

Family and Community

by S.G. Smith

In the Beginning

In the first two chapters of Genesis, God outlines His will concerning mankind and the earth. He created them male and female, and gave them a garden paradise in which to live and produce food. He also gave them animals to educate and entertain them, as well as the ability to have offspring in order to fill the earth and subdue it. Personally, I would say it sounds like a plan. Sadly, something obviously happened.

Instead of jumping to Genesis 3 and dwelling on sin and death, I would like to take some time and consider a human history that never was. How might things have developed for about 1600 years or so without sin and the consequence of death? That much time in *our* history would take us close to the Noahic Flood, which God used to curse the earth and destroy all terrestrial life which had apparently become corrupted in His eyes. Yet imagine what might have been had Adam and his wife endured for more than a millennium in perfect fellowship with their Creator. One might be inclined to say that it would surely have been *heaven* (???). It would certainly have been *paradise*.

First, can you picture everyone walking around naked? If there had been no need for

clothes, would there have ever been a need for homes? Would being naked or homeless really have any meaning like it does today?

Since there would have been no death, or murder, the earth would have perhaps “filled up” pretty fast with no thought of abortion or any kind of population reduction. Furthermore, instead of the Nimrod/Babel affair, resulting in the division of nations, perhaps Jesus Christ would have just arrived one day in the form of glorified, immortal humanity as King and Lord with the only other rulers being true patriarchal heads of families. Additionally, He might have decreed that since we had successfully filled the earth around the first millennium, we would be travelling to the stars and “filling” the galaxies. All this might really be closer to the utopian ideal of heaven. Oh well, what do I know; I’ll let someone else make a movie if they want to. ☺

Blast to the Real Past

Obviously, I have been dreaming, or hallucinating (What was in my morning coffee?). Correspondingly, however, maybe I’m just beginning to wake up to a deeper reality concerning the titanic ruin of humanity due to our ancestral parents’ decision to disobey God. I know I was just fanaticizing above, but an entirely different reality would have unfolded had we maintained loving obedience with our true Father.

For better or worse, we live in a very different reality than the one I have imagined. However, we still have gardens to work in. People still marry and have children and extended families. And more importantly, although we don’t often seem to do it well, we learn how to live together in these extended

families or communities, and perhaps even *love* one another.

Sadly this “loving one another” phenomenon is fraught with all kinds of problems. Although I’m not a professional psychologist or sociologist, I’ve been around awhile and have even been a parent. I just simply think in terms of classifying these *life problems* under three categories: a) life with myself, b) life with others, and finally, c) life with, or without, God. Interestingly, as we attempt to separate these three categories, one will discover how interconnected they are. Now I could possibly spin all this in modern terms of some kind of *intersectionality*, but I’m really not all that *hip*. A genuine notion of *truth* is generally enough for me.

Life with Myself

We are all cast within this odyssey of searching for ourselves and our relationship to the external world. It would really help if we had some guidance, which immediately connects to those other categories. Nevertheless, we must individually choose how we are going to think about ourselves and our relationship to reality.

If one experiences a normal beginning, with all their parts and faculties in place, then we are dominated by empirical experience. From the nursing infant to the lone toddler, we are launched into an environment of self discovery (even if this environment is directed or influenced by others). If we are physiologically functional, we will learn through our senses. Tasty food, shiny objects, and painful experiences shape our connection to an *external* world. Yet the manner in which I experience and elect to engage this external

world makes me aware of an *internal* world or reality, which will grow in importance. Children soon learn that they might actually *like*, or *dislike*, things about their external world and how it impacts their internal world. Herein is the beginning of a primitive rationality or conscience. Thus the notions of *me*, *my-self*, and eventually, *mine* develop as distinct mental categories from everything else.

Life with Others

The empirical never fades away, unless we suffer from some physiological loss of our senses. Yet the growing complexity of broader external world begins to come into play. Our relationship to a rock or a plant may be relatively static, and passive on the part of such examples. However, we soon become aware of other active, dynamic entities with which we are generally forced to deal. Whether it is a dog or a cat, a roach or a snake, or another human being, the empirical must be accompanied by the progressive development of a sophisticated rationality to negotiate our growing experiences. Yes, I see a dog; but if it wags its tale, or bears its teeth, then I should discern a significant difference and respond accordingly. A developing if/then interaction is demanded. Even animals get this.

With human beings, this becomes all the more complicated. Living in a family, attending school or church, working on a job, or following a career path are all examples requiring a well developed *sense* (different than empirical senses) of how to interact appropriately. Additionally, one of the most complicated exchanges involves dating, or courting, and marriage which hold forth the possibility of creating a new family. Animals probably get this better than most men.....

at least, according to most women.

Life with, or without, God

We have finally arrived at what has sadly become the most contentious element in this discussion. If I point a friend toward a picturesque mountain scene or call someone's attention to a newborn puppy, I usually expect a sympathetic sigh as opposed to some adversarial response. The introduction of some socio-economic or political idea in a discussion usually warrants caution as one might expect the listener's eyes to narrow. But if one dares to bring God into a conversation, be prepared for a variety of reactions (a side note: the potential for negative responses ultimately testifies to the deep significance of this issue in human psychology). I personally believe any problems people might have here are related/connected to problems they may be experiencing in their personal lives, within themselves or with others. Alternatively though, their problem with God may perhaps be the root of their problem with themselves or others. These do seem to be connected. Suffice it to say, from the standpoint of what Christ taught; life without God is not life.

Final Observations

In briefest terms, it is evident that we all grow up in families (or perhaps surrogate families, such as orphanages). The lessons we learn from our families are important in training us how to interact with others in some larger community setting. Despite the failures and dysfunctionalities associated with particular family units, I would submit that it is still the best form of nurturing children in preparation for adulthood.

Although there are those who might

object to this assertion, because they know, or heard about, some catastrophic example within traditional parenting and insist that the state should replace the family in nurturing the young. I would suggest that there are probably numerous examples where state run orphanages, schools, or juvenile detention centers have racked up their share of abuses.

Sinful humanity (apart from ethnicity, gender, economic standing, endowments, etc.) is continually confronted with the need for repentance, forgiveness, and humility. Like faith, hope and love, these three are equally vital, yet probably less abstract. To live well, an individual must repent (change his mind) when he/she discovers they are in error, propositionally or morally. This works to resolve false teachings, or perhaps guilt. When we are violated by others we will be forced to confront the need to forgive our offender, despite any required need for justice. This works to resolve bitterness. Finally, life is always challenging our need to be humble before God. This works against our pride and forces us to acknowledge God alone as the final judge and sovereign Lord.

Apart from the genuine path of repentance, forgiveness and humility you will only nurture resentment, bitterness, and hardness of heart. Furthermore, you may find this is practically impossible apart from divine grace, the spiritual empowerment from above.

Every family, every community, and every individual is dysfunctional....so much so that our lives will end in death....corporately or individually. However, God is really a God of mercy. Come to Christ, and learn to live.