

G O D,
M A R R I A G E,
AND F A M I L Y



Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation

SECOND EDITION

ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER
WITH DAVID W. JONES

God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation, Second Edition

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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First printing of second edition, 2010.

Cover design: Amy Bristow

Cover photo: iStock

Printed in the United States of America

See page 378 for Scripture permissions.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-0364-1

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2299-4

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-2300-7

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2285-7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Köstenberger, Andreas J., 1957–

God, marriage, and family : rebuilding the biblical foundation / Andreas J. Köstenberger, with David Jones.—2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 978-1-4335-0364-1 (tpb)

1. Marriage—Biblical teaching. 2. Families—Biblical teaching.

3. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Families—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Jones, David W. (David Wayne), 1973– .

II. Title.

BS680.M35K67 2010

261.8'3581—dc22

2009047374

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10			
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Five years have passed since the publication of *God, Marriage, and Family*. We are so grateful for the way the Lord has chosen to use this volume for his glory. We attribute the overwhelmingly positive response to our book to the fact that our primary purpose has been, as the subtitle suggests, to return to the biblical foundation of marriage and family in God's Word, and we are convinced that it is this desire to learn from our Creator and Redeemer what is God's plan for marriage and the family that our Lord chose to honor. By way of brief summary, the need for the publication of a second edition so soon after the first arose on account of the following factors.

First, we wanted to incorporate the many constructive suggestions for additions we received from a variety of sources, including reviewers, students, and other readers. Second, a steady stream of publications on marriage and the family has continued to appear, and we wanted to keep our volume up to date. Third, controversy erupted on several of the topics addressed in our book, such as divorce and remarriage and singleness. This, too, called for an update. Fourth, there were certain smaller but important topics we did not explicitly or extensively address in the first edition, such as parenting teens, that upon further reflection seemed to merit more extended treatment, and we have added such in the second edition.

In addition, the last few years witnessed the growth of a movement related to marriage and the family sometimes called the "family-integrated church approach" that requires evaluation from a biblical and theological perspective. Admittedly, adjudicating the strengths and weaknesses of any new movement such as this is not an easy task, in part because the movement is anything but monolithic and also because any such assessment calls for the application of biblical principles and the judicious evaluation of a variety of hermeneutical, theological, and cultural factors. Nevertheless, we felt that we should attempt such an assessment,

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however preliminary, in order to provide some much-needed guidance in this eminently vital area of church life.

For ease of reference, then, here is a summary of the new features in the second edition of *God, Marriage, and Family*:

- A new chapter on marriage, family, and the church (including an assessment of the “family-integrated church approach”).
- A summary of recent debates on physical discipline of children, singleness, homosexuality, and divorce and remarriage.
- New sections on the theology of sex and parenting teens.
- A new streamlined format for the chapter on divorce and remarriage, where emphasis is placed upon the divine design of the permanence of marriage and more technical material was put in an appendix.
- Incorporation of discussion of important recent articles and monographs on marriage and the family, such as Christopher Ash’s *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* and Barry Danylak’s *A Biblical Theology of Singleness*.
- Updated bibliographies and endnote references.
- Many other smaller adjustments in response to reviewer comments, student feedback, and other constructive criticisms we received subsequent to the publication of the first edition.

It is our hope that with these additions and improvements, *God, Marriage, and Family* will continue to serve readers who are willing to return to the biblical foundation, persuaded, as we are, that marriage and the family are not man’s idea but God’s and that for this reason those who conduct their marriages and families without reference to the Instructor’s Manual do so at their own peril and at the loss of the glory of God. “Now to him—the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named—who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:14, 20–21).



THE CURRENT CULTURAL CRISIS:

Rebuilding the Foundation

For the first time in its history, Western civilization is confronted with the need to *define* the meaning of the terms *marriage* and *family*. What until now has been considered a “normal” family, made up of a father, a mother, and a number of children, has in recent years increasingly begun to be viewed as one among several options, which can no longer claim to be the only or even superior form of ordering human relationships. The Judeo-Christian view of marriage and the family with its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures has to a significant extent been replaced with a set of values that prizes human rights, self-fulfillment, and pragmatic utility on an individual or societal level. It can rightly be said that marriage and the family are institutions under siege in our world today, and that with marriage and the family, our very civilization is in crisis.

The current cultural crisis, however, is merely symptomatic of a deep-seated *spiritual* crisis that continues to gnaw at the foundations of our once-shared societal values. If God the creator in fact, as the Bible teaches, instituted marriage and the family, and if there is an evil being called Satan who wages war against God’s creative purposes in this world, it should come as no surprise that the divine foundation of these institutions has come under massive attack in recent years. Ultimately, we human beings, whether we realize it or not, are involved in a cosmic spiritual conflict that pits God against Satan, with marriage and the family serving as a key arena in which spiritual and cultural battles are fought. If, then, the

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cultural crisis is symptomatic of an underlying *spiritual* crisis, the solution likewise must be spiritual, not merely cultural.

In *God, Marriage, and Family*, we hope to point the way to this spiritual solution: a return to, and rebuilding of, the biblical foundation of marriage and the family. God's Word is not dependent on man's approval, and the Scriptures are not silent regarding the vital issues facing men and women and families today. In each of the important areas related to marriage and the family, the Bible offers satisfying instructions and wholesome remedies to the maladies afflicting our culture. The Scriptures record the *divine institution* of marriage and present a *Christian theology* of marriage and parenting. They offer insight for decision making regarding abortion, contraception, infertility, and adoption. They offer helpful guidance for those who are single or unmarried and address the major threats to marriage and the family: homosexuality and divorce.

THE CURRENT CONFUSION OVER MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Measured against the biblical teaching on marriage and the family, it seems undeniable that Western culture is decaying. In fact, the past few decades have witnessed nothing less than a major paradigm shift with regard to marriage and the family. The West's Judeo-Christian heritage and foundation have largely been supplanted by a *libertarian ideology* that elevates human freedom and self-determination as the supreme principles for human relationships. In their confusion, many hail the decline of the biblical-traditional model of marriage and the family and its replacement by new competing moralities as major progress. Yet the following list of adverse effects of unbiblical views of marriage and the family upon society demonstrates that replacing the biblical-traditional model of marriage and the family with more "progressive" ones is detrimental even for those who do not view the Bible as authoritative.

One of the negative consequences of the erosion of the biblical-traditional model are skyrocketing *divorce* rates. However, the costs of divorce are troubling, not only for the people involved—especially children—but also for society at large. While children may not show ill effects of the trauma of divorce in the short run, serious negative long-term consequences have been well documented. *Sex outside of marriage*, because it does not occur within the secure environment of an exclusive lifetime commitment, also exerts a heavy price from those who engage in

adulterous or otherwise illicit sexual relationships. Teenage pregnancies and abortion are the most glaring examples. While pleasurable in the short run, sex outside of marriage takes a heavy toll both psychologically and spiritually and contributes to the overall insecurity and stress causing the destabilization of our cultural foundation. *Homosexuality* deprives children in households run by same-sex partners of primary role models of both sexes and is unable to fulfill the procreative purposes God intended for the marriage union. *Gender-role confusion*, too, is an increasingly serious issue; many men and women have lost the concept of what it means to be masculine or feminine. This results in a loss of the complete identity of being human as God created us, male and female. Our sex does not merely determine the form of our sex organs but is an integral part of our entire being.

These few examples illustrate the disturbing fact that the price exacted by the world as a result of its abandonment of the biblical foundations for marriage and the family is severe indeed. An integrative, biblical treatment of marriage and the family is essential to clear up moral confusion and to firm up convictions that, if acted upon, have the potential of returning the church and culture back to God's intentions for marriages and families.

THE LACK OF BIBLICAL, INTEGRATIVE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE ON MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

It is not only the world that is suffering the consequences of neglecting the Creator's purposes for marriage and the family. The church, too, having lowered itself to the standard of the world in many ways, has become a part of the problem and is not offering the solutions the world needs—not that Christians are unaware of their need to be educated about God's plan for marriage and the family. An abundance of resources and activities is available. There are specialized ministries and parachurch organizations. There are marriage seminars and retreats. There are books on marriage and the family, as well as magazines, video productions, Bible studies, and official statements focusing on marriage and the family. Yet for all the church is doing in this area, the fact remains that in the end there is shockingly little difference between the world and the church. Why is this the case? We believe the reason why all the above-mentioned efforts to build strong Christian marriages and families are ineffective to such a significant extent is found, at least in part, in the *lack of commitment to*

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seriously engage the Bible as a whole. The result is that much of the available Christian literature on the subject is seriously imbalanced.

Anyone stepping into a Christian or general bookstore will soon discover that while there is a plethora of books available on individual topics, such as marriage, singleness, divorce and remarriage, and homosexuality, there is *very little material* that explores on a deeper, more thoroughgoing level the entire fabric of God's purposes for human relationships. Though there is a place for books focused narrowly on one given topic to address certain specific needs, it is only when we see how the Bible's teaching on human relationships *coheres* and finds its common source in the Creator and his wise and beneficial purposes for men and women that we will have the insight and the strength to rise above our natural limitations and to embrace God's plan for human relationships in their fullness and completeness.

When a couple struggles in their marriage, they often find it helpful to focus on the more superficial remedies, such as improving their communication skills, enriching their sex life, learning better how to meet each other's needs, or similar techniques. Yet often the true cause for marital problems lies deeper. What does it mean for a man to leave his father and mother and to cleave to his wife? What does it mean for a husband and a wife to become "one flesh"? How can they be naked and not ashamed? How can it be that, once married, husband and wife are "no longer two, but one," as Jesus taught, because it is *God* who joined them together? How does sin twist and distort the roles of husband and wife, parent and child? Only if we are seeking to answer some of these deeper, underlying questions will we be adequately equipped to deal with specific challenges we face in our relationships with one another.

Yet the fact remains that many, if not most, of the plethora of popular books written on marriage and the family are theologically weak and not fully adequate in their application of sound principles of biblical interpretation. Many of these authors have PhDs in counseling or psychology but their formal training in the study of Scripture is lacking. Theological and hermeneutical naiveté gives birth to superficial diagnoses, which in turn issue in superficial remedies. It seems that the dynamics and effects of sin are poorly understood in our day. The result is that many Christian self-help books owe more to secular culture than a thoroughgoing Christian worldview. Christian, biblical counselors who take Scripture seriously and believe that diagnoses and remedies must be based on a theologically and hermeneutically accurate understanding

of the biblical teaching on marriage and the family find this unhelpful if not positively misleading.

For this reason there remains a need for a volume that does not treat issues related to marriage and the family in isolation from one another but that shows how human fulfillment in these relationships is rooted in the divine revelation found exclusively and sufficiently in Scripture.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS BOOK: BIBLICAL AND INTEGRATIVE

The authors of the present volume believe that a biblical and integrative approach most adequately represents the Bible's teaching on marriage and the family. Within the limited scope of this work, we will attempt to sketch out the contours of a "*biblical theology* of marriage and the family," that is, a presentation of what the Bible *itself* has to say on these vital topics. While we certainly do not claim to have the final word on every issue or to be infallible interpreters of the sacred Word, what we are after is decidedly *not* what *we* think marriage or family should be, based on our own preconceived notions, preferences, or traditional values, but what we believe *Scripture itself* tells us about these institutions. This, of course, requires a humble, submissive stance toward Scripture rather than one that asserts one's own independence from the will of the Creator and insists on inventing one's own rules of conduct.

In such a spirit, and placing ourselves consciously *under*, rather than *above*, Scripture, we will seek to determine in the following chapters what the Bible teaches on the various components of human relationships in an *integrative* manner: the nature of, and special issues related to, marriage and the family, childrearing, singleness, as well as homosexuality and divorce and remarriage. Because the Bible is the Word of God, which is powerful and life-transforming, we know that those who are willing to be seriously engaged by Scripture will increasingly come to know and understand God's will for marriage and the family and be able to appropriate God's power in building strong Christian homes and families. This, in turn, will both increase God's honor and reputation in this world that he has made and provide the seasoning and illumination our world needs at this time of cultural ferment and crisis with regard to marriage and the family.

REVIEWS OF THE FIRST EDITION

"A careful and competent survey of biblical materials touching on marriage and family."

Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society

"The authors display a thorough grasp of and interaction with contemporary views and stances on each topic. . . . They provide clear reasoning and argumentation for their interpretations of texts and for their disagreements with other interpretations. The book aims to provide a biblical foundation, and it accomplishes this goal."

Midwestern Journal of Theology

"This book is virtually exhaustive on the issues relating to marriage and family, and if you are looking for one volume that overviews the entire area this is it."

Themelios

This second edition introduces new sections on the theology of sex and the parenting of teens and a new chapter on marriage, family, and the church, including an evaluation of the "family-integrated church movement." The authors have added summaries of recent debates on corporal punishment, singleness, homosexuality, and divorce and remarriage, and responses to several recent articles and monographs on marriage and the family. The second edition also includes updated bibliographies and notes.



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