

Modern Family?

I grew up in a time when father still knew best—when Mr. Cunningham was dispensing words of wisdom to Fonzie, when Andy took Opie fishing and when Cliff Huxtable declared that he brought his son into the world and he could take him out. It was a time when Hollywood reinforced the values of the traditional American family. Television shows like *The Waltons*, *Little House on the Prairie* and *The Brady Bunch* presented portraits of strong families where parents ruled the roost and children knew their place.

Those days are long gone. Nowadays, children know best and dads are portrayed as dithering dolts. Instead of a mom and dad and two kids, the cul-de-sac includes families with two mommies or two daddies or a mommy who identifies as a daddy—and they've been saddled with gender-neutral offspring.

The modern family has been deconstructed. Women are wearing combat boots and according to *The New York Times*, men are wearing ladies' shoes. No wonder everyone's confused.

Consider the following:

- The U.S. Department of Education eliminated the words *mom* and *dad* from its educational aid forms. Beginning this year, the form will use terms like *Parent 1* and *Parent 2*.
- Washington State removed the words *bride* and *groom* from its marriage and divorce certificates to accommodate same-sex unions.
- "It is one sort of symbolic indication of how radical a change the legalization of same-sex marriage is," says Peter Sprigg of the Family Research Council. "Symbolically they are doing away with the whole concept of bride and groom, husband and wife, at least in the eyes of the law."

- The U.S. Department of State removed the words *mother* and *father* from U.S. passport applications and replaced the terms with more gender-neutral verbiage. A statement posted on the department's website explained the changes were made "to provide a gender-neutral description of a child's parents and in recognition of different types of families."

Robert Jeffress, a noted author and pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, takes exception to the not-so-subtle change. "It's part of an overall attempt at political correctness to diminish the distinction between men and women," he says, "and to somehow suggest you don't need both a father and a mother to raise a child successfully."

Casualty of War

The American family seems to be the latest casualty in the so-called culture war, and I fear it could be the greatest casualty. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the average family is shrinking in number and more single parents have never married.

reports only 19 percent of households were comprised of married couples with children. In 1970, that number was 40 percent. Meanwhile, 27 percent of households include just one person—up from 17 percent in 1970.

USA Today reports that the nation's marriage rate is at its "lowest point in more than a century. ... Cultural changes about whether and when to marry, the fact that two-thirds of first marriages are preceded by cohabitation and the recession's financial fallout—including unemployment and underemployment—fueled the wedding decline."

Even Grandma and Grandpa are facing marital trouble in their sunset years. Fifty years ago, only 2.8 percent of Americans older than 50 divorced, according to *The New York Times*. The latest census numbers indicate that today 15.4 percent were

divorced and another 2.1 percent were separated.

The Family Research Council (FRC), one of the nation's most prominent advocacy groups, says it's time to have public discussions about the importance of marriage.

"Now, more than ever, we need to make it clear why marriage as the union of a man and a woman matters—for children, for civil society and for limited government," the FRC recently stated. "That's why it's important to be prepared to talk with friends, family or co-workers about how redefining marriage would be bad for children—and all of us."

What About Christian Marriages?

Many would have you believe that Christian marriages are in bad shape, too. Mainstream media touts it in the headlines, while even Christian leaders further the depressing message from the pulpit: Christians divorce at the same rate as non-Christians. There's just a teensy problem.

It's not true.

"People who seriously practice a traditional religious faith—whether Christian or other—have a divorce rate markedly lower than the general population," writes Glenn Stanton, director for Family Formation Studies at Focus on the Family. "Couples who regularly practice any combination of serious religious behaviors and attitudes—attend church nearly every week; read their Bibles and spiritual materials regularly; pray privately and together; generally take their faith seriously, living not as perfect disciples, but serious disciples—enjoy significantly lower divorce rates than mere church members, the general public and unbelievers."

Stanton quotes a study from the University of Virginia's National Marriage Project, which found that "active conservative Protestants" who regularly attend church are 35 percent less likely to divorce compared to those who have no

affiliation.

So is that the solution? Is it really possible to save your marriage by grabbing your Bible, a casserole dish and heading down to your local church?

Not quite, Jeffress says.

“Going to church is not an absolute vaccination against divorce, but it is some healthy preventative medicine,” he told me in an interview. Jeffress said the act of worship involves people connecting not only with God, but also with one another on the deepest level.

“Certainly the deepest and most lasting bond between two individuals is not just the physical union or the emotional union, but it’s the spiritual union,” he said. “Attending church together allows couples to connect and relate to one another on that deepest level.”

Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research, touched on that theme in a blog post in which he referenced research from Bradley Wright’s book, *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites ... and Other Lies You’ve Been Told*.

“Specifically, the research shows that couples who are active in their faith are much less likely to divorce,” Stetzer wrote. “Catholic couples were 31 percent less likely to divorce; Protestant couples 35 percent less likely; and Jewish couples 97 percent less likely, which in itself is quite impressive, I must say.”

Critics might argue that the nation’s divorce rate is actually declining. But Jeffress believes that’s evidence of a much greater problem.

“Fewer and fewer people are getting married, so fewer people are getting divorced,” he says. “The overall health of the American family is in critical condition.”

Jeffress believes the legalization of same-sex marriage has “cheapened” traditional marriage.

“When you counter something, you cheapen its value,” he says. “When you say marriage is whatever you want it to be, people begin wondering—why bother getting married anyway? This counterfeit of marriage is having devastating sociological effects. More kids are being raised in one-parent homes. You simply cannot break God’s most basic moral law without serious ramifications.”

What Can We Do?

The solution is simultaneously simple yet challenging. Simple in that we must return to God’s pattern for the family. God is the one who created the family. Before the church, He created the family—the fundamental unit of community.

Yet re-establishing that unit as God intended it within our culture is easier said than done, obviously, because of the fervent opposition to biblical values.

The warning signs are all around us. The traditional nuclear family is on the verge of disaster. And once the nuclear family explodes, the United States should brace for a cultural Armageddon.

Can we prevent such a catastrophe by returning to God’s design for the family? Like it or not, answering that question begins with the church.

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