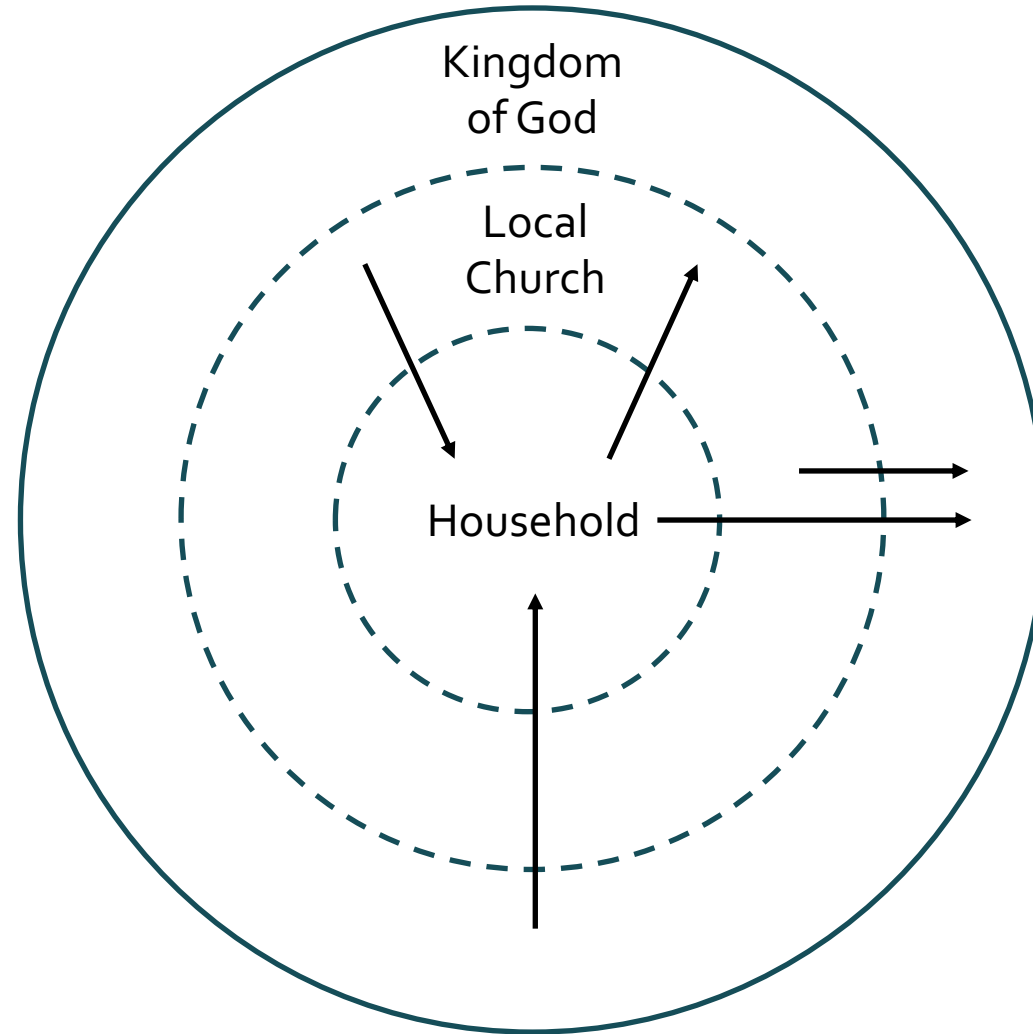


God's Design for Families and Churches

Three Circles of Family



Family in the Gospels

- In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus begins to redefine family by warning that some people will have to leave their biological families to follow Him (e.g., 10:21-39), but also that they will gain a new family if they do (e.g., 12:46-50; 18:15-18; 19:27-30; 22:29-33).
 - Matt 10:21-39 shows the tensions that will arise in the natural family because of the gospel message.
 - Matt 12:46-50 and 19:27-30 give visions of a new kind of family gained through the gospel message.
- More than any other Gospel, John fleshes out God's design to create a family through Jesus.
 - (John 1:1-13) John defines a new kind of birth that brings a person into a new kind of family.
 - (John 3:1-21) The scene with Nicodemus draws heavily on the two lineages from Genesis 3, contrasting people of the darkness versus people of the Light.
 - (John 4:1-42) Jesus uses the family situation of the woman at the well to bring an ostracized group of people into His Father's family.
 - (John 7:1-9) Jesus Himself experiences separation and rejection by his own family, just as He warned other people would as well.
 - (John 8:31-59) Jesus declares the Jewish leaders to be the children of Satan (i.e. the seed of the serpent) while also claiming that belief in Him means that one is a child of God (i.e. the seed of the woman).
 - Certainly, we cannot get away from the familial language that Jesus uses of Himself and the Father. John, far more than any other Gospel, makes this relationship apparent.

Acts

- The founding of the church at Pentecost creates a new kind of family for those who believed, but it is a Jewish family at first (2:41-47). The preaching of the Apostles here is presented as a kind of anti-Babel moment (2:5-13).
- The congregation was marked by concern for one another and care for one another (4:32-37) to the point that widows being overlooked resulted in the founding of the office of deacons (6:1-6).
 - However, households could still misalign themselves even though they were in the church (5:1-11).
- A single man (eunuch) from Ethiopia becomes a notable early convert for his ability to serve the queen of Ethiopia (8:26-40).
- As opposed to the large-scale launch of the Jewish church at Pentecost, the Gentile church begins with a single family lead by a God-fearer (10:1-48).

Acts (cont.)

- There are many notable families through whom the Apostles ministries were able to spread:
 - The mother of John Mark opened her house for a meeting place of a local church (12:12).
 - Paul find Timothy, who had been taught the Law by his Jewish mother, and Paul takes him on as sort of son in the faith (16:1-5).
 - Lydia is the catalyst for her household coming to faith (16:13-15,40).
 - A jailer, responding to Paul's kindness, leads his whole family to faith (16:25-34).
 - Aquila and Priscilla help Paul with his trade, following him to Ephesus and taking on Apollos to teach him after Paul leaves (18:1-3,18-28).
- As the narrative of the New Testament closes in Acts 28, the family of God has reoriented the focus of certain families in most of the ANE-known world.
- The movement is driven not by kings or governments, but by families who are willing to hear, believe, and change their entire allegiance to the church of God rather than to their cultural heritage.
- This has always been God's plan, that His kingdom would ultimately come through households and not through political coercion or the movements of whole nations.

1 Corinthians 5-7

- At the church level, Paul begins to work out what it means that those in Christ belong to each other as brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers.
 - He does not destroy the biological family in favor of the church (5:1), but he sees the responsibility of accountability and relationship as grounded in the church family (5:2-13).
- We see the importance of being a new kind of people through the way Christians handle legal disputes and look at sexual purity.
 - Ethics begins to flow out of a new understanding of our ontology as Christians in relationship with one another.
 - The desire to exemplify true humanity to the world should override the desire to be proven right (6:7-8).
 - Abstaining from culturally acceptable sexual expression is a matter of knowing this new ontology as well (6:12-20).
- Even the idea of marriage becomes redefined, with Paul claiming that it is not always better to marry depending on the situation.
 - The fulfillment of single life comes out of a newly defined sense of essence. Every Christian's goal is to live for the kingdom, and marriage can actually be an impediment to that (7:32-40).
 - Yet marriage is binding even when one spouse is not a believer because it can spread the kingdom to remain married (7:12-16).

Ephesians 5-6

- The commands for household roles in Ephesians 5-6 also come out of Paul's understanding of a new humanity in Christ (see especially chs 1-3).
- Husbands and wives have particular ways in which they should relate to one another for the purpose of mirroring the relationship of Christ and the church (5:22-33).
- Children are to obey their parents, and parents are not to provoke their children because their relationship as Christians is not based merely on parental authority. It is an outworking of the kind of kingdom God is trying to create (6:1-2).
- Slaves are to obey their masters because they are trying to connect to Christ through their service under all circumstances (6:5-8).
- Masters are to treat their slaves as part of the household and not as inferiors, knowing they themselves also have a Master. We have to understand ancient social ontology to grasp this point (6:9).

1-2 Timothy/ Titus/Philemon

- Paul attaches a man's ability to lead his household well to his ability to lead in the church. He also attaches women's ability to teach other women to properly fulfilling their roles well (1 Tim 3:2-5,12; Titus 2:3-5).
- Everyone has a familial position within the church even if it goes beyond the household, but the household remains the primary locus of care and discipleship (1 Tim. 5:1-8).
- Paul exemplifies the point about older men through his relationship with Timothy and Titus (2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4), though he admits that Timothy's primary disciplers were at first his biological family (2 Tim 2:5-6).
- Though Paul has said in various places that slaves should be subject to their masters, in one particular case, he urges a master to free a runaway slave and consider him a brother (Phil 8-20).

1 John and Conclusions

- John's first epistle is full of familial language about the church to whom he writes. He considers them his own children, and then talks about their mutual relationship through father/children terms (2:1,12,13-14,18,28; 3:7,13,18).
- This intra-church relationship is meant to reflect the fullness of God's kingdom since He is the Father of all who believe (2:15; 3:1-3,10; 4:7; 5:1-4).
- The boundaries between types of family (households, the local church, the Kingdom of God) is constantly blurred in the epistles.
 - Consistently, the momentum seems to begin at the household level, but it always pushes to the universal level.
 - This gives us a starting point for the teleology of family.

New Heavens and New Earth

- When we think of family and eschatology, we need to make sure we think properly about where the world is headed.
 - Popular notions about people getting wings when they die, or that eternity is an ethereal existence or disembodied worship service are incomplete at best and mostly wrong on the biblical evidence.
- Revelation 21-22 give the most complete picture we have of what the world will be like after Christ's return.
 - John presents a picture of renewal and lack of any curse in the New Heavens and New Earth (NHNE)
 - John is clearly drawing from imagery set out by Isaiah (e.g., 56:6-8; 60:1-22; 65:17-25), but he is doing so with the benefit of understanding who Jesus is and what He has done.
 - The primary identity of those in the NHNE is that of being God's people. The household, ethnic, and tribal/national identities we have now cease to be primary. Everyone becomes a citizen of the New Jerusalem.

The Family of God

- Other biblical passages indicate things about family structure in the NHNE:
 - (Gen 1:28; 2:24 vs. Matt 22:23-33) Whereas the original creation had only one human pair with the paradigm to marry and to multiply, the NHNE paradigm seems to remove this aspect of human relationship.
 - (Matt 24:36-41) The judgment between believers and non-believers will have no respect for nationality, ethnicity, or family relationships. It is entirely dependent on the outermost circle of family, the Family of God.
 - (1 Cor 13:8-13) The need for discipleship, which has the Christian home as its primary locus, will cease, as will the need for faith and hope.
- We do not have a full picture of what the NHNE will be like, but what we do have seems to indicate that the role of the household will change dramatically or even be done away with to be replaced by the larger category of the Family of God.

Approximating Glory Now

- The function of family in the time between Christ's comings takes on deep importance beyond mere reproduction and even beyond discipleship.
- Our households, whatever form they take, to whatever degree we have the ability, should look like pockets of God's kingdom arriving now.
- Every house led by Christian adults should appear as a mini-Jerusalem where righteousness, justice, and hospitality become exemplified.
 - This reality, of course, will always be held with the caveat of the curse and the sin nature.
 - In God's family, we receive a higher narrative to strive within and to push ourselves and our other family members toward.
 - For those who live in a household with unbelievers, the attempt to bring the best approximation of God's kingdom into the home will hopefully be a spur that leads to salvation for those unbelievers (see 1 Cor 7:12-16 and 1 Peter 3:1-12).

What Is a Christian Home?

- In the ideal Christian home, those member of a household who are believers should be striving to...
 - Fulfill their biblical roles within the household because this points to the true glory, justice, and righteousness that God's kingdom will bring.
 - Husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the Church
 - Wives should respect and submit to their husbands as the Church does to Christ
 - Parents should not lord over their children but should train them in wisdom and righteousness
 - Children should honor their fathers and mothers to demonstrate the honor our Heavenly Father is due
 - All living in purity and finding hope in God's promises of future glorification
 - Belong to a local family of believers and fulfil their roles there, because this pictures the larger, glorified Family of God.
 - Each Christian should value the cooperate worship setting as a glimpse of the glory we will experience in the New Heavens and New Earth within the full Family of God
 - Christians should view the local church as a family, treating the members as they deserve in righteousness and justice
 - Christians should know and use their spiritual gifts to serve the local church family and edify one another because we have not yet reached the glory to be revealed.
 - Mirror as much as possible the true moral nature of the Kingdom of God.
 - Families should make ethical decisions based on how closely those decisions match up with God's glorious kingdom and not just what meets our own desires.

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