

Parenting, Lesson #1: The Purpose of the Family

SS, 8/6/23

Objective: This class covers the biblical theology of the Family from Creation and Fall to**Redemption and Consummation.****I. CREATION**

Gen. 1:26-28 *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

1. The very first directive to mankind mentioned in the Bible is to procreate. "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." From the very beginning, the family, husband and wife and children, were seen as central to fulfilling humans' mission. We can infer that if the fall had not occurred, every person would have married and had children.
2. The very first thing stated about man is that he was created in God's image, male and female. One of the most basic ways that we reflect God's likeness is through having a parent/child relationship.

Question: How does our parenting reflect God's image?

- 1) Within the Godhead, there is the Father and the Son, a relationship depicted in terms of parent and child. Human families reflect the familial character of the Trinity.

- 2) God himself, in the work of creation (and especially in the work of redemption), **created a family**. Adam was God's SON (Luke 3:38). *Jesus was ... the son of David... the son of Abraham... ³⁸ the son of Adam, **the son of God***. We create families, just as the Lord created a family.

Gen. 2:18 *Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*

1. While marriage was designed to provide for the man's "aloneness", the wife was made not just for companionship but as "a helper" in the work that the Lord had given them to do. Adam could not multiply and begin to fill the earth without Eve. He needed her assistance in order to fulfill his mission.
2. One of the most basic purposes of marriage is for a husband and wife to team together in doing the work God has given them to do. Normally (the fall has given rise to abnormalities), a significant part of that work, for many years, is the raising of a family.

II. FALL

Gen. 3:16 *To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."*

1. As a just punishment upon the woman's defiance, the Lord promised to "multiply (her) pain in childbearing". For women in particular, fulfilling the creation mandate of having children inescapably involves PAIN. What once would have involved unmixed delight now involves suffering. The hurt that mothers experience is not limited to the actual act of giving birth.

2. Again, as a just punishment upon the woman's treason, the Lord promised that "(her) desire shall be contrary to (her) husband". In other words, their teamwork would not be characterized by perfect harmony but by some measure of tension and conflict. With parenting being such a central part of their normal work, it's predictable that husbands and wives will experience tensions in the raising of their children.

Gen. 4:1-2, 8 *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." ² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³...⁸ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.*

1. "Exhibit A" of the "pain" associated with childbirth is seen in the Cain/Abel narrative. The first parents had the agonizing experience of discovering that their second born son had been murdered by his older brother. From the beginning of man's FALLEN history, family life is seen to be marked by some measure of discord and suffering.
2. The main point of Genesis 4 is the emergence of Satan's seed and the woman's seed. The Lord had told the Serpent, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"* (Gen. 3:15). Things happening between flesh and blood family members reflect an invisible cosmic war between the powers of darkness and God's chosen ones. This contrast between the seed of the Serpent and the seed of the woman will be prominent in Noah's sons, Abraham's sons, Isaac's sons, and Jacob's sons. Later, it will be prominent in King David's sons.
3. Throughout the whole of fallen man's history, this cosmic struggle between God's people and the powers of darkness has manifested itself in the families of God's people.

Question: Where do we see in the Bible the most vivid illustration of that reality? The most vivid illustration of that reality is seen in the heaven-sent Savior being crucified by his own kinsmen.

Gen. 16:1-6 *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. ² And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. ⁴ And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵ And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" ⁶ But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.*

1. This is the first clear example of sinful parenting seen in the Scriptures. Ishmael was conceived, not through following the revealed will of God but through insisting on the will of the flesh. Hagar's pregnancy led to contempt, resentment, and harsh mistreatment in Abraham's household.
2. It would not be the last time that parents sinned in the context of trying circumstances. Abraham and Sarah did not simply give in to licentious behavior. They were frustrated. Their longing for children had not been fulfilled. They had been waiting for a long time. It was culturally acceptable to do what they did. GOD OFTEN HAS TESTED HIS PEOPLE BY WAY OF FAMILY LIFE.

Gen. 27:41 *Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."*

1. As seen in the Cain/Abel narrative (Gen. 4), so here in the Jacob/Esau story and in numerous other OT examples, family life has been marked by evil and suffering. The Bible notes the wicked character of the sons of the prophets Eli and Samuel and several of King David's sons (1Sa 2:12; 8:1-3; 2Sa 13; 18; 1Kg 1:5/2:24).
2. Parents have often contributed to the heartache experienced in their home. Rebekah sinned in urging Jacob to deceive his father. Isaac sinned in preferring Esau over the one that God had chosen. The prophet Eli and King David failed to rightly confront the selfish, insubordinate, and irreverent behavior of their sons.

Isaiah 1:2-3 *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;
for the LORD has spoken:*

*"Children have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.*

³*The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master's crib,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand."*

1. No one understands better than the Lord the pain of having children who do not know the Lord and refuse to live a life centered upon his fellowship, worship, and service. This is yet another area in which our Savior deeply sympathizes with his people.
2. God's own example powerfully illustrates that the rebellion of children does not necessarily reflect upon the quality of parenting that has been done. The Lord was the perfect Parent; yet, his children rebelled. We too can love and train well, yet see our children turn away from their Maker.

**Question: Why do parents, in particular mothers, tend to think, "What did I do wrong?"
when children depart from the truth?**

At best, it reflects their deep sense of responsibility for the training of their children. At worst, it reflects a misguided belief that we can CONTROL the results of our parenting.

Ps 68:4-6 *Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts;
his name is the LORD;
exult before him!*

⁵ *Father of the fatherless and protector of widows
is God in his holy habitation.*

⁶ **God settles the solitary in a home;**
*he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.*

1. While the OT is very candid about the imperfections and hurts of family life in a fallen world, **it still affirms the preciousness of family**. One of the wonders of the Lord is that he “*settles the solitary in a home*”.
2. The Lord has a special regard for the fatherless and widow. When one must live without the normal benefits of spouse and family, the Lord undertakes in other ways. For example, think of what he did for Naomi after she lost her husband and both sons. He provided Ruth!
3. **One of the sweetest blessings of being united to Christ is being united to his family.**
“As for the saints who are in the earth, they are the majestic ones in whom is all my delight” (Ps. 16:3).

Matt 10:34-39 *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

1. Some of the deepest family conflicts result from a family member following Jesus. The Lord soberly warned, *“For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law”*.
2. While family is a choice gift, we must fight the temptation to make it an idol. We must not love our family more than we love Jesus. We must not desire family above Jesus. He insists on being our chief treasure. Many will be found wanting on this point, having failed to *“LOSE HIS LIFE FOR (CHRIST’S) SAKE*.

III. REDEMPTION

We saw in the Cain/Abel narrative of Genesis 4 the emergence of “the seed of the woman” in contrast from “the seed of the serpent”. Almost the entire Old Testament, from Gen. 6 on, focuses upon the development of God’s chosen people, “the seed of the woman”. First, Noah, then Abraham, and then Abraham’s chosen family members, which in time become a nation of people, are the chosen seed (plural) from which comes THE promised seed (singular), the Christ.

Gen. 9:26-27 *He also said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. ²⁷ May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.”*

Gen. 12:1-3 *Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Gen. 13:16 *I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.*

Gen. 15:2-4 *But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"* ³ *And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."* ⁴ *And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."*

Gen. 17:4, 21 *"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ..."* ²¹ *But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."*

1. In all these passages, indeed in the whole of OT redemptive history, **the family is central**. It is through children continuing to be born, that the Promised One would come.
2. Still today, it is through children continuing to be born that the Lord reaches all of his chosen ones. Christ cannot and will not return before the last elect child is born and then born again. God draws his people out of families.
3. The NT draws attention to five household baptisms: 1) Cornelius (Acts 10); 2) Lydia (16); 3) the Philippian jailor (16); 4) Crispus (18); and Stephanus (1Co 1).
4. The accomplishment and application of redemption is central to why children, even in a fallen world, are to be regarded by Christian parents as a BLESSING from the Lord.

Ps 127:3-5 *Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.*

⁴ *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.*

⁵ *Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!*

*He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.*

Ps. 128:1-6 Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!

² You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.

³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;

**your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.**

⁴Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.

⁵The LORD bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!

⁶May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!

1. We should regard children as precious, not burdensome.
2. We yearn to see them fight the Lord's battles as effective instruments, contributing to "the prosperity of Jerusalem".

Deut. 5:16 "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Eph. 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." ⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Col. 3:20-21 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Titus 2:3-5 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴ and **so train the young women to love their husbands and children,** ⁵ **to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind,** and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

1. A major dimension of the practical Christian life, according to the NT, is to lovingly train our children in the ways of God. Ephesians, Colossians, and First Peter each address HOUSEHOLDS (spouses, parents/children, masters/servants).

2. It's interesting that not more is said explicitly about family in the NT. This argues against the "Family Integrated Church".

IV. CONSUMMATION

Heb. 2:10-13 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

¹³ And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Behold, I and the children God has given me."

Rom. 8:18-23 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Matt 22:28-30 In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."

²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

