

CHAPTER 42

Family and Society

Which comes first, the family or society? Which is more influential? How does the family influence society and how does society influence the family? Does my personal behavior have any impact on my family or society? If it does, how am I responsible for the consequences of my actions? We may think that sexual love is a private matter that is no one else's business. We may think, "Why shouldn't I do what I want? Surely I'm not harming anyone?" We are not the first people to think this way. Nor is our society the first to have faced such spiritual and moral confusion.

A community is made up of the relationships among people within that community. If these relationships become selfish and exploitative, then the whole community is affected. If people betray the trust of the people closest to them, they will be more likely to betray other people's trust too. Men or women who are prepared to break the promise they made to their spouse when they married will be more likely to break other promises. If we are prepared to cheat on those we love, why not cheat on those with whom we merely do business? This problem of love, or rather its misuse, is the direct or indirect cause of all social and economic problems, which are problems in human relationships.

Every civilization that has observed the rules of sexual propriety has prospered and endured. The collapse of formerly great civilizations, including the Roman Empire, has been traced in every instance to the breakdown of sexual order. When sexual order breaks down, the family breaks down. Instead of growing up in healthy, loving, stable families, children grow up in broken families, often with only one parent. A child needs to experience the love of both a father and a mother in order to develop a rounded character and know how to form wholesome relationships with both sexes. Children of single-parent families are often less able to cope with emotional and social difficulties and as a result are more likely to commit crimes. They tend to do less well at school. They are more at risk of suffering psychological problems and committing suicide. They are more likely to become involved in drugs. Because they often spend time alone in an empty house, they are more likely to join gangs. Such an outcome is by no means inevitable. However, children from such homes do have more challenges to face and more difficulties to overcome.

The story "The Princess and the Barbarian", written by the author George Gilder as a prologue for his book *Men and Marriage*, is not simply a fairy-tale. It is more like a parable—a story that can teach us a lesson. As with any parable, it has many different themes and levels of meaning.

Upon reading this story the first idea that stands out is the difference in behavior between two generations. The values of the new generation differ from those of the old generation. The courting and sexual morality of the first couple are very different

from those of the second couple. What this story also reveals are the implications of these different value systems.

The first barbarian is young and aggressive. His energy is undisciplined and pursues instant gratification. He seizes what he wants without regard for the consequences. When he sees the young princess, he is filled with lust and desire. He wants her. She, however, is the embodiment of femininity. She is modest and guards her virginity and integrity with her life. Through her love and attitude she helps the barbarian to become self-disciplined and transforms his lust into love. He is prepared to die, to change, to grow and give up his precious freedom for the sake of love. He changes from a hunter to a husband and eventually a father. As head of the family, he lives for the sake of his family and their future well-being.

The second barbarian is the same. The princess, though, has different values from those of her parents. She has been influenced by “progressive” ideas from abroad. She doesn’t care for her parents’ morality, and when she encounters the barbarian she welcomes some excitement. But she doesn’t love or respect him. She is not committed to their relationship. It would be too much effort to tame him. Instead she just enjoys the pleasure of his company without thinking of the responsibility that goes with it. When an older, suave, worldly-wise king appears at the court, she is attracted to him immediately. Why stay with a barbarian when one could have a king? The barbarian, his heart betrayed, seeks his revenge on the world.



To read

“The Princess and the Barbarian”, *Men and Marriage*, by George Gilder

Questions for Discussion



- In some societies or during some periods of history values are easily transmitted from one generation to the next. In other societies or at other times younger and older generations have different values. Why is this?
- Given that men are by nature more aggressive than women, how are they socialized into becoming responsible adults?
- How were the short-term goals of the first barbarian transformed into long-term goals?
- What distinguishes a youth from an adult? In other words, what do we mean when we say a person is grown up?
- Find out about the rites of passage that most tribal societies have and mark the transition in a young man's (and sometimes woman's) life from a youth to an adult. What is the value of such rites of initiation? What are the rites of initiation in your society or community?
- What happens when love is not integrated into society but remains on the level of self-gratification?
- How and why do the values of men and women differ? What is the unique contribution that each makes to society? How do they combine together to form society?
- What should a traditionally moral society do when immoral ideas surface, whether they be foreign or not?
- How can a person, or society, distinguish between moral and immoral ideas? What are the criteria for making such evaluations?
- How and why does the breakdown of order in sexual love influence society? Is it a cause-effect relationship, or is the effect more subtle and pervasive?
- What, if any, is the relationship between broken love, crime and violence?
- The couples in the story happened to be the rulers of their society. Do leaders and representatives have a special responsibility for setting the moral tone of their society?
- Does the behavior of a leader have more impact on a society than the behavior of an ordinary member of the society?
- When a person's heart is hurt, what does he or she do?
- What do you think are the social implications of the sexual morality taught by the world's religions?
- Are you surprised that most criminals come from broken homes or single-parent families? Why do you think this is?