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FAMILIES ARE GOOD

By David Phillips

The reasons we as Christians uphold marriage together with chastity and fidelity is that we recognise it as the will of God set out plainly in Scripture. However, as with most of the commands of Scripture we can also see that God is not just being capricious, but rather that when we live by his commands things really are better. We can see this in some of the food and hygiene laws in the Old Testament, they may have had other purposes too, but they also served to protect the people of God, to help them to flourish in a world marred by the fall. There are likewise good reasons why marriage and families are good for society and we remember that the first of the ten commandments with a promise concerns families and the promise is good - "you will live long...".

Consider one of the statistics. From 1971 to 2006 the average size of households has dropped from 2.91 to 2.34. This is due to different factors but one is the smaller number of children per household (from 2.0 to 1.7) and another is the growing number of lone-parent families. Overall this drop in household sizes has meant that there has had to be 140,000 new homes per year. This is on top of the increase in the size of the population. Of course we can see all around us that part of the solution is to take larger properties and divide them up, but there are costs associated with even this. Larger households seem to enjoy economies of scale including food and utilities. One might imagine therefore that all good environmentalists would be arguing for the encouragement of family life and lasting marriages, but it is not something one hears very often.

More controversially but nevertheless true, some of the alternatives to lifelong faithful marriage carry a great social cost. We reported in *Cross†Way* 106 (2007) that there were 1.8 million visits to clinics a year for sexually transmitted infections. More recent statistics show that the number of infections is continuing to rise annually at about 6% per year and that over half of these are amongst those aged 16 to 24 who only make up around an eighth of the population. This is a blight on young lives and a waste of money for society as a whole caused by our unwillingness to live by God's standards.

Marriages are also, if statistics are to be believed, better for children. A study in 2001 suggested that teenagers living with cohabiters were between two and 14 times more likely to have emotional and behavioural problems compared to those living with their married biological parents. A study in 1996 showed that the infant mortality rate is between 25 and 35 per cent lower for the children of married parents as against cohabiting parents. Yet the statistics also show that the number of families with cohabiting parents is continuing to rise. Likewise an Australian report also from 1996 showed that children living with homosexual couples had language and mathematics skills between 29 and 30 percent lower than those living with married heterosexual parents.

These various reports and statistics all lend weight to the argument that God's ways are best for us, as we might reasonably expect.

Faced with the continued collapse of families it is tempting to just blame the government, but we must share our part of the blame. The breakdown of families is at heart an issue of human sin, of people unwilling to live in a way God desires. Some, such as children, may largely be the unwilling victims of this but that does not change the central problem.

However, it also seems that the Christian Church in modern Britain has failed to either teach what God has said or to argue the case for it. The remedy of course lies with God, but we are to do what

we are called to do, that is to teach, to argue and to model what God has established.

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