

Nurturing Pentecostal Families

A Covenant to Nurture Our Families

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OUR COVENANT TO NURTURE OUR FAMILIES

Jackie David Johns

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. Matthew 12:50

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. Luke 12: 51-53

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, [even] as many as the Lord our God shall call. Acts 2:38-39

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed [their] stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. Acts 16:31-34

This [is] a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, ... given to hospitality, ... One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For

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if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?). 1 Timothy 3:1-5

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. 2 Timothy 1:5

The modern church often seems confused about the role of families in the kingdom of God. We speak of being *family oriented* but usually offer programs designed for individuals. We encourage *quality family-time* but have apparently concluded that church events could never qualify as such. We teach parents to put God and family first but make them feel guilty when doing so causes them to be absent from a church event. In short, in our talk we promote the family as central to the church, but in our actions we treat the family as if it was outside of the domain of the church, a sanctuary unto itself.

The church and the family have come to relate like separate corporations which share a long term contract intended to assure mutual survival, if not prosperity. Each is committed to the alliance and to the well being of the other, but neither is fully satisfied. Each seems stuck in an unsolvable riddle; does the church exist for the family or does the family exist for the church? In this environment is it any wonder that the greatest perceived influence on Evangelical families comes not from within the church but from para-church ministries such as James Dobson's *Focus on the Family*?

The words of Jesus cited above are often trivialized as if they apply to only a select few who must choose between a non-Christian family and following Christ. They were spoken to all. The family and its members must never be placed above Christ in any manner. Through his example, Jesus demands that we define our primary family as being those who do will of God. Yet, the Scriptures honor the family as a source of faith and the starting place for Christian love and ministry. Following Jesus is a decisive event that may, but need not, divide families. There is no need for competition between the church and the family. The will of God is that they be one. The covenant they share in Christ must never be reduced to a contract for mutual support. Being Christian should be a family affair; being family should be a reality for every Christian.

This chapter is an attempt to help the Pentecostal church and the Pentecostal family find themselves in the Word of God. It will address three questions: what are the essential ingredients of a Christian family? What are the characteristics of the church as the family of God? How should the church and family interrelate as the people of God?

Is There a Family in the House?

Bill and Pat live together. They are in their mid-forties and have never been married. They share chores around the house. Each takes equal turns cleaning, cooking and doing the laundry. Pat is financially dependant on Bill since an automobile accident left her unable to work outside of the home. Two teenagers, Bob and Glenda, live with them. Bob and Glenda are brother and sister who were abandoned by their mother after their father died. Bill is their legal guardian. Is this household a family?

Before you answer, consider this. Bill and Pat are brother and sister. Pat's accident occurred when she was a teenager. Bill had long ago chosen not to marry so that he could stay at home on the farm to care for his widowed mother and Pat. Bob and Glenda are the children of Bill and Pat's deceased brother. The youth had come to live on the homestead with their late grandmother, aunt, and uncle when they were preschoolers and tragedy first struck their lives. Are they a family? What is a family? What are the essential ingredients of a family?

It is becoming more and more difficult to define the family. One of every three Americans is a part of a blended family and there are now even more single-parent families than blended families. About one fourth of all American households with children are headed by a single mother; some widowed, others divorced or abandoned, and others never married. We have perhaps come to the first time in history when the majority of a generation will spend much if not all of their childhood in homes without a father figure. On the other hand, the fastest growing family type, one of every thirty-five households, is headed by a single father (Neff & Ratcliff 117-121). Added to these phenomenon are increasing numbers of (1) homes with "serial-parents" (created by patterns of frequent divorce and/or cohabitation) and (2) homosexual partners serving as parents (3) childless couples and (4) singles who may or may not create an *affiliated family* through a network of close friends. In the presence of these shifting social structures the *traditional family*,

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comprised of a married couple (male and female) with their biological children, appears to many persons to be an uncertain starting place for defining the Christian family.

Toward a Biblical Understanding of Family

Families that conform to God's expectations will endure even though all others fail. But what are the characteristics of a truly Christian family? At first glance there are many models of family in the Scriptures. There are *patriarchal* families; those in which the father rules over an extended household. There are *nuclear* families; those in which only parents and immediate children live together. There are examples of *couples* living without children or other family members and *singles* who seem to have lived alone or in small groups. While such examples are descriptive of the variety of family structures found in the Scriptures they do not establish what is normative in terms of God's desire for the family. Their existence does raise the question, what constitutes a family?

From the perspective of word studies, in the Scriptures the concept of *family* draws its meaning from the image of *house*. The root idea of the Latin word from which the modern English word *family* is derived is *house*. The Hebrew and Greek words translated as family in some modern versions of the Bible have this same underlying meaning. Older translations tended to retain the ancient imagery with the words house or household. While the word house may refer to a tent or permanent structure, its primary reference is to persons who are bound together as a social unit, persons whose lives revolve around, if not under, the same roof. Implicit in this understanding is the idea of covenant. In the Scriptures, as with other ancient cultures of the region, the word covenant was generally reserved for relationships with authority figures and was therefore not used of families. But households were always constituted by relationships that bore the marks of covenant. All social structures had an underlying covenantal nature. Emphasis was placed on the relationship that binds persons together rather than the structures through which persons gathered.

Households primarily centered around a marriage but usually were larger than the couple. The marriage relationship enveloped a large social grouping. Households included the children born to a married couple and, often, the grandchildren of the couple. These biblical families also included servants (both slave and hired) and their children. Even foreigners who took refuge with a

household became a member of the household for as long as they lived together. In a similar fashion, marriage joined not only the couple but also the respective households from which they came. The central concept around which this system revolved was that of covenant.

Covenant

Throughout the ancient middle east relationships were approached covenantally. Covenant was a common concept, but one that needs some clarification in modern times. It is the same word that is translated testament, as in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. But testament is an Old English word that has lost meaning except as a reference to the Bible or as a legal document that records the last wishes of the dead. Covenant is now the preferred English word.

Covenant is often misunderstood to be a synonym for contract. The two words are similar but distinct in meaning. A contract is an agreement between two parties to fulfill commitments made to each other. **The focus of a contract is on meeting the needs or desires of the two parties.** A contract always specifies what persons have agreed to do for each other. The expectation is that each person will be enriched by the fulfillment of the contract.

In the Bible the focus of covenant is on the binding of persons in a relationship. It is perhaps better thought of as a pact that joins persons as a social unit. **In a covenant persons enter into an agreement that defines the manner in which they are to relate to one another.** The emphasis on relationship in covenant is powerfully described in the account of Jonathan and David: "After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. . . And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself" (I Samuel 18:1-3 NIV; See also I Samuel 20:8). The essence of the covenant God made with Israel was that He would be their God and they would be His people. The motivation for the covenant was God's love for humanity, His desire to redeem and bless all nations by reconciling them unto Himself.

Covenants were not to be taken lightly. They represented the highest level of binding and were often formalized with the eating of a sacrificial animal. A common practice in the ancient world was to divide the carcass of the animal into halves and for the parties of the covenant to walk between the halves. Thus, the sacrifice

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became a pungent symbol of the gravity of a covenant. Those covenanted together shared a common life.

A covenant included vows which clarified the expectations of its members for each other. These terms were binding in that they made clear the manner in which the members of the covenant were to relate to one another. They were very much like a contract in that they focused on what was to be done by each partner in the covenant. **The key difference between a contract and the terms of a covenant is simply this: in a contract a relationship exists in order to achieve the terms of the contract; in a covenant the terms exist in order to consummate and maintain the relationship.**

There is thus an extended social dimension to covenant. Covenants are never private. In ancient times they were generally witnessed by others who became partners in the covenant. The witness was often an authority figure who would guarantee compliance and mediate future disagreements. Covenants with God were made only at His invitation and since there is no higher authority He guaranteed His own covenant. Thus, God alone walked between the pieces of the sacrifice when He entered into covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15). Furthermore, God serves as witness to all covenants. He is a partner and judge in all relationships.

The current state of marriage serves as a good illustration of the distinctions between covenant and contract. Historically marriage was understood as a covenant for life. Couples exchanged vows during the wedding ceremony, but these public statements served more as guidelines for a healthy marriage than as regulations to be enforced. Divorce was never granted for failing to fully live up to the standards. The marriage ended only when proof of the gravest offenses could be established. A marriage was not just an agreement between two people. It was also an agreement between the couple and God, and between the couple and society.

Modern society has moved into viewing marriage as a contract between individuals. Couples live together for pleasure and mutual fulfillment. A contract is needed to protect their rights when the pleasure has ended. A similar situation developed in ancient Rome which as a nation took pride in being governed by civil laws. Divorce laws were written to protect women from abusive situations but were soon manipulated by men to their own advantage. Those who controlled the seats of power (men) could use the legal system to profit through making and breaking marriage contracts. Jesus' teachings about marriage and divorce may be understood in this light. Israel had begun to read the Law of Moses through the lens of

Roman culture. Men were viewing their marriages as contracts which they could end for whatever reason if a better opportunity arose. Women were being discarded as if they were bad investments. This dehumanization of women was unacceptable; it abused the Law and it ignored the intentions of God as set forth in the creation stories of Genesis.

In a similar fashion in the modern world the relationship between adults and children is often constructed in terms of a contract instead of covenant. The growing social distances between children and adults encourages adults to view the young as a competing society, a corporation of their own. According to the implied contract, adults are to provide for the security, pleasure, and general well being of children while they are young, in exchange for the same services from them when the adults retire. In such an environment it is easy for one group to treat the other as objects to be manipulated for their own satisfaction. There is strong indication that many parents today view their children primarily as objects to satisfy their own emotional needs. Grown children often resent their elderly parents as burdens for the same reasons. It is no wonder that modern societies are marred by the abuse of children and the elderly by those who should be caring for them.

Covenant requires that Christians view all relationships as sacred but especially those within the family and church. No group or individual exists to be exploited by others. Believers are bound together for our common good, but also for the good of others, and for the glory of God. We share the same history and the same destiny. We are joined together in such a way that there is never a time we are not meeting one another's needs. Even our weakest members offer wholeness to the body. Thus, our commitments are in sickness and in health until death do us part. They do not end when the terms become inconvenient. In covenant there is no room for the discarding of the young or the abandonment of the elderly. We are bound together for our very existence.

Family Relationships

The foundational issue for families is that of relationships. For Christians the issue becomes what are the characteristics of relationships that are pleasing to God? Pentecostals do not accept the Old Testament as a basis for governing life. Unfortunately, many therefore ignore it as if it is not the Word of God. The result being that they misread the New Testament because they lack understanding of the fountain from which it flows.

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Old Testament families were viewed concentrically. That is, a married couple formed the center of a family; their children and then other members of the household expanded the circle. Other near relatives enlarged it more. The circle expanded to include the couple's clan, and then tribe, and ultimately the entire house of Israel. Obligations were based on closeness of kinship. However, the Law required that closeness sometimes be viewed inversely. Everyone had someone who was nearest of kin, a "redeemer kinsman." The nearest of kin was obligated to an individual even if they were biologically far removed (Consider the story of Ruth).

The commands on kinship contained in the Law of Moses might be summarized to say that blood relatives have a sacred obligation to insure that all their members are cared for and each generation is extended into the next. These Laws were dependant upon the larger social network of the nation for enforcement. Ultimately, all descendants of Abraham were of the same family. Further, in recognition of the family of humankind, strangers were to be loved and provision made for their needs.

The Law also gave extensive requirements for governing family relationships. Actually, since it was to be taught by parents to their children, the entire Law could be viewed as instructions for families. The Wisdom Literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) especially focused on the relationships at the nucleus of the family circle. Emphasis is placed on the need for love, devotion, and fidelity in marriage. Further stress was placed on the need for children to respect and learn from their parents.

The New Testament gives some, but surprisingly few, direct commandments about family relationships; children are to honor and obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20), Husbands and wives were to fulfill their conjugal rights with each other (I Corinthians 7:1-7), husbands are to honor, and love their wives as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25, 28; Colossians 3:19; I Peter 3:7), wives are to submit to, honor and obey their husbands (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; I Peter 3:1-6; Titus 2:5), and fathers are to bring their children up in the fear and admonition of the Lord and not provoke them to wrath (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).

A few observations taken from the texts listed above need to be offered. First, the motivation and example for all family relationships is Jesus Christ. As family members Christians are instructed:

For we are members of His body....(Ephesians 5:30)

And whatsoever ye do, do [it] heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. (Colossians 3:23-25)

Family relationships provide the most significant context for the demonstration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other passages the family is seen as the proving ground for persons who consider themselves called to congregational leadership (I Timothy 3:4-5; 11-12; Titus 1:6).

Second, the low number of commandments governing family relationships and the contexts in which they are given (general exhortations toward Godly living) suggest that the Apostles expected family members simply to be Christian with one another. Expectations for family behavior were essentially the same as those for all Christian relationships. In deed, the key words (honor, submit, love, obey) were applied to all relationships within the body of Christ. Conversely, all general instructions on Christian behavior and relationships must be applied to the family.

Finally, the Old Testament Scriptures were quoted in the *Epistle to the Ephesians* as the basis for instructions on family relationships. For children, the citation comes from the Law, "Honor your father and mother that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16 as quoted in Ephesians 6:2-3). For husbands, the quote is from the creation story, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24 as quoted in Ephesians 5:31). This quotation is significant in New Testament literature for it is the basis on which Christ condemns divorce (Mark 10:4-9) and Paul condemns fornication (I Corinthians 6:16). Of even greater significance is that the New Testament understands the reference to a man and woman becoming one flesh to be analogous to the believer's union to Christ (I Corinthians 6:15, Ephesians 5:30). The Apostle Paul further refers to the creation story in his treatments of the roles of men and women in the church (I Corinthians 11:2-16; I Timothy 2:11-15).

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In God's Image

The story of Adam and Eve thus provides the standards by which all human relationships must be judged; their's is the story of God's plan for human fulfillment. The manner in which the opening chapters of Genesis are read determines the manner in which all teachings on the family are interpreted. It is difficult, but necessary, not to bring to the text our own cultural biases. The challenge is to let the text speak for itself. This is a formidable task because centuries of extra-Biblical traditions have worked their way into the very fabric of western civilization. Some of those biases may be seen in various translations of the New Testament passages which address family issues. Certainly, biases are within us as each brings to our study of the Bible our own personal understanding of love, submission, and obedience, etc..

There are two accounts of the creation of humankind in Genesis; the first is in chapter one, and the second in chapter two. It has been suggested that these are two different stories which represent divergent religious traditions that made their way into Scripture. However, since the two accounts are placed next to each other and are treated as historical events in the rest of the Scriptures, it must be concluded that they are complementary records of a single creation story. Each is needed to interpret and amplify the other. The first account reads:

Then God said let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in His own image. And the image of God he created him, male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them be fruitful and increase the number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Then God said I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth, and every tree that has fruit with seed in it, they will be yours for food and to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the air and all the creatures that move on the ground, everything that has the breath of life in it. I give every green plant for food and it was so. And God saw all that He had made and it was very

good and there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1:26-31 NIV)

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Several observations can be made from this account of the creation of humankind. First, God speaks in the first-person plural, "let Us make man in Our image." It is very easy for us as recipients of centuries of orthodox teachings and as partakers in the life of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, to look back at this passage and see a triune God at work. But the text itself merely points to a singular but plural deity who acts to create humankind. Second, the creation of "man" is distinct from all other creations. The sixth day contains the first use of the plural pronoun in reference to God. Within all of creation, only humanity is said to be created in the image and likeness of God. Third, like God, "man" is a singular but plural being; "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Finally, the plural pronoun is used in reference to "man" having dominion over all the earth; "let them have dominion...." There is no distinction given as to how the two are to function. They are created together, two who are one, and the two are to "be fruitful and multiply," and to "have dominion" over the earth and subdue it, together.

Suitable Helpers

The second account of creation lends itself to personal and cultural bias. It has been argued that the text shows the priority (and superiority) of men over women. This is based in part on the order of creation, Adam before Eve, and is clarified by the supposed supportive role given to Eve. She was created to be a helper for him. The argument is strengthened by the fact that Eve was brought to Adam and named by him. But, what does the text say?

In the opening verses of the chapter God creates the heavens and earth, then he creates "man" (as a male) from the dust of the earth and breathes into him the breath of life. God then plants a garden in Eden and places the man there.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree of the garden. But you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it,

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you will surely die. Then the Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him. Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air, he brought them to the land to see what he would name them. And whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and all the beasts of the field, but for Adam, no suitable helper was found, so the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and while he was sleeping he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh, then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:15-25)

Oneness and Equality

Three statements in the text need clarification before the story can be properly understood. First, what does it mean for Eve to be a "helper" for Adam? In the western world "helper" is often a pejorative term which refers to an apprentice who lacks the skills to be a true craftsman. Helpers are at the bottom of the workforce. However, as used in the Bible, "helper" does not suggest a person of a lesser state. It comes from the Hebrew word *'ezer*, which is most often used in the Old Testament to refer to the Lord God who comes to the aid of many. It often refers to those who provide military help, those who have power to help weaker nations. Never is the word used in the Old Testament to refer to someone who is subordinate. A helper is simply one who comes to the aid of another.

Second, what does it mean that Eve is "meet for him?" Aida Besancon Spencer has offered a helpful definition of the phrase based upon the Hebrew word from which it comes. She writes,

In this verse "the Adam" is used to describe the male. What the King James Version translates "meet for him" and the Revised Standard Version translates "fit for him" in Hebrew, is one word, *knegdwo*. This

one word occurs in this form only in verse 18 and is repeated in verse 20. The word is made up of three thought units: the prefix *k*, the preposition *neged*, and the suffix *wo*. The prefix *k* signifies comparison, similarity, or proportion. The suffix *wo* is a pronoun signifying "him." The prefix asks the question, what is the comparison between the helper and "him"? How may the helper be described in comparison to Adam? The preposition *neged* which lies between the prefix and the suffix answers the question. The helper is *neged* to him. What does *neged* mean? The basic root literally describes physical relationships. It refers to "the front" or "the visible." The preposition *neged* means "in front of," "in sight of," and "opposite to." Thus, God made for Adam a helper "as if in front of him." (Spencer 23-24)

Spencer goes on to point out the significance of this word. Hebrew is a visual language. Position has great significance. That which is *behind* is inferior. That which is *in front of* is considered superior or equal. For example, when the same preposition *neged* is converted into a noun, *negid*, it signifies "a leader, ruler, prince, or king," an "overseer." (Spencer 24)

Others have reached similar conclusions. A *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* gives the phrase to mean "A help corresponding to him...(that is) equal and adequate to himself. (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 617). As an ancient translation from Hebrews to Greek, the Septuagint adds an interesting amplification in that it translate *knegdwo* differently in verses 18 and 20. In verse 18 the translation involves the preposition *kata* followed by the direct object "of him." Verse 20 the word *homoios* is used instead. The preposition *kata* taken with a direct object signifies horizontal similarity. (Robertson 608). In verse 20 *homoios*, means "of the same nature like, similar." Taken together, the Septuagint translations seem to stress equality of Adam and Eve. Walter Bauer cites Genesis 2:20 as signifying "equally great or important, as powerful as, equal." (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich 569). Thus, "a helper meet for him" is at the very least one who is equal to Adam.

Third, consider the meaning of the comment that "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh." Given the patriarchal context

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in which it was first written, this is a remarkable statement. The cultures of the time dictated a man was to remain under his father's authority and therefore bring his wife into the house of his parents. The text reveals a divine design for humans to find themselves through union with someone of the opposite sex. **Human identity can not be found solely in the comforts and securities of one's parents or one's heritage.**

"Becoming one flesh" is a metaphor which refers to much more than physical union in marriage. It depicts the extent and exclusiveness of the marriage union. In marriage a man and a woman are to be joined together to the extent that their personal identities are integrated to form a joint identity. It should be stressed that this is not the same as losing one's personal identity in the marriage or the marriage partner. God's design is not for one individual to be lost in another. The union is whole only as its members are whole. Both members are to find their identity in their shared union. Further, as Christ would later point out, the thrust of the passage is toward an intimate and committed allegiance to one spouse. The quest for true sexual intimacy can find true fulfillment only through monogamous marriages.

It was only after they were expelled from the Garden that the Scriptures say Adam "knew" Eve. Sexual intercourse, which had been intended by God from the beginning to be an expression of unity through which the earth was to be populated, became after the Fall a means of reclaiming in part the unity of existence experienced in the Garden. Physical intimacy retained its intended sacred character for the married couple which in love seeks deeper intimacy. In giving their bodies to each other in sexual union each should come to know both the self and the other so that self-denial becomes the means of mutual-fulfillment.

Other Observations

Several other observations can be made about the second account. This is another story of how Adam and Eve came from one source. God is the creator of both, whether viewed sequentially or collectively. Eve came out of Adam's side, further indicating the commonness of their existence. Eve was not the product of Adam's design or effort. Adam's passiveness is seen in the fact that it was God's decision and action to put him to sleep in order to complete the creation of humankind. Neither was Eve the result of Adam's

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loneliness. There is no indication in the passage that God was acting in response to some emotional distress that was afflicting Adam. Finally, this is a story about a shared vocation. Without distinction of function the two were to tend the Garden. God knew Adam alone was not adequate to the task for which he was created, no helper was found for him. He needed someone to stand in front of him as an equal who would be able to join him in completing the task of having dominion over the earth.

Two related questions arise from a study of the two accounts of creation: What does it mean to be created in the image and likeness of God? What does it mean to be human? Karl Barth and P. K. Jewett concluded separately that to be created in the image of God is to be created in the image of the Trinity. God is one Being who exists in three persons who are eternally in perfect relationship with one another. **To have the image of God is to have the capacities for wholeness in personal existence and fulfillment through shared existence. Humans were created to be in relationship with one another and with God, relationships characterized by unity, love, and shared authority and responsibility.**

Taken together, the creation accounts make fundamental statements about what it means to be human. To be human is to exist viz a viz God; from Him we came and unto Him we shall return to give an account. To be human is to have an appointed vocation which includes watch care of the created world. To be human is to exist as male or female—male and female. As Karl Barth has said, “to be human is to always exist in relationship to the opposite sex of which you are.” All relationships grow out of and are defined by the male/female relationship.

Summation

The Scriptures do not define the idea of being family in the same terms used by the modern world. They suggest flexibility to accept a variety of cultural norms for who resided together: couples, singles, small or extended families. But they also presuppose that all families are built on the basis of the statement in Chapter Two of Genesis that men will leave their parent's house and be united to a wife. Families are to be formed through the covenant of marriage. They are linked to the congregation of the Lord through a concentric pattern.

New Testament passages written about families, and the stories of the creation of Adam and Eve lay a solid foundation for

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understanding God's design for marriage and family. The foundational characteristic of a Christian family is that its members know God and they know each other knowing God; each member serves God and each other as all serve God. Christian families are comprised of persons who live in fellowship with God. The fellowship that each member has with God is a dynamic element of the fellowship they share with each other. Each member lives for the fulfillment of all others. These families see themselves as both the product of, and an instrument of, the will of God.

The Christian family, like the church, is to be characterized by unity. It has wrongly been said that the family was the first human institution ordained of God. Adam and Eve were created to be the people of God, both as family and as congregation. God created a people for himself at the same moment that he created the first couple. At Sinai families were identified as parts of the congregation of the Lord. Likewise, New Testament families are viewed as expressions of the church. In the light of these observations, the prayer of Jesus for Christian unity found in John 17 takes on a deeper meaning. He was praying for families as he prayed for the church. Through the atoning work of Jesus, God has provided for a restoration of humanity to its former state. We can be with Christ in God and just as they are One so we can be one. Sexual union while remaining sacred in marriage is a passing form of human unity. In Heaven there will be neither marriage nor giving in marriage. Lasting and perfect unity comes only as family members are restored to fellowship with each other and with God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The critical issues to be faced in building Christian families is the relationship of husbands with wives, and parents with children. The church must accept as its responsibility the urgent need to guide families into relationships that are characterized by mutual support and submission. The fundamental task of every family member is to find fulfillment through doing the will of God which begins with becoming a helper suitable to all other family members.

While physical intimacy is an appropriate and ordained means of achieving and expressing unity within marriage, it is not the only means. In being joined to Christ all persons have an everlasting means of Godly intimacy with others. Male-female relationships are needed by all. Children especially need a healthy relationship with an opposite sex parent figure. In the absence of intact family relationships these relationships should be available

through the fellowship of the saints. Is the modern church well suited for this task? Can it be a helper for the family?

The Family of God

The ability of the church to help families will be determined by the place it gives to families, and the place it gives to families will always be determined by the church's prevailing understanding of its own nature. The challenge for those who are committed to nurturing healthy families within the church must include assuring that the church is a healthy environment for families. *If our churches are full of dysfunctional families, it is probable that our churches are themselves dysfunctional* as Vining has shown (40-63). Only when we rediscover and conform to the Biblical understanding of what it means to be God's redeemed people will we be able with confidence to integrate families into their rightful place in the church.

Modern Images of the Church

Modern images and understandings of the church contribute to the confusion about the role of families in the family of God. The informal ways in which we see ourselves are powerful influences on our formation, more powerful than our formal definitions of the nature and purpose of our existence. The images taken from our gatherings become synonymous with our images of the church. From those images we draw much of our understanding of what it means to be Christian. The mental portraits people take of church gatherings today simply have little room for being family.

Since worship is the primary Christian gathering, the activities of worship symbolically define the nature of the church. The modern place of worship is often little more than an ornate lecture hall. The furnishings and seats all focus on a rostrum from which the sermon (lecture) will be delivered. Behind the rostrum is a choir loft from which musical messages are delivered. The significant aspect of this arrangement is that it is suitable only for presentation, not for interaction. Sustained congregational involvement is virtually impossible. In other words, our church buildings and worship programs send out powerful, if subtle, messages that worship is primarily a passive act of listening.

Christianity once thought of its gatherings as a great banquet for the family of God (a covered dish "dinner on the grounds" affair). Churches today often resemble more a smorgasbord where

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their members get exactly what they want but do not even know the people sitting next to them. Church meetings today are seldom thought of as a community gathering for persons of all ages. Instead the church is considered an activity center with programs for all ages. Relationships in which persons truly come to know each other are difficult to develop in the various programs of the modern church. If church members ever come to build meaningful relationships among themselves it is because of personal efforts to "get together" outside of the gathered church.

Toward a Biblical Understanding of the Church

The Scriptures avoid defining the church in institutional terms. Instead, the church is described in the language of relationships. Quite a number of images are used to provide the description. The church is the *Body of Christ* (Romans 12:5), comprised of persons who are joined together as ligaments and joints of His Body. The church is a *living temple* (Ephesians 2:19-22), being constructed out of living stones for God's habitation. The church is the *Bride of Christ* (Revelation 21:2), comprised of all the saints who will rule with him. And the church is the *family of God* (Ephesians 3:15), with a heavenly Father, Christ as elder brother, and all the saints as brothers and sisters who are joint heirs with Christ. These images expand and interpret Old Testament understandings of what it meant to be the people of God.

The Congregation of the Lord

In the Old Testament, names often carry special meaning. Several names were given to the descendants of Isaac, the promised son of Abraham. The two most prominent of those names were taken from the names of Isaac's son, Israel and his grandson, Judah. These names signify the nation's special place as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchs with whom God had made an everlasting covenant. There was another, less formal, name given to Israel, one which traced its meaning not to a set of persons but to a set of events.

The principle Hebrew name given to the people of God as a congregation is '*edah*' (he-dah). '*edah*' first appeared in the Scriptures in the story of the Passover and was used extensively throughout the record of the Exodus events. All but 24 of its 149 uses were in the Pentateuch and Joshua. Thus, '*edah*' is the name given to Israel in association with their journey with God from a land of

bondage to the possession of the promised land. That was the formative period in the development of Israel's self identity and societal structures. The congregation of Israel was organized according to families, clans, and tribes, with elders receiving a definitive role in the life of the community. At the center of the gathered nation was the *house of the Lord* containing the ark of the covenant.

The word '*edah*' expressed "a concept of corporateness" with the stress falling not on the total of individuals, but on "the unity of the fellowship" (Coenan 219-292). Of special significance was the fact that '*edah*' was never used of any people other than Israel so that it represented the unambiguous and permanent term for Israel as the covenant community of God. In the Septuagint (an ancient translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek) '*edah*' was almost exclusively translated with the Greek word *synagoge* (synagogue). Consequently, by the first century the synagogue existed as the house where the children of Israel gathered, and had become a symbol of the Jewish religion with all its traditions. With only one exception (James 2:2) the New Testament did not use *synagogue* to represent the Christian community or its meetings.

Two other Hebrew words are translated as *congregation*; *qahal* is a term which was used to designate any type of assembly which had been summoned in the sense of mustering; *mow'ed* is a term which was used to designate any type of appointed assembly and was used exclusively to designate the tabernacle of meeting. Of the two words, *qahal* is of special significance. In the Septuagint it is predominantly (but not always) translated into the Greek word *ekklesia* which is translated in the English New Testament as the word *church*.

At this juncture the significance of the use of the term *ekklesia* as the designation for the followers of Christ emerges. The early church identified itself with the end-time gathering of the true Israel. Some have wrongly thought that the early church chose to call itself *ekklesia*, "the called out ones," because it did not want to be associated with the Jews and therefore would not use the word *synagogue*. It seems however that the opposite was the case. Christians understood themselves to be "mustered out" from among the *synagogue*. As such they were the *qahal* of the '*edah*', or the *ekklesia* of the *synagogue*. They represented a final mustering of a faithful remnant out of Israel. The Apostle Paul emphatically extended the limits of the true Israel to cover Gentile Christians by applying the rubric of descent from Abraham by faith (Romans 4; Galatians 3). Thus, all who believed in Christ were the heirs of the promise to Abraham

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(Galatians 3:29; 4:28), and members of God's own household (Ephesians 2:19). Just as the congregation of Israel had once gathered at Sinai to hear the voice of God, the church was forever assembled at "the heavenly Jerusalem," to hear from God (Hebrews 12:18-29).

Israel's experience at Sinai had imprinted upon their minds two immovable facts. First, they were the congregation of the Lord. The covenants made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were their birthright. Their destiny as a people had been sealed in their past. They were a nation that belonged to God. They were a family, the house of Israel.

Second, their God was a holy and a consuming God. Only that which was holy could enter into his very presence. Therefore, no one could see the face of the Lord and live. He was to be feared. He was a mighty God who ruled from heaven above. His relationship with them was that of a King. At the house of the Lord they might experience His glory but they could not begin to perceive of themselves as dwelling in His presence or being His household, His family. The early church built on this foundation.

The Early Church

As the people of promise, early Christians saw themselves as another congregation of Israel, one which lived in the new covenant of God (2 Corinthians 3:6), the covenant promised by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17). As promised, they knew God. His Law was written on their hearts. He was their God. They were His people. This new covenant was not a replacement of the old one. Rather, the new fulfilled the old, bringing it to its intended end. The new covenant fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant in that it brought to fruition the promise of the older covenant; life and liberty to those who belong to Christ (Galatians 4:23-26).

The early church further identified itself with the kingdom of God. The roots of the kingdom idea lay in the Old Testament doctrine of the theistic monarchy; Yahweh (Jehovah/God) alone is king and only those He appoints rule. With the failure of the kings of Judah to keep the covenant God had made with the house of David, the expectation of a last-days messianic king grew. The lordship of Yahweh was combined with the hoped-for lordship of the Messiah. The messianic son of David would be appointed by God and draw his authority as the representative of the kingly rule of Yahweh (Isaiah 9:7; 11:1f). Intertestamental Judaism was highly influenced by this belief in the coming Messiah. The apocalyptic

writings gave pre-eminence to the expected arrival of the "son of man" who would possess the kingdom. The kingdom would be characterized by liberation from the total misery of human society; it would be a kingdom of peace, joy, and freedom. In the New Testament God and Christ alone had full right to the title king. Jesus was described as the messianic king of the Jews, the promised son of David. Jesus himself stressed the immanence of the future kingdom (Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:2; 5:17; Luke 21:31), as the rule of God was at hand (Matthew 24:32f; Mark 13:28f; Luke 21:29f). However, for Him the kingdom was also already present (Mark 2:19; Matthew 9:15; Luke 5:34; 17:20f) because He, the son of David, was already present.

The Christian gospel soon substituted the crucified and resurrected Jesus for the kingdom of God. The church knew the exalted Christ as Lord (Philippians 2:9-11; Acts 2:36) and thus began to speak of the kingdom of Christ (Ephesians 5:5; 2 Timothy 4:1, 18; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelations 1:9). In Christ the community experienced the promised rule of God.

In close association with the kingdom of God concept, the Christian community also identified itself with the Hebrew image of the "saints," or "holy ones." The decisive element of the Old Testament concept of the holy was relatively direct contact with God or His divine power. God and God alone was holy. That which was near to Him partook of His holiness. However, improper or profane contact would result in death. Daniel had prophetically applied the term "saints" to the end-time people of God (Daniel 7:15-27). Intertestamental Judaism made Daniel's thought a normative description of the end-time community. In the New Testament the term "saints" virtually always appeared in plural form as a synonym for the *ekklesia*. The emphasis was upon belonging to God as his own. The saints were at every point circumscribed by the Holy Spirit so that their lives were determined and empowered by him.

This thought pattern was extended by another set of images that portrayed the covenant community as a holy habitation for God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; Ephesians 2:21). The central idea behind these images was that the church constituted a glorious building constructed for the pleasure of God and was the focal point of communion between God and His creation. God, by the Spirit, was understood to dwell in the church so that the two were inseparable (1 Corinthians 6:19).

One final image of the church must be noted. Paul expressed the divine unity of the church with the image of the *soma Christou*,

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the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-30). Essentially Paul kept a Hebrew understanding of wholeness, that is, the several members do not constitute the whole. Rather, the various tasks of the members constitute their corporate nature. The *soma* (body) constituted their unity. Paul most clearly expressed this sense of unity with the word *koinonia*, meaning fellowship. The root idea was the commonness of their existence, the communion they shared. It denoted a unanimity and unity brought about by the Spirit as they shared a common faith and relationship to Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:16; 2 Corinthians 3:13; Philippians 1:5; 3:10; Philemon 6). This was tangibly expressed in the sharing of material goods according to need (2 Corinthians 9:13).

The imagery of the body of Christ was also a proclamation of shared hope. Participation in the body of Christ meant participation in his death and resurrection. Believers had followed Christ in death to sin and awaited their final redemption/transformation at His return (Romans 6:5-11; 7:2-4). In the meantime the Spirit infused the believer with the life of Christ and called forth the hope of his inheritance (Romans 8:5-25).

It may be concluded from these terms and images that the early Christians understood themselves to comprise a messianic community of God which existed as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. As such they perceived themselves to be living in the "fullness of times." By the power of the Holy Spirit they knew God, lived in His presence, and fulfilled His will. On the other hand there was a constant awareness their final destiny awaited the return of Christ. In the mean time, their orientation to community life was that of the house of Israel.

Early Christian Gatherings

The character of early Christian gatherings conformed to these perceptions. The church met together in large or small groups daily. They assembled in homes, public places, Jewish synagogues, and at the temple. They ate together, prayed together, studied together, worshiped together, witnessed together, and conducted the business of the church together. It is quite obvious from the record of the Scriptures that the visual images of life in the church were those of a vibrant community that understood itself to be living in the presence of God.

Christians described themselves as witnesses of the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit. The memories they held of

their gatherings were those of an intimate family. They had no opportunity or desire to view the church as a stagnant building or an entertaining set of programs. The church was the context for divine-human encounter. This is not to say the church lacked order, structure, or discipline. It is to say that relationships took precedence over form; the church gathered to glorify God and build up the body of Christ.

Their life together was characterized by genuine fellowship. There was a strong sense of belonging to an intimate family, one that provided support for weak and needy members. Spiritually, converts generally received the personal attention of a sponsor until established in the church. Physically, even the pagans took note of the manner in which Christians provided for their widows, orphans, and sick.

In an age of slavery and economic and sexual domination, this was a radical social order. Christianity insisted on the nobility and worth of the individual with no consideration of economic or political status (James 2:1-9). Slaves and women, who were nonentities in the Hellenistic world, were able to rise to positions of leadership in the Christian *ekklesia*. Even marriage barriers between social classes were broken down. Fundamental for this new order was a denouncement of the use of power to control others. Christians served God and each other out of a sense of freedom and love.

Feasts were a common type of church gathering. The pattern of Jesus in frequenting feasts was adopted and his instructions concerning the giving of feasts were taken literally. Emphasis was placed on feeding the lame, blind, and poor (Luke 14:12-13). These "love feasts" apparently began as a part of the Sunday observance of the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:17-34). An early Christian writer named Tertullian gave a most vivid description of these gatherings.

Yet about the modest supper room of the Christians alone a great ado is made. Our feast explains itself by its name. The Greeks call it *agape*, i.e., affection. Whatever it costs, our outlay in the name of piety is gain, since with the good things of the feast we benefit the needy; not as it is with you, do parasites aspire to the glory of satisfying their licentious propensities, selling themselves for a belly-feast to all disgraceful treatment,—but as it is with God himself, a peculiar respect is shown to the lowly. If the object of our feast

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be good, in the light of that consider its further regulations. As it is an act of religious service, it permits no vileness or immodesty. The participants, before reclining, taste first of prayer to God. As much is eaten as satisfies the cravings of hunger; as much is drunk as befits the chaste. They say it is enough, as those who remember that even during the night they have to worship God; they talk as those who know that the Lord is one of their auditors. After manual ablution, and the bringing in of lights, each is asked to stand forth and sing, as he can, a hymn to God, either one from the holy Scriptures or one of his own composing,—a proof of the measure of our drinking. As the feast commenced with prayer, so with prayer it is closed. We go from it, not like troops of mischief-doers, nor bands of vagabonds, nor to break out into licentious acts, but to have as much care of our modesty and chastity as if we had been at a school of virtue rather than a banquet. (Roberts, Alexander, Donaldson 43)

Tertullian also gave a description of the Sunday worship gatherings. Prayer was offered up in "united force as if with violence in order to please God by wrestling with him in supplications." Intercession was given "for the emperors, for their ministers and for all authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation." Scripture readings were selected as needful for the "peculiarity of the times" in order to nourish faith, animate hope, make confidence steadfast, and confirm good habits. Exhortations from the Scriptures included rebukes, sacred censures and judgments against individuals. The climax of the Sunday gatherings was the celebration of the Lord's Supper. But only those walking in harmony with Christ and his church were allowed to partake.

A distinctive factor in the environment of the gatherings of the early church was the sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The leaders and activities of the gatherings were perceived to be under the immediate direction of the Spirit. But perhaps the greatest impact of the Spirit upon the gatherings was through the ongoing presence of the *charismata* gifts. The gifts of the Spirit, especially prophetic utterances and healings, were common. It would be difficult to overstate the impact of these manifestations. To meet

together was to meet with God who attested his presence through signs, wonders, and gifts by the Holy Spirit. And, any or all members might be so used.

Summation

Early Christianity understood the church to be the fulfillment of prophetic promises to Israel. The Hebrew congregation had been called together to talk with God at an earthly mountain that shook at the very presence of God. They chose to withdraw and allow Moses to intercede on their behalf. The new congregation has been called to live with God on a mountain that can not be shaken. Their intercessor is the second Adam, the first born of the resurrection, He who knew no sin and yet became sin that they might be fully reconciled to God. Through Him they entered boldly into the very throne room of God. With Him they were seated in the heavenly realms.

Through Jesus the church was a whole new order of creation. These descendants of Adam and Eve, the remnant of the house of Israel, were by faith recipients of the promise to Abraham. In fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, they knew God. His Law was written on their hearts and minds. Through this knowledge they fully understood God to be their Father and themselves to be his household, His family. Therefore, **the early church ordered their lives together on the basis of what it meant to live together, not in, but as the house of God.**

At the core of the early church's self-perception was the knowledge that they were the family over which God was the head. They purposed to relate to each other as God intended for brothers and sisters to relate. They structured their times together so as to experience what it meant to share the fellowship of Christ. They saw themselves as members one of another in a manner that transcended all other human experiences. They were united in the body of Christ. They had all things in common. Special attention was given to the care of the wounded and needy.

The early church was all these things and yet they were still becoming these things. Caught between two worlds, they did not always live according to the Spirit. Sometimes they walked according to the flesh. But the consistent message of the Scriptures was that God had provided for them to live together in unity and love as His people. God expected them to gather often as the household of faith and God expected those meetings to function accordingly. His provisions and expectations have not changed.

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Families Together

The most critical challenge facing the church today is for the church and families to learn **once again to interrelate as the family of God**. Christian families are being powerfully affected by the patterns of the world. But the real danger is not the world. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. The real threat to Pentecostal families is that the church is no longer very different from the world in the patterns of its relationships. Energies are focused on events and appearances instead of persons and relationships. Little is sacred; success is supreme; communication is unidirectional; decision making is controlled by a few; rewards (honor) are tied to performance; and persons are seldom disciplined for the purposes of reconciliation and spiritual growth. The church must put its house in order.

Congregational Steps

The first step the church must take in restoring the role of families in the family of God is for the church to return to the mountain of God so that it may draw its life and identity from Him. If the church no longer resembles the New Testament description of the people of God it is because the church has failed to dwell in the presence of a holy God. **The church needs a Jeremiah 31 revival followed by an Acts 2 outpouring of the Holy Spirit.** Then it would once again be said of it,

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

And the church would once again resemble the house of God.

The second step is for the church to accept a Biblical model for being the family of God. In this model families belong to the church in the same way that at Sinai households belonged to the congregation of the Lord. In modern mobile societies structures must be nurtured within the church that fill the place of extended families, clans, and tribes. Marriage must be viewed as the normative center for families, but, as in the New Testament, alternative groupings especially of singles must be infolded into the larger family system. **Within this model every individual and every household within the family of God must have a community of "redeemer kinsmen" with whom they belong and before whom they are accountable.** These expressions of the body of Christ must function as vital organs of the church. In the Scriptures, elders and deacons arise from such communities and have no basis for ministry without them.

The third step is for the church to learn again to honor families by honoring all the members of the church family. The family will not be honored by simply honoring the idea of family on a "Family Day." The best way to honor a family is to honor the members of a family. The church must join in celebrating the major accomplishments of all of its members. Special attention should be given to weddings, the birth of children, graduations, and other honors. If an event is significant in the life of an individual it is significant to his or her family and must be significant to the church. But true honor calls forth joy and sorrow. The church must learn again to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. In the family of God no one should ever suffer alone, or celebrate alone. No matter how large the congregation there must be a system that provides support for families in times of stress and disappointment. Such systems are doomed to fail unless the members have become a family prior to the critical event that gives rise to a need.

Role of Pastors

Pastors have a special role in the nurture of Pentecostal families, and the single most important contribution that pastors can make toward nurturing healthy families is to assure that couples are prepared for marriage before they are married. In healthy families the parents and grandparents have modeled and taught the "secrets" of a good marriage. Parents can share from the wisdom passed on to them by others, their own life experiences (both good and bad), and what the Bible teaches about marriage. There is no

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aspect of marriage that should not open for discussion between a parent and a soon to be married child. Pastors must facilitate this process through periodic sermons and classes on parenting. But these will fail without relationships that enable the pastor to hold parents accountable for preparing their own children for this and all other major transitions in life.

Pastors need to make sure the entire congregation understands the covenantal and sacred nature of marriage. Again, preaching and teaching are essential, but it is the manner a pastor goes about preparing for and conducting marriage ceremonies that will have the greatest influence. If the pastor insists that the entire process be recognized as sacred, and puts an appropriate amount of effort into nurturing the spirituality of the event, the congregation will come to know that marriage is a sacred covenant.

Pastors can instantly elevate a congregation's perception of marriage by simply making known the basis upon which she or he will officiate a wedding. "Church weddings" serve a special function in the life of the family of God. The covenantal nature of marriage binds the pastor and congregation to the couple. As witnesses and participants in the wedding they must also be witnesses and participants in the marriage. Their involvement commits them to support the couple in the formation and preservation of a Christian home. Therefore, pastors and congregations should distinguish between weddings which are expressions of the life of the family of God and those which are mere contracts within the larger society. The first must be fully blessed (provided they meet the Biblical standards for marriage). The second must be honored because of the sacredness of all marriages (provided they are not contrary to Biblical requirements for marriage). Some marriages should not in any manner appear to be endorsed by the church, even if they meet the standards of the larger society.

Policies concerning the performance of wedding ceremonies should be simple and universally applied. Above all they must be grounded in a Biblical understanding of marriage. A pastoral statement might read in part:

As pastor, it is my privilege and responsibility to perform wedding ceremonies according to the guidelines of this state, our church, and the Word of God. I am pleased to perform a congregational wedding ceremony for any couple which meets the following criteria;

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1. The couple must satisfy my conscience about the marriage. I must be convinced the marriage is not contrary to the expressed will of God as taught in the Scriptures.

2. The couple must convince me they have, after prayerful deliberation, come to sincerely believe it to be the will of God for their lives.

3. The couple must demonstrate to me they are ready to become truly united in marriage; they must know and understand what the covenant of marriage is about; they must know each other and be compatible.

4. The couple must be willing to meet with me a minimum of six hours for pre-marriage counseling.

I reserve the right to perform the private wedding ceremony for others as my conscience dictates. Under no circumstances will I perform the wedding of a couple which is disqualified for marriage according to the Scriptures.

Pre and post-wedding counseling are critical responsibilities of the pastor who performs a wedding. Pre-wedding counseling should stress the Biblical and covenantal nature of marriage. There are two primary purposes. First, the pastor must lead the couple through a process of discerning if the marriage is indeed the will of God. Second, the pastor must assure the couple is prepared to begin building a relationship which will form the foundation of a family. Post-wedding counseling is of equal importance. It sets the pattern by which the couple will relate to the family of God.

Conclusion

The current crises of Christian families must be understood as multidimensional. The problems spring from the changing values and shifting structures of modern society. But to admit this is to confess that we in the church have allowed culture more than the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to shape our lives. The answer to

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the problem cannot be found in the great writings of Western Civilization, although they may point us in the right direction. Neither can the answer be found in the social sciences and various schools of therapy, except as they reflect the truths of God. These are tools that God can use in the hands of a discerning church. The true and lasting solution, however, can only be found in the Word of God. Finally, the Pentecostal church must address the crises of the family. It is our crises and it can only be met within the context of being the family of God.

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