

# God is the architect of the family

A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows,  
Is God in His holy habitation.  
God makes a home for the lonely;  
He leads out the prisoners into prosperity,  
Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land (Psalm 68:5–6).

## **Marriage: A convenience or an inconvenience?**

The story is told of a woman who awoke during the night to find that her husband was not in bed. She put on her dressing gown and went downstairs. He was sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee in front of him. He appeared to be in deep thought, just staring at the wall. She saw him wipe a tear from his eye and take a sip of his coffee.

‘What’s the matter, dear? Why are you down here at this time of night?’ she asked.

‘Do you remember twenty years ago, when we were dating and you were only sixteen?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I do,’ she replied, remembering fondly.

‘Do you remember when your father caught us kissing?’

‘Yes, I remember.’

‘Do you remember when he threatened me and said, “Either you marry my daughter or you spend twenty years in jail”?’

‘Yes, I do,’ she said.

He wiped another tear from his cheek and said, ‘You know ... I would have got out today.’

This humorous story reflects how, for some people, marriage or family life is simply an inconvenience. At best, some jokingly say, it is the lesser of two evils. For others it is simply a man-made invention and a convenient way of safeguarding their property.

### Engels' theory

In 1883 Friedrich Engels, a close associate of Karl Marx, wrote a book called *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. According to Engels, the family originated from a primitive form of communism. He taught that human society was originally made up of promiscuous 'hordes' of people who mated indiscriminately. However, he said, as men began to become more independent and began to claim or own private property, they needed a family to whom they could pass on their inheritance. This, according to Engels, explained how the family came into being, and indeed this was the officially sanctioned theory in the former Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

### The family unit in crisis

Although very few anthropologists accept Engels' theory today, in many instances it would appear that society in general treats marriage and the family as though they were invented in a cave around a flickering fire by a group of previously promiscuous cavemen. It is exactly this mindset that has created a crisis for the very existence of the family as we know it.

Millions of young people in the West seem disillusioned with conventional marriage, and are experimenting with lifestyles different from those of their parents. Many young men and women have decided to live together without the commitment of marriage, and are raising children in that context. Others do enter into the marriage relationship with a sincere desire that it is for life. They know only too well that many marriages have failed or are failing, and yet their genuine belief is that their marriage will be different because they really love each other and their love will last for ever. Then, having entered into marriage with perhaps a very limited understanding of what love really is, their marriage runs into trouble. In other words, many young people understand 'love' merely in the restricted sense of 'romance'. Real love between a married couple certainly includes romance and mutual affection; but the Bible teaches that even when one does not *feel* in love, true love practised by both partners will actually deepen and increase despite, or perhaps even as a result of, difficulties (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 13). Sadly, when the first real crisis arises in the relationships of many couples, even of those who enter marriage with the highest hopes and expectations, they

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opt for the easiest way out and it's off to the divorce courts. 'I could never trust him/her again' is their main plea. Little or no consideration is given to God-glorifying reconciliation. In this sense, their commitment to marriage is only partial.

This mindset can be seen in the fact that the number of divorces is on the increase every year. For example, in the United States in 1960 there were 25 divorces for every 100 marriages; in 1975 the number was 48, in 1990 it was approximately 60, and in the present day the number of divorces is closer to 65 for every 100 marriages.<sup>2</sup> These figures show an increase of more than 150% in one generation.<sup>3</sup> In 2003, the number of divorces granted in the United Kingdom increased by 3.7%.<sup>4</sup>

And yet, here is the paradox. 'Over the past thirty years a consistent 96% of the American public has expressed a personal desire for marriage. Only 8% of American women consider remaining single ideal, a proportion that has not changed over the past twenty years. Even 81% of divorced and separate Americans still believe that marriage should be for life.'<sup>5</sup> Other surveys carried out some years ago by the Institute of Life Insurance found that 87% of the people they questioned over twenty-nine years of age chose a 'happy family life' as the most important aim in their lives.<sup>6</sup> This raises some very important questions: How can a young couple achieve a happy family life? What can a young man and woman do that will help them be successful in their marriage? What can they do to help them develop a healthy, happy family life together, to help them develop a secure environment in which to raise their children, in an atmosphere in which both parents are lovingly committed to serving each other's and their family's needs?

Let me begin by saying that there are no magic formulae. When we are ill and visit the doctor, we do not expect the doctor to wave a magic wand and suddenly make us better. What we do expect is that the doctor will prescribe a cure, that he will give us a prescription which, when taken, will help us to become healthier and stronger again. Alternatively, it has often been said that 'prevention is the best medicine'. In this book you will come to see that the only prescription for a healthy marriage and family life is that found in the Bible. The Bible also offers the best possible preventative medicine for life.