

# BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture Number 15

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### THE PROBLEM

#### INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time Mae West said, “Marriage is a wonderful institution, but I’m not ready for an institution yet.”

Well, marriage is an institution – an institution which is falling to pieces. And in the process everybody is getting hurt. The collapse of marriage is the result of what is happening to our civilization, of which marriage is a part.

#### CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION

The Christian Church began twenty centuries ago in a corner of the Roman Empire, and in a world which was very hostile to it. But by the end of the fourth century it had converted that empire and spread into countries outside that empire finally converting even Russia. In the process, it created something called the *Christian Synthesis*. The Christian Synthesis was a set of assumptions, which everyone held, about the meaning of life and what the most important things in life are. It was a set of dogmas.

Remember what a dogma is – a deeply held belief that you take for granted and never question. For example: “Water runs down hill.” If a child asks his mother why water runs down hill, she might answer, “Well, honey it just does.” When you come to a “honey it just does”, you have come to a dogma. Actually the Christian dogma is “Water runs down hill because God tells it to”. “Why?” “Well Honey he just does.”

These dogmas—the Christian Synthesis—were the basis of Christian civilization, or *Christendom* as the Roman Empire was called after its conversion. But a united Christendom lasted for only about a century.

In the fifth century, barbarians from outside began to attack the empire more and more frequently and with more and more success. And the empire began to break up. At first it split into two parts: the west where Latin was the language and the east where Greek was spoken. Rome was the capital of the western part, and Constantinople was the capital of the eastern.

The western part returned largely to tribalism. After several futile attempts to restore the empire, Europe found itself divided into a number of nation states with rival princes. Each of them claimed for himself what once only the Christian Emperor had claimed. These rivalries supplied both the opportunity and the fuel for the break up of the Church. And the disintegration went on.

First there was warfare between nations; then warfare within nations, that is civil war. After civil war has come revolution, guerrilla “wars of national liberation,” and now terrorism.

Along with this political fragmentation, has come the fragmentation of the Church and the end of the Christian Synthesis. All that is left of the Christian Synthesis is an assortment of scraps without any obvious connection to each other or to real life.

The most that can be said about the Christian Synthesis today is that when someone claims to be an atheist, the God whose existence he is denying is Jehovah (Yahweh) instead of Zeus or Jupiter or Thor.

As a matter of fact, the “Jehovah” he doesn’t believe in is more than likely one I don’t believe in either, since the image of God has become so distorted in our world.

The Christian Synthesis was the basis for our civilization. And because it has been destroyed, our civilization is headed for chaos.

As a result of all this, to be a Christian today, a person has to be very deliberate about it because the world he lives in is constantly misleading him as to what it means to be a Christian. He lives in a world based more and more on the same dogmas as the pagan world of the first century.

## INSTITUTIONS

More and more people today think Mae West was right: marriage seems like a madhouse; a person would have to be crazy to get married. But marriage doesn’t have to be that kind of “institution”.

First, let’s think about institutions in general. Every community has a number of needs or problems which are built-in. There are some of them which are common to all communities. But not all communities see those common problems in the same way.

When a society hits upon a good solution to one of its basic needs or problems, that solution gets copied and rapidly becomes the standard solution. That is, it becomes an institution.

Civilizations are different even in those institutions which deal with the problems they have in common. For example, in the U. S., if a person has a wreck and is smart, he doesn’t leave the scene of the accident; that would only make it worse. But in Mexico, if he is smart he doesn’t wait around; that would only make it worse, because he would get involved with a corrupt system which runs on bribes, etc.

The institutions we grow up with just seem to be part of the *natural law*. However, other people’s institutions seem bizarre. For example, in the U. S., a man is allowed one wife (at a time); in Iran, four wives. In Tibet, a woman can have four husbands.

In the U. S., if a man is seen out with a woman who is not his wife, it is assumed that he has sex on his mind. But in Japan, it is assumed that he has poetry on his mind – a geisha is a professional cultural companion, not necessarily a prostitute.

Community life is essential for human beings; we are social creatures. Institutions make community life, make civilization, possible. Human life requires a very basic thing which institutions give, because...

As important as justice is, it is even more important to know what the rules are. Bad rules are better than no rules at all. For example, remember when you were in some totally new situation and didn't know any of the rules – like the very first day of school.

This principle was applied by the Chinese communists during the Korean War in the “brain-washing” of captured Americans. The way they did it involved totally changing all the rules for the prisoners every day and not telling them what the rules were. The result was that none of them tried to escape. No one trusted anyone else. Absolutely all sense of community among prisoners was completely destroyed.

On the other hand, there is an old proverb in the Navy which is profoundly true: “A taut ship is a happy ship.” On a ship where the rules are clear and consistent, even though strict, the crew is happier than on a ship where the rules are lax but no one knows exactly what they are from day to day or person to person.

It is very important to know where you stand. Nothing terrifies people as much as totally unstructured conditions. So we defend our institutions blindly and passionately. The alternative is chaos.

The anarchists of the last 150 years have wanted chaos, because they bought into the absurd idea of the eighteenth century philosophers like Rousseau and his friends who said that people are basically good, that what causes all our trouble is human institutions. They believed that if we did away with all our institutions we would be free. And then our own innate goodness would produce a free and happy society.

That notion has become almost a dogma today with many people. You hear people speak of being committed to “social change” without ever saying what the change will be to—just change. But even people who speak that way in general do not want anyone to fool with their own institutions.

In fact, in the last century or so, no one has been feared or resented quite so much as the anarchist. Because people with common sense know that a society without rules is an unendurable chaos.

This was demonstrated dramatically for me by what happened in Tucson, Arizona, when I lived there. Ever since the 1950's, the public school system had a large fleet of busses which was used to bring children in to the schools, because the city was so spread out. That was a local solution to a commonly recognized local problem. There was no resistance to it at all. In fact it was considered a blessing.

But then in the 1960's, representatives of the very small black community sued and got the federal courts to require bussing to produce integration. Then there appeared intense resistance to it, especially from the Mexican community which made up about a fourth of the population. When outsiders began interfering in local institutions everyone became protective of them.

There is a tremendous public pressure to preserve our institutions, including the institution of marriage. However...

THE SYMBIOSIS OF INSTITUTIONS

The institutions of a society are *symbiotic*, their lives are intermeshed. To illustrate: foxes and rabbits living in the same environment with limited food resources are symbiotic. If the foxes get killed off, the rabbit population explodes and eats up all the food. Then the rabbits starve and get sick and die.

So when one institution in a society changes, it puts pressure on all the others to change.

The school and the home are symbiotic.

Back in the 1920's, a man named John Dewey came up with the idea that the real purpose of the school was to prepare Johnny to take his place in society, to instill values in him, to build his character. His motto was, "We teach pupils, not subjects."

It was an exciting new idea and the teachers bought it. But they weren't prepared to do it. So they all went back to college to take courses in things like child psychology. And the graduate school of education was invented.

Before then, a Spanish teacher was expected to know Spanish; a math teacher was expected to know math; etc. The new idea was that if you know "education" you can teach anything.

The result was that under the old system the education a person got in high school was better than the one a person got in college under the new system.

By the 1930's, parents caught on to the idea that the school had taken on the responsibility for the formation of the character of the child and they were off the hook. And the age of the baby-sitter was born.

Back in the 1920's and before, when parents went out, as a rule, they took little Johnny with them or they just didn't go. But beginning in the 1930's, they would leave little Johnny with a teen-age girl from the neighborhood. The first time that happened to little Johnny, he got a shock, a trauma.

"I wonder if Mama and Daddy are coming back!" When after a while, he learns that they will, he has something else to deal with: "Mama and Daddy want a life which leaves me out." And he feels rejected, not secure.

And he has less exposure to the example of his parents as a result of the institution of the baby-sitter.

Then in the 1950's, the Russians launched Sputnik, and we discovered that they were producing better engineers than we were. And the emphasis shifted back toward the "solid" subjects.

The result of that was that the high school students of the 1950's got a better education than their parents had. Their parents became a "lost generation".

Furthermore, after that, there was no one accepting responsibility for the formation of the character of children. And we got the "youth culture".

In the youth culture young people look only to each other for their values and their ideals—and maybe to some adults who themselves have never grown up. And the results are tragic. Countless millions of lives are fouled up and being wasted as a result.

Youth have ceased to learn from exposure to the examples of their parents all day long, day in and day out. Now, with few exceptions, young people who do not have a clue about what life is all about are looking to other youth for the answers to the questions of life—to youth who are in the same boat as they are and also without a clue.

Most families turned over their age-old responsibility to the schools, and they welcomed it as a liberation. Now nobody is bearing that responsibility. But only families can do it. God has placed that responsibility on the shoulders of parents.

Beside the profound changes in the school, there have been others in our society just as deep, which have put severe pressure on the family.

For instance, throughout human history until the middle of the twentieth century, everyone, at least in the temperate zone, lived in an economy of scarcity. That produced what some have called the “Protestant work ethic” which said, “Work as hard as you can to satisfy the needs of you and your family; then work a little more for your neighbor who can’t quite make it.”

When we passed from an economy of scarcity to an economy of plenty, the Protestant work ethic seemed obsolete. But there are signs that we may see the economy of scarcity return. At any rate, much of the world has never left it.

## LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES

When a society changes the way it perceives one of its basic common problems, then the institution that deals with that problem has to change. And when one institution changes, it puts pressure on all those connected with it to change. If they do not change, they tend to become inefficient, and the pressure for them to change gets even greater.

Change in circumstances brings new problems and changes the way old problems are understood.

So there is always a part of society which wants to tinker with institutions and make them more efficient. These are the “liberals”.

And likewise, there is always a segment which wants to preserve the institutions: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” These are the conservatives.

This is normal and usually it is healthy. It can lead to measured and reasonable adaptation to new circumstances. But when there is intense confrontation between the two forces, the situation is ripe for revolution.

Today, within most of us, there is just such a tug-of-war over the institution of marriage.

Many of us have, more or less, the romantic notion of what marriage ought to be: a cottage in the suburbs; Daddy comes driving home from work; two beautiful children and a dog are

playing in the yard; they run to greet Daddy with outstretched arms, crying “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!”

Daddy picks them up and swings them around; his beautiful wife comes to the door in a frilly apron and tells them that supper is ready; they sit down to supper by candlelight to enjoy a meal of all sorts of delicious food which mother has just finished cooking; and they laugh and they talk and they enjoy each other’s company.

And that does not happen today in one out of a thousand families.

On the other hand, we have also absorbed, more or less, the modern liberal notions: we ought to have equality of the sexes; marriage should be democratic; wives ought to be free to do what they choose with their own bodies; etc.

These two ideals are in conflict within each of us and between us. We are damned if we do and we are damned if we don’t. So both in society and within each of us there is a great deal of stress.

And to make matters worse we don’t know what the rules for behavior are.

## THE MARRIAGE CRISIS

Within the last 150 years, the Christian consensus on marriage has completely collapsed. What we expect from marriage has changed. What we do about it has changed. For example:

In 1910, a suitor asked the girl’s parents for permission to come court. In 1930, he asked their permission to marry her. In 1950, they announced their marriage after it had happened. And today, lots of people just live together for a while, and then maybe they get married and maybe not.

We look for different things in a mate than people once did. For instance, Daniel Boone would have wanted a wife who was strong, who could shoot straight, who could do a full day’s work while pregnant, and who could bear him lots of sons. Romantic love would have been an unexpected extra.

Once upon a time, we expected our children to marry people like the children of our best friends, with the same background as our own.

But now the daughter of Polish Roman Catholic parents, who was born in Gary, Indiana, goes to college and meets the son of a southern Indiana hardware merchant and a member of the Church of Christ. And they get married. And all they have in common is four years of college.

In 1920, in the south, in the summertime, families would sit out in the yard and visit with their neighbors. Meanwhile the children played here and the hounds all around the neighborhood until it got cool enough to go to bed. But today, yards serve no purpose usually except to put distance between you and your neighbors whom you have never met.

In 1920, if the wife worked outside the home, she worked alongside her husband. The family had breakfast together. Often Daddy came home for lunch. The whole family had supper

together. But today they may actually have no meals together on a regular basis.

In those days a child's best friend was likely to be the child of his parents' best friends. Today, parents frequently do not even know who their children's friends are.

If mother could not discipline Johnny, she might say she would tell his daddy when he got home. Today, if there is a daddy in the home, he looks up from the sports page or the TV and says to his wife, "Honey can't you make *your* child behave!"

In 1930, a woman who got divorced was a social outcast. Members of a ladies' bridge club would be scandalized if a woman who had gotten a divorce did not "have the decency" to resign from the club. But today, it is perfectly acceptable. In fact, half the people who get married get divorced sooner or later.

The social pressure to keep marriages together has completely evaporated.

## THE SEXUAL IDENTITY CRISIS

In this society, we are in a severe sexual identity crisis. Of course each of us knows what his or her own sex is; we do not have to go to a doctor for a physical exam to find out which we are. But what we do not know is how a man or a woman is to behave in a thousand different social situations. There are no longer any role definitions for men and women.

During the last 200 years, we have had an almost complete reversal of the social roles of men and women. What men used to do and what was once regarded as masculine came to be thought of as sissy. And what women once considered feminine came to be thought of as masculine. In the last thirty years or so even those assumptions have been abandoned.

Every act of courtesy which came to be paid by men to women, 200 hundred years ago was paid by women to men. For example, when George Washington entered the room, Martha stood up. She stood behind his chair. And she seated him at the dinner table. She held his coat for him; opened doors for him; and served him first at dinner.

But now all bets are off—there are now no agreed upon rules for man—woman conduct.

## SEXUAL ROLES IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Historically, our civilization is the blending of Semitic, Hellenic, and Viking cultures. All three of them agreed on at least one thing, namely, the defined roles of men and women. And when those cultures blended, they had no conflict on that subject. They agreed on the rules.

Remember, bad rules, bad roles, are better than no rules at all!

From prehistoric times, man's job has been culture and warfare. By culture I mean all the intangible things which make human life different from animal life.

And women's roles, historically, have been what is illustrated by the following quotation.

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.  
She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.  
She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.  
She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her  
She considereth a field and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.  
She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.  
She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.  
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.  
She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.  
Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.  
She maketh fine linen and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.  
Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and her tongue is the law of kindness.  
She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.  
Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.  
Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be  
Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

[Proverbs 31:10 – 31]

Historically, woman's role has been babies and business. Our own word *economics* comes from the Greek word which means "the management of the household" —*oikonomia*.

## THE BASIS OF THE HISTORICAL ROLES

Throughout history, the primary basis for the division of labor between men and women has been the fact that women have babies.

For example, a healthy seventeen year old girl could probably outrun and out swim me. But let her get eight months pregnant and it might be a different story. The poorest woman at having babies is better than the best of men. And that extends beyond the event of birth.

Having a baby limits a woman's mobility. A young infant needs almost continuous access to his mother's body. Until the twentieth century, children were normally nursed until they were two or three years old. And the mother could move around about as fast as a two year old baby could toddle. And by then she was pregnant again.

So she stayed home and did the kinds of jobs she could do sitting down. So she is the one who made the arrow heads, not her husband. He went hunting with them.

Men did the work that required traveling. To illustrate: back in 1820, the men of a Comanche

tribe went out and killed a buffalo. Then they sent word back to the women where it was. And the women went out and skinned it, butchered it, tanned the hides and eventually made moccasins out of it.

Now notice, no woman ever died as the result of skinning a buffalo. But many a brave got trampled to death in the midst of a stampeding herd.

The men did the dangerous work. And when a decision had to be made about something like going to war with another tribe, it was the mobile ones, the men, who came together to make the decision. The immobile ones, the women, stayed home and attended to the domestic matters.

## THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

Let's go back a thousand years, to a Scandinavian village where the men meet regularly in the local tavern. One time, one of them says, "My wife is always complaining about the smell of garbage which everybody throws out in the street." Another one says, "So does mine."

So they all discuss it thoroughly and come up with a solution. They decide that every family will provide a big crockery jug with a lid which will sit outside the house. The village will hire a man with a cart and a donkey to come by on a schedule and collect the garbage.

So Lars comes home and says to his wife, "Guess what, Honey, we've solved the garbage problem" and proceeds to tell her the plan. What Lars has done is bring the culture, the civilization, the institutions of the larger community into the family.

For that reason, historically he has been considered the head of the family.

## THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

In the 17th century, people in England were making a lot of money exporting wool to the continent of Europe, where there was a large cottage industry that wove the wool into fabric. Then the woolen fabric was imported back into England where it was made into garments. Since the fabric was woven by hand, it was said to be *manufactured* (Latin: *manus*, hand; *factus*, made).

But now, "manufactured" means the opposite of "hand-made". Today, in the Ozark mountains, you can see signs along the side of the road advertising tufted bedspreads— "handmade", guaranteed not "manufactured". Mobile homes are advertised as "manufactured" homes, etc. How did that happen?

Well, one day in the 18th century, an Englishman was looking at a vacant barn and, because of the recent availability of steam power, he had a vision. He imagined there was a row of twenty spinning wheels along one wall all spinning away making woolen yarn; and along the opposite wall were twenty looms; and forty people busily making yarn into fabric.

And with that the factory system was born. The European cottage industry was doomed. And the "Industrial Revolution" was under way.

The people who had the skill to do the work were women and children. So for the next hundred

years, the factory workers were women and children.

The long-range outcome of the industrial revolution was the creation of a new leisure class, the housewife.

Leisure is not idleness, but rather the freedom from constant preoccupation with the necessities of life, so that one has time for culture. Leisure is the prerequisite for culture.

Prior to the American Civil War, all school teachers were men. But during the war all able-bodied men were in the army. That left no one to teach school, and a surplus of young ladies with no one to marry. So the ones who could read and write became school teachers.

When the war was over, so many men never came back that the temporary shortage became permanent, and the women stayed on as school teachers. After a generation, it had become the norm. A hundred years later, in the middle of the twentieth century, it was still common for small town school boards to have a rule that a school teacher had to resign if she got married unless she had gotten their permission first.

In England, the first women school teachers did not appear until the first World War. The change there has never been as complete as it was in this country. It is still common in England to have men teachers in grade school.

Today, the chief supporters of cultural activities are still women – even when their husbands write the checks. And the majority of political party volunteers are women and retired people.

Women entering the work force is not an invasion of traditional male activities; they are merely reclaiming *activities* which had been taken over by men two hundred years ago. However, for them to be doing it outside the home, in the larger community, is an invasion of what was traditional male *territory*.

## NEW HEAD OF THE FAMILY

In a study reported in *Psychology Today* some years ago, a group of three and four year-old children were each given a box of crayons and a sheet of paper in the middle of which there was a square. The majority of the girls decorated the inside of the square, and the boys decorated the border and left the inside of the square blank.

It was suggested that the results might have something to do with the way we are made sexually. In the act of sexual intercourse a woman receives into herself from outside; the man goes out of himself to enter that which is other than himself.

Historically, women are oriented inwardly; men are oriented outwardly. Women talk about inward matters like feelings and motives; men talk about what people do and largely ignore the subject of motives and feelings.

This can be symbolized by a scene in a Comanche Indian village in 1820: an Indian couple is standing back to back at the entrance to their teepee. The woman is looking inside to make sure everything is all right inside with the children, etc. The man is looking out into the village to see what is going on out there.

As a result of the Industrial Revolution, man has taken over the responsibility for the material well-being of his family, and he has abdicated his historical role of providing for the cultural well-being of his family, for the *quality* of his family's life.

However, whoever determines the life-style, the value system, of the family is the *functional* head of the family.

At the beginning of the movement to give women the vote, the big argument against it went this way: voters need to be well informed; and to be sufficiently informed one has to read; and "everyone knows women don't read!"—except old maid school teachers, of course. But today, the majority of those who use the public libraries are women and retired people.

And today, it is almost always the woman who sets the direction in cultural affairs for the family. She is the leader. She is therefore, functionally, the head of the family.

### THE RESULTING DILEMMA

The man knows he is supposed to be the head of the family. He thinks, mistakenly, that that means he is supposed to be *boss*. He knows deep inside himself that he is inadequate and incompetent. So he is frustrated and irritated. And all he can think to do is to throw his weight around, only to discover that his family resists it and rebels against it.

Furthermore, there is another factor.

A man named Konrad Lorenz has discovered a principle about the way animals behave called "the territorial imperative". It also applies to human behavior.

To illustrate: There are two families living next door to each other. One has a collie dog and one has a German shepherd. When the collie goes in the yard of the German shepherd, it gets beaten up. When the German shepherd goes in the yard of the collie, it gets beaten up.

Courage varies in proportion to the nearness to home base.

Well, when husband and wife quarrel, it is almost always on her territory. And it is not uncommon for a husband to feel like a collie dog in the yard of a German shepherd. Nevertheless, the husband is supposed to be the head of that house.

In an ordinary family, Daddy is out and gone by the time breakfast is over - and now the mother may be also. From the time he is born until he starts school a boy is under the exclusive control of women - mother, female day care worker, or baby sitter.

Then he starts school. And he is instructed in the ways of the larger world almost entirely by women.

There is no way he can be expected to assume responsibility for the leadership of a family. Because the moment there is a crisis, he looks to the nearest woman and says, "What'll we do?" And she tells him.

We have raised a generation of gutless men and strong-minded women – present company excepted, of course.

## WHAT MEN AND WOMEN WANT

Until very recently, the laws were written on the assumptions of an earlier time when the man actually was the head of the family. But the present reality is just the opposite. Women are asking that the laws be changed to fit the facts. They have the game; now they want the rules.

And their demand is reasonable. If they are going to carry the responsibility, they ought to have the authority.

But in general, neither men nor women want the woman to be the head of the family.

The most common complaint of women in marriage counseling, beside “he doesn’t communicate”, is “he can’t accept responsibility!”

The subject next time will be “Romanticism and Love”.