

Feminism, Family, and the Bible: A Biblical Assessment of Feminism's Impact on American Families

By **Andreas J. Köstenberger, Ph.D.***

*Andreas Köstenberger is a professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

For the first time in its history, Western civilization is confronted with the need to define the meaning of the terms "marriage" and "family." What until now has been considered a "normal" family, made up of a father, a mother, and a number of children, has in recent years increasingly begun to be viewed as one among several options, which can no longer claim to be the only or even superior form of ordering human relationships. The Judeo-Christian view of marriage and the family with its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures has to a significant extent been replaced with a set of values that prizes human rights, self-fulfillment, and pragmatic utility on an individual or societal level. It can rightly be said that marriage and the family are institutions under siege in our world today and that, with marriage and the family, our very civilization is in crisis.

Feminist ideology has significantly contributed to this burgeoning crisis. Intrinsic to feminism, with its emphasis on women's rights and self-realization, is the effort to liberate women from what it perceives to be a male-dominated society. Radical feminist ideology, in particular, contends that the traditional and biblical concepts of gender roles and family relations are part of a patriarchal social construct that is designed to control and oppress women.^[1] According to radical feminists, the Bible's teaching on gender roles serves only to perpetuate "established patterns of power."^[2] Thus feminism, in order to achieve equality between the sexes, urges a radical reappraisal and redefinition of what it means to be a man or a woman and what constitutes a family.

THE RISE OF FEMINISM AND ITS STANCE TOWARD THE FAMILY [TOP](#)

Historically, feminism has its roots in the soil of liberalism that stresses individual rights above all other social, institutional, and moral responsibilities.^[3] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese connects the feminist movement with the concept of individual liberty when she writes, "Feminism originated as the handmaid of individualism and from the start has been tied to and informed by the ideals of individual liberty and the equality of individual rights."^[4] During the mid-nineteenth century, women began to voice issues of equality in the social, religious, economic, and political spheres of society.^[5] The 1848 convention in Seneca Falls, New York, ratified the "Declaration of Sentiments" drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Specifically, this manifesto listed grievances concerning the property rights of married women, legally mandated obedience to husbands, and the barring of women from gainful employment.^[6] The emergence of the suffrage movement, spearheaded by leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Frances Wright, Sarah Grimké, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Taylor, and John Stuart Mill, fueled by the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) allowing black men — but not women — to vote, culminated in women being granted the right to vote in 1919.^[7] Although the suffrage movement waned in the 1920s, the movement pressing for women's liberation from the confines of traditional roles assigned to them continued.

The feminist assault on traditional gender roles and families began in earnest in the 1960s and increasingly turned radical in the 1970s.^[8] This "second wave" of feminism targeted the family because women "could not realize their potential in society as long as they were still tied to childbearing, childraising, and housekeeping as their primary responsibilities."^[9] Betty Friedan, author of the celebrated work *The Feminine Mystique*, contended that women were victims of the delusion that they must find their fulfillment and identity through their husbands and children, otherwise known as the "trapped housewife syndrome."^[10] Early radical feminists such as Marlene Dixon, Pamela Kearon, and Germaine Greer all decried marriage as the primary vehicle for oppressing women and called for its demise.^[11] Kate Millett^[12] used the term "patriarchy" to name the problem, and Adrienne Rich offered the following definition:

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men — by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor — determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.^[13]

In light of these developments it is not surprising that feminists singled out marriage as one of the major culprits in the infamous 1971 "Declaration of Feminism."^[14] Gloria Steinem averred that a woman's greatest threat is "a husband or lover in the isolation of their own home."^[15] Andrea Dworkin equated traditional marital relationships with patriarchy and, ultimately, rape.^[16] These women pioneered the modern radical feminist agenda, sending the movement on a trajectory aimed at destroying the concept of the traditional and biblical view of marriage and family.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FEMINISTS' STANCE TOWARD THE FAMILY [TOP](#)

In the decades that followed, however, radical feminist ideology has proven counter-intuitive, controversial, and too extreme for mainstream America. In fact, even some within the feminist movement have argued that feminism has hurt the cause of women, at least in certain respects. One influential voice was Susan Faludi, who famously chronicled a consequent backlash against feminism in the years following the heyday of the movement in the 1960s and '70s (incidentally, Faludi largely blamed the conservative and religious right for having orchestrated such a backlash).^[17] Nevertheless, Faludi reasserted the legitimacy of feminism as championing the right of women to "be free to define themselves — instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and their men" and maintained that the goals of the feminist movement are still far from realized.^[18] Many women are still unfulfilled because they continue to face a lack of personal and professional equality.^[19] Faludi also noted that despite the excesses and unwelcome side effects of feminism, 75 to 95 percent of women credit the feminist liberation movement with improving their lives, and a similar proportion say that it should keep pushing for change.^[20]

Similar to Faludi, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argued that the feminist elite had lost touch with the concerns of everyday women and attempted to soften much of the radical feminist rhetoric.^[21] Betty Friedan, in 1998, sought to correct her anti-family label by acknowledging the value of marriage, family, and housewives.^[22] In her 2001 memoir, Friedan lamented, "I was, in fact, beside myself at the damage being done to the women's movement by extremists and the 'radical chic.' Sexual politics was once again overshadowing the mainstream issues of abortion and child care in the winter of 1970 and fomenting an image of the women's movement as just a bunch of lesbians."^[23] Far from forsaking her feminist ideals, Friedan's concern was rather that feminism had lost sight of its central tenets owing to the influence of the movement's most radical representatives. Patricia Ireland, in *What Women Want*, concurred, contending that, at its heart, feminism seeks to empower women to gain control over their own lives.^[24]

While some feminists modified their stance and sought to clarify the true nature of feminism, this does not mean that the radical feminist rejection of biblical and traditional views of marriage and family has materially changed. Judith Stacey redefined the concept of family from that of the traditional nuclear family to a broader, less restrictive concept that also includes homosexual families, among other types of relationships.^[25] This, some argued, is actually for the better, since feminist families, unlike the traditional patriarchal family, tend to exhibit less sex-role stereotyping, less authoritarianism, and more sharing of household and economic responsibilities.^[26] Also, contrary to what it might appear, they insisted that the absence of fathers — or parents of one gender — does not necessarily have negative effects on "family life" and children. Thus Louise B. Silverstein and Carl F. Auerbach advanced the notion that fathers are not essential for raising children in a family as long as there is at least one stable adult influencing the child.^[27]

On the most extreme end of the spectrum, some feminists claim that traditional marriage may actually endanger women and advocate alternatives less detrimental to women's rights such as cohabitation or lesbianism.^[28] In fact, many radical modern feminists advance a notion of equality that requires the complete abolition of conventional views of gender roles.^[29] Virginia Mollenkott epitomizes this worldview when she argues in her book *Omnigender* that the binary masculine and feminine genders are nothing more than a social construct.^[30] According to Mollenkott, this gender system propagates social injustice in order to maintain androcentric control:

Our entire society is organized around gender roles. Females are socialized to be "feminine" (passive, dependent, and nurturant) and then paired with males, who are socialized to be "masculine" (active, independent, and macho). It should not surprise anybody that within such pairings, the females are subjugated and encouraged to express pseudopower harmlessly through consumerism. Thus, society in the United States depends on gender roles not only to maintain androcentric control, but also to support capitalism.[31]

Although feminist theory has splintered into various factions, all of its manifold representations maintain as their core tenet the primacy of a woman's personal needs, ambitions, and goals.[32] The impact of this feminist philosophy and social strategy, initially perceptible only as a fissure, has managed to cause significant cracks in the foundation and structural integrity of families in America. While it is difficult to link feminism and the demise of the American family by way of a strict cause-and-effect relationship, there seems to be a clear correspondence between the rise of the feminist movement and its views toward marriage and the family on the one hand and the deterioration of marriage and the family in the United States in the past several decades.

STATISTICAL DATA ON THE AMERICAN FAMILY [TOP](#)

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the recent U.S. census provides a snapshot of the condition of American families. In 1970 traditional family households made up 81 percent of all households, but this percentage has dropped to 68 percent in 2003.[33] Single-mother families increased from 3 million in 1970 to 10 million in 2003, and the number of single-father families grew to 2 million in 2003 from less than half a million in 1970.[34] Nearly one-third of all American children are born out of wedlock, and more than half will spend some portion of their childhood in never-formed or broken families.[38] Divorce rates spiked dramatically between 1970 and 1975.[39] On average, since the late 1970s, 20 out of 1,000 women divorce in a given year.[40] According to most indicators, the trend of divorce has subsided toward the end of the twentieth century. The median duration of marriages that end in divorce is about eight years as of 2001.[41] Although marriages tend to remain intact longer than in the 1970s, the decline in the divorce rate may at least in part be attributable to the fact that many couples are now avoiding marriage altogether.

The number of births by unmarried women relative to those of married women increased rapidly between 1970 and 1990.[42] Delays in marriage have also been an observable trend among American adults.[43] The median age of adults who marry for the first time rose from age 20 (women) and 23 (men) in 1970 to 25 and 27, respectively, in 2003.[44] The general number of adults who have never married has also continued to grow during the last thirty years.[45] Since 1970 the proportion of women who have never married between the ages 20-24 has more than doubled, and has tripled for women 30-34.[46] Overall, men and women who never married and/or are divorced composed a larger share of the population in 2003 than they did in 1970, while the proportion of those currently married declined.[47]

A final observable trend away from the traditional family model in America is the increase of cohabitation. Between 1960 and 2000 the amount of couples living together has increased tenfold or 1000 percent.[48] In 2003, 4.6 million households were classified as unmarried-partner households.[49] The proportion of cohabiting couples increased from 2.9 percent of all households in 1996 to 4.2 percent in 2003.[50] About 9.2 million men and women are cohabiting, and 41 percent of them have children under the age of 18.[51] The rising trend of cohabitation is directly linked to the decline in the number of Americans who marry.[52] Research has indicated that many, if not most, families composed of cohabiting couples with children intend to marry, although few actually do.[53] Interestingly, mothers, rather than fathers, in a cohabiting relationship are more hesitant about pursuing marriage.[54] The traditional nuclear family of a husband, wife, and children no longer serves as the paradigmatic model for a great number of Americans.

In addition to these statistics, alternative lifestyles and families have produced a national discussion on what constitutes a family. During the 1990s, the theme of "family values" and what constitutes appropriate values entered the political discourse.[55] On the one hand, Dan Quayle famously criticized the values of the television show *Murphy Brown* when the main character decided to have a child out of wedlock. Al and Tipper Gore, on the other hand, hoped that their reassessment and redefinition of family values would boost Gore's presidential campaign. In their book *Joined at the Heart* the Gores survey the statistical data and discover: "The classic nuclear family of our childhood...is not gone, but is very much a

minority of families now. Alongside it today are two-income families, single-parent families and a host of other types."^[56] They affirm that the true "essence" of family is captured in the definition that it is a "group of people who love and care about each other, regardless of blood relation or marital status."^[57] Thus homosexual and lesbian couples with children are assumed to constitute a genuine family on par with conventional families.^[58] These examples illustrate the larger phenomenon that in recent history Americans have become increasingly divided with regard to the proper definition of marriage and a family, including the question of the legalization of same-sex marriages.

EXAMINING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE AMERICAN FAMILY [TOP](#)

As the previous statistical survey has amply demonstrated, an observable shift has taken place among American families during the last three decades of the twentieth century. More children grow up in single-parent homes. A large number of marriages end in divorce. Men and women typically delay marriage and prefer cohabitation prior to marriage — should they ever decide to tie the knot — not to mention the increased number of gay and lesbian couples raising children. In a period of thirty years, the question of what constitutes a family has moved from an issue on which there was widespread consensus to a state of affairs where the institutions of marriage and the family are very much under siege.

The decline of the traditional family corresponds to the rise of feminist ideology. This is the case despite the frequent claims by feminists such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, who emphatically states that "First we need to be clear that feminism is not the cause of the crisis in the family."^[59] Instead, she avers, "The crisis in the family is caused by a patriarchal ideology of female subordination and separation of men and women into mutually exclusive spheres of childraising and paid work, forged in the Victorian age."^[60] Barbara LeBey posits that the sexual revolution, women's liberation, lenient attitudes toward divorce, and increased mobility are all contributing factors to the demise of the family. In particular, she contends that the former two movements freed women to pursue education and careers that also changed the traditional notions concerning motherhood and family that put children first.^[61] A woman must be free to determine her own identity, role, and goals. No man or patriarchal construct should ever interfere with women's choices, desires, and ideals.

In keeping with the feminist credo of women's unfettered personal freedom, marriage, on account of its contractual basis, is often devalued as an instrument for oppressing women's personal freedom. This is evidenced by the way in which feminists have championed "no-fault" divorce laws. Young children are increasingly placed into day care where they spend most of their waking hours without interaction with their mothers.^[62] The traditional and biblical model of family operates on the basis of giving up personal freedoms for the benefit of others within a loving, caring, and faithful relationship. As women began to put their rights and ambitions ahead of husbands and family, homes began to crumble. Thus, as Linda Woodhead rightly notes, "amongst the barrage of attacks on the family which have been launched since the mid 1960s, the feminist critique stands out as one of the most powerful."^[63]

One of the many ways in which feminism has contributed to the demise of the traditional family is by reassigning and/or obliterating gender role distinctions. Judith Stacey sharply remarks:

[T]he family values campaigns have an antifeminist tinge...There was a lot of emphasis on the selfish career woman,...the self-indulgent woman or the promiscuous woman....At first, it was all about the decline of motherhood....Then recently the emphasis began to shift from motherless America to fatherless America....it's really about restoring the father to his rightful place as head of the household, the center of authority. That's what I have a problem with....and restoring sharply differentiated roles of mothers and fathers.^[64]

The notion of differentiated gender roles constitutes a major part of feminism's critique of the traditional view of marriage and the family. If women are completely equal to men, they should not have any gender expectations imposed upon them. Susan Cohen and Mary Katzenstein have isolated the primary concern as a "woman's autonomy within and outside the family." A woman, they say, must not be restricted by any traditional, social, and religious guidelines suggesting that she must act within certain parameters to fulfill her role as a woman.^[65]

Feminism has also contributed to the demise of the traditional family by deconstructing the definition of family. The feminist movement has railed against the traditional definition of family as "the nuclear family

of a heterosexual married couple with its natural and adopted children, together with family branches consisting of all nuclear families descended from common ancestors."^[66] Instead, feminists have championed a more open and encompassing definition, which has found acceptance even among some evangelicals. Thus Diana Garland and Diane Pancoast advocate a broader, "ecological" definition of family as "the relationships through which persons meet their needs for intimacy, sharing of resources, tangible and intangible help, commitment, responsibility, and meaningfulness over time and contexts," including friendships, roommates, workplace "families," communal groups, and, it appears, same-sex marriages as well.^[67]

To be sure, feminism does not stand alone as the cause for the decline of families in America. It shares culpability with: secular humanism, which asserts the self as supreme; atheistic naturalism, which maintains that humans are nothing more than a collection of chemicals and instincts; and postmodernism, which rejects all notions of authority and overarching meta-narratives. Thus feminism is one of several worldviews and ideologies that have contributed to a paradigm shift redefining the nature of truth and morality.^[68] The one common element in all of these systems of thought is the fundamental rejection of truth based on the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Scriptures.

Radical and reformist feminist interpretation has consistently subverted the teachings of Scripture in order to accommodate its particular point of view.^[69] Early on, Elizabeth Cady Stanton averred that the emancipation of women was impossible if the teachings of Scripture were accepted.^[70] Mary Daly suggested a "castration" of the biblical language, because its core symbolism is patriarchal and therefore fails to liberate women from the sexist confines imposed upon them.^[71] Others, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether^[72] and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,^[73] have focused on the concerns of biblical interpretation related to social justice as a means of promoting a liberationist reformist brand of feminism.^[74]

The feminist experience relegates the notion of scriptural authority to a secondary and subservient position.^[75] As Ellen K. Wondra observed, "[i]n sharp contrast to the uniquely normative character of scripture, white feminist theologians view scripture as only secondarily normative, subjecting scripture, with other sources, to another norm: the liberation of women from oppressive, patriarchal structures, of which scripture and its interpretation is one."^[76] Consequently, feminists exclude large swaths of the biblical record and replace it with extrabiblical documents more favorable to their own feminist viewpoint. The result of this procedure is the redefinition of gender and familial roles in keeping with the cultural ideology that has contributed, and is continuing to contribute, to the overall breakdown of American families.^[77]

THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY [TOP](#)

In my book *God, Marriage & Family*, I have attempted to point the way to a more biblical and spiritual solution: a return to, and rebuilding of, the biblical foundation of marriage and the family.^[78] God's Word is not dependent on man's approval, and the Scriptures are not silent regarding the vital issues facing men and women and families today. In each of the important areas related to marriage and the family, the Bible offers satisfying instructions and wholesome remedies to the maladies afflicting our culture. The Scriptures record the divine institution of marriage and present a Christian theology of marriage and parenting. They offer insight for decision-making regarding abortion, contraception, infertility, and adoption. They give helpful guidance for those who are single or unmarried and address the major threats to marriage and the family — homosexuality, divorce, and feminism.

At the very outset, the Bible affirms God as the Creator and Sovereign Lord over everything pertaining to human life, behavior, and institutions. The fact that both men and women are created in the likeness and image of their Creator invests them with inestimable worth, dignity, and significance. By placing his image on the man and the woman and by setting them in a particular environment, God assigns to them the mandate of representative rule. This rule is the joint function of the man and the woman, although the man carries ultimate responsibility before God. Together the man and the woman are to exercise representative rule, multiply and be stewards of the children given to them by God, and subdue the earth.

God's creation of Eve demonstrates that God's plan for Adam's, as well as all subsequent, marriages involves a monogamous, heterosexual relationship. God only made one "suitable helper" for Adam, and she was female. What is more, it is God who is shown to take the initiative in fashioning a compatible

human companion for the man. As his God-given associate, the woman provides for the man's need for companionship (Gen 2:18, 20) and serves as a suitable partner both in procreation (Gen 2:24) and in the earth's domestication (Gen 1:28).

Hence the woman's role is distinct from the man's, yet unique and exceedingly significant. While assigned to the man as his "helper" and thus placed under his overall charge, the woman is his partner in ruling the earth for God. Thus equality and distinctness, complementarity and submission/authority must be held in fine balance. The man and the woman are jointly charged with ruling the earth for God, yet they are not to do so androgynously, but each as fulfilling their God-ordained, gender-specific roles. Indeed, since these functional differences are part of the Creator's design, it is only when men and women embrace their God-ordained roles that they will be truly fulfilled and that God's creational wisdom will be fully displayed and exalted.^[79]

The New Testament applies the teaching of Genesis to Christian marriages in the church. Using the format of the ancient household code, Paul cites models for both wives and husbands to emulate: for wives, the church in her submission to Christ (Eph 5:24); for husbands, Christ's sacrificial love for the church, resulting in her cleansing, holiness, and purity (Eph 5:25-28).^[80] The fact that wives are called to recognize and respect proper authority over them is not unique to them. Men, too, must submit to Christ, local church leadership and discipline, the civil authorities, and their employers. Nevertheless, this does not alter the fact that there is a sense in which wives are called to submit to their husbands in a non-reciprocal way (1 Pet 3:1-6; cf. 1 Pet 2:13, 18). Yet husbands' exercise of authority must not be arbitrary or abusive, but motivated by love (cf. 1 Pet 3:7).^[81]

On a general scale, the Bible affirms an ethic that stresses loving God and others above living for self. When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus referred to the command of loving God and one's neighbor as oneself (Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:33; Luke 10:27). Elsewhere, Jesus taught that people should do to others what they would have them do to them (Matt 7:12). Conversely, pride and selfish ambition are denounced as opposed to God and his good purposes (Prov 8:13; 21:4; Ps 94:2; 119:36; Jas 3:14, 16; 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5). This places the emphasis not on individual rights and self-interest, but on love and self-sacrifice for others (cf. John 15:12-13).

Feminist ideology flows from secular humanism (liberalism) with its exalted notion of individualism and personal autonomy. Moral issues are subordinated to personal choice and self-interest. Abortion is legitimized as "a woman's right to choose." The only recognized moral framework for human sexual behavior is that it be consensual. Submission is rejected as archaic and unworthy of an "enlightened" human society. The idea of women staying home with their children is acceptable only if that is her personal choice rather than that of her husband, society, or religious affiliation. Yet a breakdown in relationships will inevitably result when people live primarily to gratify self.

CONCLUSION [TOP](#)

Harold O.J. Brown helpfully pinpoints the postmodern and pluralistic roots related to the shift in American families. He observes, "[w]hen the opinions and convictions suddenly undergo dramatic alteration, although nothing new has been discovered and the only thing that has dramatically changed is the spirit of the age, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that that spirit has had an important role to play in the shift."⁸⁵ The rise of feminism with its emphasis on individualism and personal autonomy has led to a radical alteration of gender roles within the family. Women no longer view themselves as the created complement to their male counterparts. Instead, gender roles are perceived as socially constructed patterns of power designed by men to oppress and restrict women. The real issue is that of authority.

Are humans and society the authorities that govern all of life, behavior, and morality? If so, a change in the spirit of the age would indeed warrant a change in social institutions such as marriage and the family. In this case, attempts at redefining sex, marriage, and family are part of human evolution. The Bible, however, stands in radical opposition to such a notion. According to the Scriptures, God — not humans or society — is the ultimate authority, because he is both the Creator and Sovereign Lord of the universe. He alone determines what is right and wrong, true or false, moral or immoral. God is also the Creator and Lord of the family. He established marriage as a covenantal bond between one man and one woman intended to last a lifetime. He, in his ultimate wisdom, ordained the relationship between man and woman as two distinct sexes who are equal in status, worth, and dignity, but who function according to specific,

distinct roles.

The above-surveyed data support the notion that when men and women abandon the scriptural, divinely ordained sex roles, a breakdown in society inevitably ensues. Homes splinter apart, leaving behind children to sift through the rubble in an attempt to mature into functional adults. Couples delay or even avoid altogether a stable commitment to each other by opting to cohabitate instead. Economic security becomes the motto to justify decisions made by women who decide to pursue careers that take them out of their homes. Self-fulfillment is touted as the highest goal, and anything perceived as an obstacle to personal self-interest must be overcome. The feminist assault on biblical principles for marriage and family has indeed succeeded on many fronts, but at what cost?

As women struggle to define their role and identity in American society, it is imperative that they look to the Bible as their guide rather than to feminism. Feminists desire the complete liberation of women from any perceived gender bias based on antiquated models shaped by men. To be sure, no woman should be discriminated against on the basis of her sex, yet, in the end, if feminism has its way, women may wake up to find themselves enslaved to societal pressure, professional ambitions, and broken homes. The Bible alone, rightly interpreted and put into practice, offers true liberty to women who desire to live up to their God-designed potential. God's word provides the perfect template for true liberty and equality for men and women alike. American men and women must decide on what foundation they will build their homes. Should they choose the feminist approach that rejects biblical authority and demands that individual rights reign supreme? Or should they choose the biblical foundation, assigning to men and women complementary roles through which both genders are able to work together in mutual love and respect?[82]

Endnotes:

1 [Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "The Social Construction and Institutionalization of Gender and Race: An Integrative Framework," in Revisioning Gender, ed. Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber, and Beth B. Hess \(Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000\), 3-43. Cf. Amir Butler, "How Feminism Has Murdered the West," A True Word, April 11, 2002, <http://www.atrueword.com/index.php/article/articleprint/24/-14> \(accessed September 28, 2005\).](#)

2 [Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach \(Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001\), 1.](#)

3 [Robert W. Yarbrough, "Progressive and Historic: The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9-15," in Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, 2d ed., ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner \(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005\), 126.](#)

4 [Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Equality, Difference, and the Practical Problems of a New Feminism," in Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism, ed. M. M. Schumacher \(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004\), 302. See also Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Women and the Future of the Family \(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000\), 17-24.](#)

5 [Christine Bolt, The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s \(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993\).](#)

6 [Mary Kassian, The Feminist Mistake: The Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Culture \(Wheaton: Crossway, 2005\), 18-19.](#)

7 [Bolt, Women's Movements, 119.](#)

8 [Kassian, Feminist Mistake, 10, 17-27. For an excellent resource chronicling the histories of feminist opposition to marriage see Patrick F. Fagan, Robert E. Rector, and Lauren R. Noyes, "Why Congress Should Ignore Feminist Opposition to Marriage," The Heritage Foundation, June 16, 2003, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/bg1662.cfm#pgfId-1033776> \(accessed November, 14, 2005\). The following survey is partly indebted to this article.](#)

9 [Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Church, Feminism, and Family," in God Forbid: Religion and Sex in American Public Life, ed. Kathleen M. Sands \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000\), 99.](#)

10 [Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique \(New York: Norton, 1963\), 22, 44. See also Janice Shaw](#)

Crouse, "Feminism and the Family," *Meridian Magazine*, 2005.
<http://www.ldsmag.com/familywatch/040506feminismprint.htm> (accessed September 28). A current parody of this is the popular television show "Desperate Housewives."

11 Marlene Dixon, "Why Women's Liberation? Racism and Male Supremacy,"
<http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/uhs/WebSite/Courses/APUSH/2nd%20Sem/Articles%20Semester%202/8%20Dixon.htm> (accessed November 14, 2005); Pamela Kearon and Barbara Mehrhof, "The Feminists," in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 374-76; and Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 317, 20.

12 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon Books, 1969).

13 Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 57-58; quoted in Kassian, *Feminist Mistake*, 27.

14 The manifesto states, "Marriage has existed for the benefit of men and has been a legally sanctioned method of control over women.... Male society has sold us the idea of marriage...Now we know it is the institution that has failed us and we must work to destroy it.... The end of the institution of marriage is a necessary condition for the liberation of women. Therefore, it is important for us to encourage women to leave their husbands and not to live individually with men." Nancy Lehmann and Helen Sullinger, *The Document: Declaration of Feminism*. Originally distributed in June of 1971. Post Office Box 7064, Powderhorn Station, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55407.

15 Gloria Steinem, *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1993), 259.

16 She clarifies the point about rape in marriage in an interview with British novelist Michael Moorcock. She states, "My point was that as long as the law allows statutory exemption for a husband from rape charges, no married woman has legal protection from rape. I also argued, based on a reading of our laws, that marriage mandated intercourse — it was compulsory, part of the marriage contract. Under the circumstances, I said, it was impossible to view sexual intercourse in marriage as the free act of a free woman. I said that when we look at sexual liberation and the law, we need to look not only at which sexual acts are forbidden, but which are compelled." Michael Moorcock and Andrea Dworkin, "Fighting Talk," Interview with Andrea Dworkin by Michael Moorcock, April 21, 1995.
<http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/dworkin/MoorcockInterview.html> (accessed November 13, 2005).

17 Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday), 1991.

18 *Ibid.*, xxiii.

19 Susan Faludi, "Feminism Has Not Harmed Women," in *Feminism: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Carol Wekesser (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1995), 60.

20 *Ibid.*, 61.

21 Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 1-8.

22 Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 10.

23 Betty Friedan, *Life So Far: A Memoir* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 248.

24 Patricia Ireland, *What Women Want: A Journey to Personal and Political Power* (New York: Plume, 1997), 5, 7. She writes, "For me — and, I suspect, for many women—the question of what I wanted was never asked. We were socialized always to put others first. We were rarely encouraged to ask ourselves what we really wanted. Nor were we usually in positions to go after it, anyway.... So I want to show, in the pages that follow, how I gained the power to control my own life and to make positive changes for myself and for other women."

25 Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 80.

26 Phyllis Chesler, "Feminism Supports the Family," in *Feminism: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Jennifer A. Hurley (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2001), 99.

27 They aver, "In contrast to the neoconservative perspective, our data on gay fathering couples have convinced us that neither a mother nor a father is essential. Similarly, our research with divorced, never-married, and remarried fathers has taught us that a wide variety of family structures can support positive child outcomes. We have concluded that children need at least one responsible, caretaking adult who has a positive emotional connection to them, and with whom they have a consistent relationship." Louise B. Silverstein and Carl F. Auerbach, "Fathers Are Not Essential," in *Male/Female Roles: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Auriana Ojeda (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2005), 119.

28 Barbara Ehrenreich, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor, 2005); *Radical Women, The Radical Women Manifesto: Socialist Feminist Theory, Program and Organizational Structure* (Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2001), 28; Claudia Card, *Lesbian Choices* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Esther D. Rothblum argues that lesbians married to men have increased rates of mental health disorders due to their role as a housewife, or being expected to do housework ("Introduction: Lesbianism as a Model of a Positive Lifestyle for Women," in *Lesbianism: Affirming Nontraditional Roles*, ed. Esther D. Rothblum and Ellen Cole [New York: Haworth Press, 1989], 6).

29 Judith Squires, *Gender in Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 54-79; Ann Oakley, *Gender on Planet Earth* (New York: The New Press, 2002); *Revisioning Gender: The Gender Lens*, ed. Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber, and Beth B. Hess (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); Judith Butler, "The End of Sexual Difference?," in *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 414-34. On the other hand, some argue for up to as many as five gender categories that embrace homosexuals, transsexuals, and others. Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Idea of Multiple Genders Must Be Accepted," in *Male/Female Roles: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Auriana Ojeda (San Diego: GreenHaven Press, 2005), 38-48.

30 Mollenkott, *Omnigender*, 6-12.

31 *Ibid.*, 19.

32 Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions*, 3rd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001), 199-221.

33 Jason Fields, *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2003, Current Population Reports, P20-553*, U. S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2003, 2.

34 Fields, *America's Families and Living Arrangements*, 7.

35 Robert E. Rector, Melissa G. Pardue, and Lauren R. Noyes, "'Marriage Plus': Sabotaging the President's Efforts to Promote Healthy Marriage," Heritage Foundation, August 22, 2003, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Welfare/BG1677.cfm> (accessed November 28, 2005).

36 Kassian, *Feminist Mistake*, 8.

37 Andrew J. Weaver, Linda A. Revilla, and Harold G. Koenig, *Counseling Families Across the Stages of Life: A Handbook for Pastors and Other Helping Professionals* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 102.

38 Fields, *America's Families and Living Arrangements*, 5. See also Rose Krieder and Jason Fields, *Number, Timing and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: Fall 1996, Current Population Reports, P70-80*, U.S. Census Bureau: Washington, DC, 2001.

39 Rose M. Krieder, *Number, Timing and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 2001, Current Population Reports, P70-97*, U.S. Census Bureau: Washington, DC, February 2005, 4.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*, 9.

42 Fields, *America's Families and Living Arrangements*, 5.

43 *Ibid.*, 12.

- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid., 13.
- 48 Kassian, Feminist Mistake, 8. She cites "Statistics: Cohabitation," U. S. Census Bureau, 2000, <http://www.unmarried.org/statistics.html>.
- 49 Ibid., 16.
- 50 Ibid. See also Lynne M. Casper and Philip N. Cohen, "How Does POSSLQ Measure Up? National Estimates of Cohabitations," *Demography* 37/2 (May 2000): 237-45.
- 51 Ibid., 17.
- 52 Matthew D. Bramlett and William D. Mosher, "Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States," National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Health Statistics* 23 no. 22 (July 2002): 13.
- 53 Sara McLanahan, et al, "The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study Baseline National Report," The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study of Princeton University, Revised March 2003, <http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/documents/nationalreport.pdf> (accessed November 28, 2005), 7.
- 54 Ibid., 7.
- 55 Don S. Browing, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Pamela D. Couture, K. Brynoff Lyon and Robert M. Franklin, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 29-34.
- 56 Al and Tipper Gore, *Joined at the Heart: The Transformation of the American Family* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002), 16.
- 57 Ibid., 33.
- 58 Cf. Julie M. Thompson, *Mommy Queerest: Contemporary Rhetorics of Lesbian Maternal Identity* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Janet M. Wright, *Lesbian Step Families: An Ethnography of Love* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1998).
- 59 Ruether, "Church, Feminism, and Family," 101.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Barbara LeBey, "Traditional Families Are Declining," in *The Family: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Auriana Ojeda (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2003), 19.
- 62 Leslie Anne Carbone, "Feminism Has Caused the Breakdown of the Family," in *Feminism: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Jennifer A. Hurley (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2001), 97.
- 63 Linda Woodhead, "Faith, Feminism and the Family," in *The Family*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietmar Mieth (London: SCM, 1995), 43.
- 64 Laura Hagar, "The American Family Is Dead!" *Bay Area Express* 19 (20) (February 1997): 9, 12, quoted in Mary Ann Lamanna and Agnes Riedmann, *Marriages and Families: Making Choices in a Diverse Society*, 7th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2000), 42.
- 65 See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Christian Understandings of Human Nature and Gender," in *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*, ed. Anne Carr and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 95-110.
- 66 George Rekers et al., "The Christian World View of the Family," *Coalition On Revival*, 1999, <http://www.reformation.net/Cor/cordocs/family.pdf>. (accessed December 5, 2005).
- 67 Diana S. Richmond Garland and Diane L. Pancoast, eds., *The Church's Ministry with Families: A Practical Guide* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 11. For their definition of family they follow A. Hartman and J. Laird,

Family-Centered Social Work Practice (New York: Free Press, 1983).

68 See Andreas J. Köstenberger, gen. ed., Whatever Happened to Truth? (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), with contributions by R. Albert Mohler, J. P. Moreland, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Andreas Köstenberger.

69 Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Gender Passages in the New Testament: Hermeneutical Fallacies Critiqued," Westminster Theological Journal 56 (1994): 259-83. In this article, I identify six hermeneutical fallacies: (1) underestimating the power of presuppositions; (2) lack of balance in hermeneutical methodology; (3) underrating the importance of the use of the Old Testament in the New; (4) the improper use of background data; (5) an arbitrary distinction between "paradigm passages" and "passages with limited application"; and (6) isolationist exegesis.

70 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Woman's Bible: Parts I and II (1895, 1898; reprinted in the series American Women: Images and Realities; New York: 1972), pt. 1, 12. She states, "The only points in which I differ from all ecclesiastical teaching is that I do not believe that any man ever saw or talked with God, I do not believe that God inspired the Mosaic code, or told the historians what they say he did about woman, for all the religions on the face of the earth degrade her, and so long as woman accepts the position that they assign to her, her emancipation is impossible." For a survey of early feminist interpretation see William Baird, History of New Testament Research, vol. 2: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 330-32, 335-37.

71 Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation, (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 9. For a review and critique of Daly's work see Margaret E. Köstenberger, "A Critique of Feminist and Egalitarian Hermeneutics and Exegesis: With Special Focus on Jesus' Approach to Women" (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, Pretoria, Unisa, 2005), 15-16.

72 Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary, the Feminine Face of the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977); idem, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon, 1983).

73 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad, 1983). Fiorenza posits a fourfold feminist hermeneutic: (1) a hermeneutic of suspicion toward traditional interpretations based on patriarchal biases and assumptions; (2) a hermeneutic of remembrance that locates women as foundational agency in the Christian tradition; (3) a hermeneutic of proclamation relating this reconstruction to the Christian community; and (4) a hermeneutic of imagination that encapsulates feminism in ritual, prayer, hymns, and works of art.

74 Margaret Köstenberger, "Critique," 20.

75 Rebecca Groothuis, Women Caught in the Conflict (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 103-8.

76 Ellen K. Wondra, "By Whose Authority? The Status of Scripture in Contemporary Feminist Theologies," Anglican Theological Review 74 (Winter 1993): 84.

77 Cf. Yarbrough, "Progressive and Historic," 121-48, esp. 126-33.

78 Andreas J. Köstenberger (with David W. Jones), God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004). The following material is adapted from Chapters 1, 3, and 8 of this book. See also Christopher Ash, Marriage: Sex in the Service of God (Leicester, U.K.: InterVarsity, 2003; Regent College Publishing, 2005).

79 Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Ascertaining Women's God-Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15," Bulletin of Biblical Research 7 (1997): 107-44.

80 Later, Paul adds a second, common-sense analogy from the nature of things, appealing to self-interest: everyone loves one's own body; in light of the one-flesh union between husbands and wives, if husbands love their wives, this is tantamount to husbands loving themselves (Eph 5:29-30). On the basis of Eph 5:21 ("submitting to one another"), some argue that Paul does not teach the submission of wives to their husbands only, but also that of husbands to their wives in an arrangement termed "mutual submission" (e.g., Chap. 8 in David Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], esp. 236-37). More likely, however, wives are called to submit to their husbands as their "head" as the church does to Christ (Eph 5:22-24), while husbands are

to love their wives with the sacrificial love of Christ (Eph 5:25-30). See Wayne Grudem, "The Myth of Mutual Submission as an Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21," in Wayne Grudem, ed., Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 221-31. See also Daniel Doriani, "The Historical Novelty of Egalitarian Interpretations of Ephesians 5:21-22," in *ibid.*, 203-19; and Wayne Walden, "Ephesians 5:21: A Translation Note," *Restoration Quarterly* 45 no. 4 (2003): 254.

81 Cf. Hawthorne, "Marriage and Divorce," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 596.

82 Harold O. J. Brown, "The New Testament Against Itself: 1 Timothy 2:19-15 and the 'Breakthrough' of Galatians 3:28," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 199.

83 I gratefully acknowledge the research assistance of Alan Bandy for this article.