

Motherhood

It is universally accepted that the mother - child relationship is special. The reasons are not difficult to find. The child is very much part of her. Able to conceive and give space for baby to grow in safety within her body for up to nine months, a mother is also uniquely equipped to continue the necessary nurture process immediately after birth.

This does not mean that a father cannot enjoy a special relationship with his child. He can. But there is something different about it. Although some duties are shared and similar, fatherhood is not the same as motherhood. A father can never be a mother (a biological impossibility) and a mother can never father a child (another biological impossibility).

Suffragettes

Traditional ideas of motherhood have been challenged in recent years. The suffragette movement was active in the early years of the 20th century. One hundred years ago (June 1913) Emily

Wilding Davison stepped on to the Epsom race track and was struck by *Anmer*, King Edward's horse. Four days later she died from her injuries. She is buried, near her home, in the graveyard of Morpeth Parish Church.

Feminism

Later in the 20th century full-blown feminism proved influential amongst some. In fact so influential has it been that some mums feel guilty if they choose to take a career break to care for their child(ren) in their early years. Recently a young mother, who claims to be a feminist, expressed her dismay on national radio at being treated in the way she is by those whom she thought would support her in the choice she had made. Herein lies a problem. Does seeing men and women as equal (a key notion taught by feminists) mean they must be seen as the same? Clearly it does not. Yet that is usually the equation made.

Anchor

We all need an anchor. If we did not have one we would not be able to cope with life. What do we mean? We soon discover as we experience life that the world of mankind is full of ideas. There are political theories, social theories, and religious beliefs. The number of them is mesmerising. How can we cope? The

answer is that we make a choice as to which set of ideas we will follow. Some choose the ideas of a philosopher or social scientist. Others follow those of a religious leader. Yet others choose to go their own way. The belief system embraced becomes an anchor. Events and new ideas get examined and sifted by it.

Influences

We are all influenced by what happens around us. The means of influence have vastly increased. There was a time when the prime or sole influence in the home was Mam and Dad. Today with the radio, television and the Internet the possibility of one's access to the world of ideas, values and behaviours being restricted is greatly reduced. That being so a new problem emerges. Parents may give up doing their duty for their child.

Bedrock

In one sense there is nothing new. The world around always tries to squeeze people into its mould (*see Romans 12.2*). That is why the apostle Paul is used to instruct us not to be conformed to this world. How do we avoid that trap? Paul's advice is succinct. It is by being renewed in our thinking.

Inevitably the question is asked, what does being renewed in our thinking entail? We should note Paul refers to the will of God. More specifically he says that we are to test ideas about belief and behaviour. We are to discern whether they cohere with the will of God. If they do, we are to embrace them. If they do not, we are to reject them. The goal, says Paul, is to discover "what is good and acceptable and perfect" (*Romans 12.2*).

It is a fact of life that the idea that God is and that God has spoken are deemed strange by many. They imagine science has dispensed with the need for God or even disproved his existence. They also conjecture that Darwinian thinking about evolution has proved the Bible wrong in what it says about creation and human existence. The result is many try to make sense of life without reference to their Creator and their Creator's instructions.

Amazement

What do most parents think when their babe is born. Usually they are amazed. And if they know something about the size of the egg and sperm which united to trigger the formation of the baby they cuddle in their arms, they know that sense of awe and wonder all the more keenly.

The remarkable fact is that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (*Psalm 139.14*). God put us together in our mother's womb. He brought us to birth. And he sustains us in life. Therein lies the reason why the mother - child relationship is so special.

Purpose

There was a time when our culture accepted the framework for understanding life and our existence found in the Bible. Today it seems that framework is just seen as one of many competing frameworks. Furthermore it is also apparent some want to ensure it is not allowed to keep the position it once had. That is why secular humanism is so aggressive and intolerant of contrary views. But what many fail to see is that their novel ideas will have an adverse effect upon family life.

The Family

Traditionally marriage has been seen as essential for individual and social well-being. And universally marriage has been defined as one man and one woman united for life in a voluntary union. Yes there have been exceptions (polygamy, cohabitation *etc*) but they are exceptions to the accepted rule.

We may go further. Traditionally this voluntary union has been marked by three further features.

First, the union exists for the mutual benefit, companionship, love and support the man and woman give to each other. This is a fundamentally important feature of human existence.

Secondly, the union exists as the sphere in which the natural instinct for physical intimacy implanted by God may legitimately be expressed. In other words sex is for marriage. That is why fornication, adultery and other forms of sexual intimacy are defined as sins.

Thirdly, marriage is the union in which any children conceived and brought to birth are to be loved and nurtured.

Thus we are back to where we began. The mother - child relationship is special. It is something to be prized and valued. It is something to be preserved and protected. Political and social theories come and go. The mother - child relationship transcends them. Yes, it may be affected by them but it does not need to be. Ultimately the influence that ought to fashion our understanding of family life is the will of our Creator. No individual and no society can expect to flourish if they ignore the Maker's instructions.

Sadly our decaying culture is tinkering with (so it thinks) the received ideas about family and marriage. What it seems reluctant to acknowledge is that its tinkering is far more than that. It represents a monumental shift of understanding that will have a profound and far-reaching effect upon us all. You simply cannot redefine family and marriage for a few. Any redefinition will mean a redefinition for us all. Ultimately no society can cope with contradictory notions of family-life and marriage.

The need then is for our thinking to be renewed. All notions and ideas, even those put forward by eminently scientists and politicians, need to be tested against the infallible standard of God's revelation to mankind. He created us male and female. And as our designer he has provided us with the instructions that we need for our individual and corporate well-being. Thus we thank God that we who are of equal dignity and status before him, has not made us the same but different.

On Mothering Sunday we praise him for the high calling of motherhood. Without it none of us would be here.