

What is a Family?

I. The family: created

- A household
 - A place of nurture and support, physically and spiritually (Prov 31:10–27; 1 Tim 5:8)
 - Organized in an authority structure: parents over children; the father having ultimate responsibility (Exod 20:12; Eph 5:22; 6:2)
- Multigenerational
 - Each generation is one with each other (Exod 2:24; Deut 5:3, 9–10; Heb 7:10)
 - A family has a direction: raising up new generation (Ps 22:31; 78:4–6; 102:18)
- Covenantal unit
 - A family is in relationship to God; God deals not just with individuals, but with families.
 - A lamb for each family at the Passover (Exod 12:3)
 - Achan: when he sinned, his whole family perished (Josh 7)
 - Each new branch is part of the family “tree” (Rom 11:17–24)
 - Infant baptism: we recognize that God’s reckons the children of disciples as his disciples. (Acts 2:39; Eph 6:1)
 - Hence the family is to be a place of teaching and worship (Exod 12:26–27; 13:14–15; Josh 4:6–7, 21–23; Deut 6:7–9, 20–24)
- One family, yet a diversity of roles and duties
 - The older generation teaches the younger; the younger learns from the older.
 - The husband protects, provides, and lays down his life for his wife; the wife supports, submits, and helps her husband.
 - The wife has a special role in bringing forth and nurturing children, especially early on.
 - Roles change over time: the parents go from being supporters to being supported (Matt 15:4–6; 1 Tim 5:4, 8)

II. The family: fallen

- Right away, we see the family becomes a place of death and not of life: Cain murdering Abel; the troubles with Jacob and Esau; Joseph and brothers.
- Assessing the breakdown of the family in American culture:¹
 - Marriage on the decline: among Americans ages 18 to 55, only 26 percent of the poor and 39 percent of the working class are currently married.
 - Children born out of wedlock: In 1960, roughly 5 percent of children were born to unmarried women. Now about 40 percent are.
 - Absent fathers: 11 percent of children lived apart from their father in 1960. In 2010, 27 percent did. American children are more likely to live in a single-parent household than children from any other country.

¹ Many of the insights/stats below are from David Brooks,
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-nuclear-family-was-a-mistake/605536/>

- Rootless young men: today many American males spend the first 20 years of their life without a father and the next 15 without a spouse.
- Constant instability: 12 percent of American kids had lived in at least three “parental partnerships” before they turned 15. The transition moments, when mom’s old partner moves out or her new partner moves in, are the hardest on kids.
- Isolated elderly: 35 percent of Americans over 45 say they are chronically lonely. There’s an awful rise of senior citizens who die alone in their apartments and are not discovered for weeks.
- Isolation in general: families rarely have meals together and do things together. Among Christians, family worship is rare.
- Reasons:
 - Brooks: the culture now tells us that people should have the freedom to pick whatever family form works for them. “[P]rogressives have no philosophy of family life at all, because they don’t want to seem judgmental. The sexual revolution has come and gone, and it’s left us with no governing norms of family life, no guiding values, no articulated ideals.” Many people now don’t even desire marriage.
 - Radical individualism and the pursuit of autonomy (“my life” vs. “our life”): “We want close families, but not the legal, cultural, and sociological constraints that made them possible ... [W]hen people who are raised in developed countries get money, they buy privacy.”
 - Sin is always threatening to tear apart the fabric of the family: selfishness, anger, pride, grudges, lust/infidelity.

III. The family: redeemed by Christ

- Christ renews the family by his grace (grace restores nature, the way God created things to be).
 - The Spirit reverses our fragmentation through sin. He enables us to forgive; moves us to seek unity.
 - The Spirit renews us in love, and in our commitment to each other (between spouses, between parents and children)
- Christ gives a new family by his grace (grace surpasses nature; it creates a new, everlasting reality) (Matt 12:48–49)
 - The church is the family of God which will one day supplant our earthly families (Matt 10:35–37; Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15).
 - Our first loyalty lies with Christ and his people, not with our earthly families.