

## A Word for Sheepdogs

ONLY BLIND BATS AND MOLES would deny that the family has fallen on hard times in our day. Though there was family dysfunction even in the halcyon days of “Father Knows Best,” the vocations of husband and wife, father and mother, brother and sister continue to be decimated by the relentless pursuit of self interest and self expression. Ever since the cataclysm in Eden the “self” is contaminated by sin and twisted by shame. Thus any pastor tackling the complicated task of shepherding souls who live in the confines of a household broken by sin and shame needs discernment, wisdom, and tact. He faces the humanly impossible task of navigating between the Scylla of legalism and the Charybdis of license when it comes to bringing healing and wholeness to the wounded souls who so often live quietly desperate lives beneath the facade of outwardly happy homes. Timothy Pauls shines the bright beacon of the light of God’s word into these dark recesses, showing how the natural family and the church are interwoven both biblically and pastorally. He provides foundational Scriptural insight into how the pastor’s own vocation as both husband and father intimately connect with his vocation as surrogate husband to Christ’s bride and surrogate father to His children. You will be both stretched and challenged by his insights. Above all, you will be encouraged. For in Jesus you are a true son of the Father in heaven who has sent the Spirit of His Son into your heart so you can call out to Him for help: “Abba, Father!” (Gal 4:6)

- *H. L. Senkbeil*



# The Congregation as Family: A New Testament Survey

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**C**HURCH AND FAMILY GO TOGETHER. They are two of Luther's three estates and pillars of Western civilization. Intact families are more likely to attend church, and Christian doctrine fosters strong marriages and families.

Likewise, when churches decline, so do families; and both are suffering decline and relentless assault in our present time. Mary Eberstadt poignantly summarizes the heartbreak:

*A growing number of Western individuals greet the milestones of life with no religious framework at all. They are born without being baptized; they have children without being married; they contract civil marriages instead of religious ones. They darken church doors infrequently, if ever, and upon dying their bodies are incinerated and scattered to the winds, rather than prayed over whole in the ground as Christian ritual and dogma had hitherto commanded.<sup>1</sup>*

Eberstadt writes from a sociological perspective, examining trends and challenging assumptions. She sets out to examine the reasons for the secularization of western culture, and she argues that examinations to date are lacking because they've failed to take into account "the active effect that

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<sup>1</sup> Eberstadt, Mary. *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2013), 7-8.

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participation in the family itself appears to have on religious belief and practice.”<sup>2</sup> To use her phrase, church and family are “the invisible double-helix of society.”<sup>3</sup> As one goes, so goes the other. It is a chicken/egg relationship in her estimation: strong families lead to strong churches, and vice versa.

Eberstadt's analysis from a sociological standpoint is convincing: the data demonstrates that there is a strong connection between church and family. From a theological standpoint, however, I argue that the relationship is even closer: in the garden of Eden, the two were identical, and it is only the fall into sin that has created a distinction between the two.

It is with this in mind that I present the following survey of the New Testament to propose that, as the church is the family of God, so the congregation is the family of God in a certain location. Family is not to be understood merely as an analogy of the church or one paradigm among many to describe God's people; rather, the congregation is a family. It is born of the Spirit, not of the flesh; not by the will of man, but of God. This truth should guide pastoral care and practice.

### **Part 1: The Church as Family Archetype (Ephesians 5:22-33)**

If we are to speak of family, it is proper to begin with marriage and an examination of Ephesians 5:22-33. Like most parish pastors, my

<sup>2</sup> Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, 22.

contact with the reading is usually in connection with weddings<sup>4</sup> and, given the occasion, the focus naturally falls upon the relationship between husband and wife. One verse in the reading that receives far less attention is verse 32, where Paul writes, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” The mystery to which he refers is Genesis 2:24, quoted in the previous verse: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Paul's assertion is significant: Genesis 2:24, the institution of marriage in Paradise, is not a verse about marriage that also happens to describe Christ and the church. Rather it's a verse about Christ and his church that also happens to describe marriage.

Thomas Winger agrees wholeheartedly in his commentary on Ephesians:

*Paul does not simply say that the relationship of Christ to the church is like marriage. Rather, the apostle teaches that God first had Christ in mind and then instituted marriage to reflect what he would ultimately do. In other words, earthly marriage reflects Christ and the church, not the other way around.*<sup>5</sup>

Winger's argument is worth a survey before we narrow our focus from the church to the local congregation.

Ephesians is clearly the foremost New Testament epistle about the

<sup>4</sup> Aside from the designated epistle for the Rite of Holy Matrimony, it appears once as an option in the One-Year Lectionary (Epiphany 2) and once in the Three-Year Lectionary (Series B, Proper 16).

<sup>5</sup> Winger, Thomas M. *Ephesians* (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 2015), 624-625.

church, but there is a casual tendency to consider the *Haustafeln* (“house tables” or “table of duties” found in 5:22-6:9) as an add-on, as if Paul tacks on a bit of practical advice at the end of his treatise. If this is true, there’s a curious feature in the epistle: of the nine uses of the term ἐκκλησία in Ephesians, no fewer than six of them appear within the *Haustafeln*, specifically in Paul’s description of Christ and his bride in 5:22-33.<sup>6</sup>

The description of marriage in these verses is full of Christological and sacramental language. The husband is the head of the wife because Christ is the head of the church for the purpose of salvation (5:23): it “is a Christ-kind of headship that does not tyrannize but rather sacrifices itself, as Paul’s exposition will demonstrate.”<sup>7</sup> The wife willingly subordinates because she isn’t given to be the head: her office is patterned after that of the Church, and to claim headship in marriage “would imply that the church can act as her own savior.”<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, the counterpoint to the wife’s submission is not dominion by the husband: Paul does not tell husbands to rule over their wives or compel their submission, but to love their wives sacrificially.<sup>9</sup> His instructions to husbands are lengthier because he is unfolding the mystery of Christ’s love and sacrifice for the church. The Lord gives himself up for

her (5:25), to cleanse and sanctify her “by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (5:26-27), a clear reference to Holy Baptism. Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies, because this reflects the mystical union of Christ and the church.<sup>10</sup> They are to nourish their wives, for Christ nourishes the church with his own body and blood.<sup>11</sup>

Paul cites Genesis 2:24 as precedent, quoted in Ephesians 5:31: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” The “therefore” (ἀντί τούτου) at the start of the verse is in reference to Christ in 5:29-30, not the happy circumstance of a man and a woman who are mutually attracted. In other words, “for the reason of *Jesus Christ*, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife...”

Genesis 2:24 then is really about Christ, and marriage is given to point to him. Walter Trobisch expands upon this, noting that for our salvation Jesus left his Father (Philippians 2:7)

<sup>6</sup> Winger, *Ephesians*, 147.

<sup>7</sup> Winger, *Ephesians*, 605-606.

<sup>8</sup> Winger, *Ephesians*, 606.

<sup>9</sup> “An ancient reader might have expected Paul to balance the wives’ obligation to submit with an exhortation to the husbands to ‘rule well’ or to ‘make’ his wife submit. The imperative ἀγαπάτε, ‘love,’ is therefore quite stunning.” (Winger, *Ephesians*, 608).

<sup>10</sup> “She is not just *like* his own body, she *is* his own body; husband and wife have a unity that is every bit as real as the mystical union of the church with Christ through Baptism into him. Far from encouraging a selfish view of marriage (as if one ought to care more for oneself than for others), Paul’s words forbid a husband so to distance himself from his wife that he might consider himself more important than her” (Winger, *Ephesians*, 615)

<sup>11</sup> “Christ truly nourishes the church, even to the point of giving his very body and blood for her to eat, spreading a banquet before her. Thus, both Baptism (5:26) and the Lord’s Supper feature prominently in Christ’s care for his bride, the church. Birth is followed up with feeding.” (Winger, *Ephesians*, 616)

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and mother (John 19:26) to hold fast to his wife by dying for her, and risen again, he joins her to himself (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Gal. 3:28).<sup>12</sup> Winger concludes, "In other words, all human marriages take place not simply because Eve was created from Adam but because of and in order to point to Christ's marriage to the church."<sup>13</sup>

No wonder that Paul begins verse 32 by saying that "the mystery is profound"! Marriage, the delicate and intimate union of husband and wife where love is often enacted in folding laundry or changing furnace filters, is given to exemplify the Son of God's perfect, sacrificial love for His people. Apart from Christ, one's understanding of marriage is incomplete.<sup>14</sup> Marriage is not one of many metaphors that Paul might choose to describe Christ and the Church. The connection is far more intimate. In the words of William Weinrich:

*The true marriage is that between Christ and the Church. All other marriages (including the first one in the Garden)—and this is true the more marriages are blessed by love—are faint images and icons*

<sup>12</sup> Trobisch, Walter. *I Married You*. (Bolivar, MO: Quiet Waters Publications, 2000), 149-153. Trobisch offers a nice homiletical treatment in these pages.

<sup>13</sup> Winger, *Ephesians*, 618.

<sup>14</sup> "The full meaning of Gen 2:24 was not clear until Christ came. Now, by the revelation of the mystery, we see that it was never just about marriage; its deeper meaning was always about Christ's leaving the Father and cleaving to the church. ... The meaning of Paul's words then, is this: 'but I say [that Gen 2:24 refers] to Christ and to the church' or 'but I disclose the mystery of Gen 2:24 as being Christ and the church.'" (Winger, *Ephesians*, 624)

*of that Marriage of the Lamb with his Bride, the Church.*<sup>15</sup>

Paul's treatment of marriage in the *Haustafeln* is revolutionary. Rather than reinforce the cultural norm in which the husband is to act with authority and autonomy while the wife is given to obey and enable his independence, Paul describes marriage as an estate of mutual love and service. While the goal of *Haustafeln* found among his contemporary moral philosophers is to prevent social-political rebellion and revolution by means of control and subjugation, Paul's instruction creates an order in which all are set free to serve within the order God has established. The husband is not made the head in order to live an autonomous life at the expense of wife and children, but to serve and provide for them. The wife is not subordinated for sexual gratification upon demand or to enable her husband's sovereignty, but to respect him—and, if he is not a believer, perhaps to gain his conversion (1 Pet. 3:1-2)! This reversal of social values comes as no surprise, for it begins with the Son of God who has humbled Himself, become flesh and died in the place of sinners.<sup>16</sup>

Within marriage, husband and wife do more than love and serve one another: by doing so, they daily play a part that reminds one another of the story of redemption.<sup>17</sup> The con-

<sup>15</sup> Winger, *Ephesians*, 625. The quotation is from Weinrich, William. *It Is Not Given to Women to Teach": A Lex in Search of a Ratio* (Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1993) 23.

<sup>16</sup> Kleinig, John W. "Ordered Community: Order and Subordination in the New Testament." *John W. Kleinig Resources*. 2005. www.johnkleinig.com (accessed February 18, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Significantly, the theme is the order of redemption, not creation: "Finally, the logic

sequences and benefits for marriage are profound. The consequences and benefits for parish ministry ought not be underestimated, either.

### Parents and Children

Paul's *Haustafeln* in Ephesians do not end with marriage and chapter five; households include children and servants, and the instructions regarding those relationships are equally revealing.

Paul commands, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." (Eph 6:1). The command for children to ὑπακούετε is delightfully more encompassing than "obey:" a compound of ὑπὸ and ἀκούω, it literally means "to listen from under" and describes obedience as well as listening, learning, trusting and believing.<sup>18</sup> The relationship between parent and child is far more than mere compliance, but includes even catechetical overtones.<sup>19</sup>

To parents, Paul says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph.

of Paul's presentation is significant: despite his appeal to the creation of Eve from the side of Adam and the institutional mandate for marriage in Genesis (Eph 5:29-32; cf Gen 2:21-24), Paul's argument with respect to Christian marriage is not essentially derived from the order of creation. In fact, Paul argues in completely the opposite fashion: from Christ and the church backwards to the order of creation. That is to say, the order of creation, including the institution of marriage for all time and for all people, was set in place so that it might stand as a perpetual proclamation of the Gospel." (Winger, *Ephesians*, 650)

<sup>18</sup> "In other words, children 'heed' their parents not only when they obey their commands but also when they trust them, learn from them, and believe what they are taught 'in the Lord.'" (Winger, *Ephesians*, 656.)

<sup>19</sup> Winger, *Ephesians*, 679.

6:4). His reason for specifying fathers may be for several reasons, including the father's ultimate responsibility as *paterfamilias* for the family's behavior or the greater likelihood of a father's anger over a mother's.<sup>20</sup> However, it is telling that the opposite of provocation to anger is not kindness, but nurture "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Paul is carrying on the analogy of Christ and his bride begun in his instructions to husband and wife; it is not just marriage that is to teach of the Lord and his church, but also other household relationships. Thus, as God the Father deals with his people by means of his saving and instructive word rather than wrath, he is the archetype of fatherhood. Grothe writes, "Paul does not, in fact, move inductively from the human, physical ('literal') relationship to the spiritual; rather, in Ephesians 3:14-15 he asserts that the real picture of the relationship is just the opposite: 'For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named...'"<sup>21</sup>

Again, the reversal is at work: although children are clearly subordinate to parents, parents are to act in service to their children through care, discipline and instruction. In this case, both point to Christ because he is at once the one who nurtures his children in the church *and*

<sup>20</sup> Winger, *Ephesians*, 662.

<sup>21</sup> Grothe, Jonathan F. *Reclaiming Patterns of Pastoral Ministry: Jesus and Paul*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1988), 22. Grothe continues, "Prior to all experience is God, the Creator, the Father, the source of all life. Deduced from that fatherhood of God is every other 'patria,' clan, or nation descended from or named after a father. Deductively, from the point of view of faith, it is the relationships originating in God that are prior, and the human relationships are derived."

the obedient child who honors his Father, even to death on the cross (Heb 5:7-8).

### Slaves and Masters

A similar emphasis is found when Paul addresses slaves: “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ” (Eph 6:5). In obeying his earthly master, the slave is a servant of Christ (6:6) who renders service to the Lord (6:7), and he is to do so with a good will. To masters, Paul says, “do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him” (Eph 6:9). As a father is to avoid provocation to anger, the master is to give up threatening. Instead, he is to “do the same;” and acting in good will toward servants (since they are equals before the Master), a Christian master might very well instruct his slaves in the word of God.<sup>22</sup>

Once again, both sides of the relationship point to Christ. Frequently addressed as “Master” (κύριε), he has been given all authority (Matt. 28:18) and he rules over his Church and all things; yet he also has taken on the form of a slave for our redemption (Phil 2:7), acting in service to his Father for our salvation. In this final relationship of the *Haustafeln*, Jesus is the archetype of both master and slave.

Of the parties to relationships in the *Haustafeln*, Christ fulfills each one except that of the wife. It is not just marriage, but the entire household that depicts Christ and the Church. In

<sup>22</sup> As with children, slaves are commanded to ὑπακούετε, so the catechetical flavor is found here too.

fact, all of these relationships within the family are designed to remind household members of the gospel. The daily activities of the family are to tell the story of God’s love for his people in Christ.

### More than Metaphor

One might easily conclude that the household serves as a metaphor without peer for the church throughout Scripture — a helpful comparison certainly, but little more. In the Old Testament after the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24, the Lord frequently describes his love for his people as a husband’s love for His bride (Isa 62:1-5; Song 4:8-5:1), even when she is unfaithful (Ezek 16:1-15; Hos 3); and it should not be dismissed that the Lord makes false doctrine tantamount to sexual infidelity. He calls them His children (Exod 3:10; Hos 11:10), though often disobedient (Isa 1:2; Jer 3:14).<sup>23</sup>

In the New Testament, the descriptions of the Church as family only intensify. The Church is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:23-24), and her children eagerly await the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven (Rev 19:7-9). The children are those who receive Christ and believe in him, who are “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13), born into the kingdom of God by water and the Spirit

<sup>23</sup> For more, see William Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), p. 154. Weinrich notes the themes for the Israelites as God’s sons: “Israel’s sonship is closely associated with the exodus and with Israel as a people freed for divine service and right worship. Important also is the idea of obedience.... Indeed, obedience is a hallmark of being a son or child of God. Disobedience disenfranchises and disinherits.” In other words, the Israelites are born to live as God’s children.

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(John 3:5). As children of God, they pray to him as “Our Father, who art in heaven” (Matt 6:9), having been adopted as sons (Rom 8:15). They are heirs of the kingdom of God (Rom 8:17; Gal 3:29-4:7). Even if they are ostracized by their natural families because of their faith, their family is increased a hundredfold now and for eternity (Mark 10:29-30).

All of this is true because they are joined to Christ. They are united with his death and resurrection in their rebirth of Holy Baptism (Rom 6:3-11), and so they are clothed in his righteousness (Gal 3:27). They are fed with his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:26-29). They are enlivened by his Word (John 20:21-23, 31), members of the household of God because they are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:19-22). Because they are joined to the only-begotten Son of God, they are sons of God, too (Rom 8:14). They are the family of God, because God has given them his own name and protection (Eph 3:14-15): Christians are πατριὰ because he is their πατέρα.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> “In Hebrew/OT thinking, which is carried through into the NT, naming (here ὀνομάζω, ‘to name’) does not refer to just hanging a label on something; the name indicates the reality, and to give a name indicates mastery over something or taking it under one’s protection (see the second textual note on 1:21). In the present context, however, ἐξ οὗ ‘from whom [is named],’ means even more than ὑφ’ οὗ, ‘by whom’; God gives his children not just a name but his name. When Jesus, the Son of God, teaches his brothers and sisters to call upon God as their Father, he teaches that we are truly children of God; it is not just a metaphor. We have received from him the Triune name into which the sacramental water placed us (Mt 28:19), and through that name a new identity. Families come into being through birth. The Christian’s new birth (in analogy to biological birth) comes through water and the Spirit; that which is born of the

It is the tender theme that John renews in his first epistle: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1).

In contrast to regarding the household as the foremost metaphor for the Church, it is my argument that we need to turn this on its head: If Christ is the archetype of husband, father, and master, then the church is the archetype of family.

It’s hardly a great leap. In the Garden of Eden, Adam is first entrusted with the word and then a wife; and all who are born of Eve into the biological family are also to be the church, the family of God. It is the fall into sin that divides into two families—those born only of flesh and those born of the Spirit. In fact, it is likely in light of this that both Paul and John refer back to the first family as they speak of the Church as family, as we will see below. The distinction remains in the Old Testament nation of Israel, who—except for a few well-known proselytes—are biological descendants of Abraham; and yet the true descendants of Abraham are those who share his faith in the promised Christ (Gal 3:5-9).

It may also be most remarkable that when the Lord commands people to be fruitful and multiply biologically, he gives this blessing only to believers:<sup>25</sup> membership in the household of faith precedes sexual procreation each time. Furthermore,

Spirit is spirit (John 3:5-6). We are what our new Parent is.” (Winger, *Ephesians*, 391)

<sup>25</sup> In Genesis 1:28 and 9:1, 7, the only inhabitants of the earth are Adam and Eve (pre-fall) and Noah’s family (post-flood), respectively. It is not so in Genesis 35:11; however, when the Lord repeats this command to Jacob, the imperative is singular (הַבְרִי הַרְבֵּה), not plural (וַיְבָרֵךְ וַיְרַב).

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as God predestined his people for adoption as sons before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4-5), one can hardly argue that natural families predate the household of faith. Like marriage, the former is given as an illustration of the latter.

One can predict tension between natural and church families, especially the less they overlap. This may come, for instance, in the form of a new Christian ostracized by her Mormon relatives, the church member who chooses to cohabit with his girlfriend, the pastor's wife who is troubled at her husband's dedication to church over their children, or disagreements between pastor and people over the services for weddings and funerals. It is in such moments that one encounters Jesus' statement that his coming divides natural families because not all will believe and be joined to the household of faith (Matt 10:34-36).

Family is not one convenient metaphor among many: the church is the family of God. It follows that, just as the Pauls household in Boise is one branch of a greater family tree, the local congregation is the family of God in a certain place and also part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. This recognition greatly benefits parish pastors for a number of reasons: among other things, it provides much-needed clarity regarding the doctrines of church and ministry, it offers a basis on which to measure various models for mission and ministry today, and it assists pastor and congregation in understanding and dealing with various situations in the parish. We will take up the matter of church and ministry for the duration of this paper.

## Part 2: Church and Ministry in the Family Framework

Within the New Testament, the church is full of "brothers," "sisters," "fathers," "mothers" and "sons." One might dismiss these terms as implying loose associations, as if "father" is merely synonymous with "mentor" and "brother" with "associate," but nothing more. However, if the church is a true family, then it must have true family members who are related by blood—the blood of Christ—and joined together in his body.

### Pastor as Husband

Pastors serve as surrogate husbands to Christ's bride, the church: they are those who stand in the stead and by his command. Jesus makes this position clear with his repeated admonition, "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me" (Matt 10:40), and "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16; cf. John 13:20).

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul warns the Corinthians of the errors of the heretical "super-apostles," who slickly proclaim "another Jesus" and a "different spirit" (2 Cor 11:4). As he begins his argument, he does so with "a little foolishness" on his part, writing,

*For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor 11:2-3).*

Whimsically, Paul aligns himself with the Lord: as Yahweh presented Eve to Adam, so the apostle labors to present the Corinthians as a pure virgin to Christ—a beautiful description of pastoral care.<sup>26</sup>

One might also put Paul in the shoes of Adam, for the first man was entrusted with God’s word (Gen 2:16) for Eve’s good, and in so caring for her, he would act in service to God by preserving the woman he had created. Though Adam failed to speak when they were tempted (Gen 3:1-6), Paul argues that it is given to him to preserve the Corinthian church as a pure virgin to Christ, maintaining her purity by means of the undefiled gospel. So, as Paul cares for this Corinthian bride, is his role a reflection of God or of Adam? The answer is “both”: he speaks in the stead and by the command of Christ, the Son of God and second Adam.

John adopts the same position in his second epistle as he writes as “The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth” (2 John 1): elect (ἐκλεκτῆ), chosen by Christ as his bride. When John greets the church with grace, mercy, and peace from “God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father’s Son” (2 John 3), he brings greetings from the bridegroom to his beloved bride, with the assurance of his faithfulness to her. He then bids the “dear lady” (the ESV adds “dear” to the κυρία in the text to maintain the loving nuance) to walk in the commandments of Christ

(2 John 5), bidding the bride to abide by the wishes of her betrothed. His commandments for her are truth and love, whereas the teachings of deceivers will defile because they are of the antichrist (2 John 7).

### Pastors as Fathers

If pastors are surrogate husbands to the bride of Christ, the next part is no surprise: as Joseph served as surrogate father to Mary’s firstborn Son, so pastors serve as fathers to the children of God.

When Paul writes his first epistle to the Corinthians, he is writing to a congregation in turmoil, and his approach is both pastoral and familial. He devotes the first four chapters to divisions in the church, as various Corinthians claim superiority for following Paul or Apollos or Cephas or Christ. Rather than cite his authority as an apostle, however, he appeals to them no fewer than seven times in these chapters as “brothers” (ἀδελφοί, 1 Cor 1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6) because they are brothers “in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). As he progresses through his argument, Paul eventually asserts a difference in maturity: though he and they are brothers, he is the big brother while the Corinthians are “infants in Christ” (νηπίους ἐν Χριστῷ, 1 Cor 3:1) because of their divisions. Their immaturity has consequences, and their foolishness could lead to destruction (1 Cor 3:17).

With regard to his apostolic office, Paul uses it to illustrate the great reversal: the Corinthians might be foolish and weak in the eyes of the world (1 Cor 1:26-27), but the apostles are worse, “last of all, like men sen-

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<sup>26</sup> Michael L. McCoy provides a fine treatment of this in his allegory, *The Bestman, the Bride and the Wedding*. It is most appropriately dedicated “for my mother who begat me, for my brothers for whom I walk and for the children” (McCoy 1998, 7), and provides an edifying and enjoyable treatment of the Church and her pastors.

tenced to death” (1 Cor 4:9). Worse yet is Christ, for he was crucified (1 Cor 1:23; 2:1) that they may become rich (1 Cor 4:8)! But to discuss the matter of division, Paul frames the argument continually in fraternity.

However, now that he has appealed as brother and apostle (and steward of the mysteries of God), Paul introduces a new relationship: father. He writes:

*I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. (1 Cor 4:14-16)*

*As a natural father is an instrument of the God of life in procreation, so Paul has been God’s instrument so that the Corinthians might be created anew in Christ. He is an apostle speaking on authority of Jesus: those who receive Paul receive the Lord Himself.*

Though a brother as one redeemed by Christ, he is also their father. Why? Because they have been born again as God’s children through the preaching of God’s word by Paul: “I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (1 Cor 4:15). As a natural father is an instrument of the God of life in procreation, so Paul has been God’s instrument so that the Corinthians might be created anew in Christ.<sup>27</sup> He is an apostle speaking on authority of Jesus: those who receive Paul receive the Lord Himself. Even though Paul has chided them for their divisions, he is still careful to express his position as

<sup>27</sup> “He [Paul] thus appropriately refers to himself as their father, who begot them. Every human father is nothing but a created, cooperating agent of God the Creator. In the ‘miracle’ of procreation, the human father participates as an agent for the planting of the seed. But he is unable to ‘make life’ (cause conception) apart from the divine power of the Creator Himself.” (Grothe 1988, 20)

their father in Christ, and his concern for them flows from his fatherhood.

John likewise speaks to Christians as a father to children in his epistles, most evidently in 1 John. Once John has established in chapter one that we have fellowship with the Father, the Son and one another because “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7), John tenderly begins chapter two with the words, “My little children (Τεκνία μου), I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin” (1 John 2:1). Note the possessive: they are not only children of God, but “my children,” and aside from John, Τεκνία as a form of address is used only by Jesus to his disciples as Jesus commands them to love one another (John 13:33-34). In 1 John 2:7-10, the apostle reminds them of this commandment once again. He further calls them children in verse 12, noting that some of his children are young men and some are fathers (1 John 2:13-14). And so he continues, calling them children in 2:18, 28; 3:7; 3:18; 4:4 and 5:21.<sup>28</sup> Their status as children is assured because they are anointed in Holy Baptism (2:20, 27), and they remain the Lord’s children by abiding in him (2:28).

In chapter three, John rejoices that, though their father in the faith, he is numbered with them as children of God (1 John 3:1-2). Where Paul hearkened back to the first family in Genesis when he spoke of Eve’s deception, John now references Cain as he warns that Christian brothers are to love one another (1 John 3:12). Those who so love are children of God. Those who do not so love, but

<sup>28</sup> John calls them Παῖδία in 2:13, 18 and 3:7; otherwise in the epistle, he calls them Τεκνία.

disobey God's commandments, are children of the devil (1 John 3:10). The discussion of this love (ἀγάπη) from God and among his children continues through chapters four and five. John repeats that they are children by birth (1 John 5:4) for the sake of the Son of God, who comes by water and blood, and to whom the Spirit testifies (1 John 5:6-8): the language is rich with baptism in the triune God. As the epistle comes to a close, John proclaims redemption in the Son of God and then concludes, "Little children, keep yourself from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Clearly in these passages, the apostles assume fatherhood of believers: those who stand in the stead and by the command of Christ are surrogate fathers to the children of God.

In a few instances, Paul speaks of individual Christians as his children. When he calls the Corinthians his children in 1 Corinthians 4:14-16, he next adds, "That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (1 Cor 4:17).

Paul speaks thus of Timothy several times in his pastoral epistles, calling him his "true child in the faith" (γνησίῳ τέκνῳ ἐν πίστει, 1 Tim 1:2), "my child" (1 Tim 1:18; 2 Tim 2:1); and "my beloved child" (2 Tim 1:2). While such expressions are found elsewhere in Jewish and Roman literature, in Scripture they are found in the milieu of family references that describe the Church. The relationship is established as it was between Paul and the Corinthians: Paul has instructed Timothy in "sound words" and "in the faith and love that are in

Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 1:13; cf. 2:2),<sup>29</sup> thus becoming his father.

Stott notes the personal nature of the verses immediately following 2 Timothy 1:2: Paul writes that he remembers Timothy constantly in "my prayers night and day" with thankfulness (1 Tim 2:3), remembers Timothy's tears and writes, "I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy" (1 Tim 2:4).<sup>30</sup> The relationship is more than collegial, as Paul exhibits a fatherly affection for his "true child in the faith."

It is the same with Titus: he is Paul's "true child in a common faith" (Titus 1:4), suggesting that Paul was also the instrument through whom Titus was brought to faith in Christ. While Paul's directives of conduct to Titus are regarding his work as a pastor, they can easily be read as a father's counsel to his son.

One further example is found in Paul's letter to Philemon. As Paul writes to Philemon about Onesimus, the slave once run-away and now repentant, he frames the letter as correspondence within the family of God. Timothy is "our brother" and Apphia "our sister" (Phlm 1-2). Marvelously, the church is in Philemon's house (Phlm 2), indicating that his house serves as the local worship place for a congregation: both of Philemon's families are under the same roof.<sup>31</sup> As

<sup>29</sup> He is not the first, of course: Timothy has learned the faith from Eunice and Lois, his mother and grandmother (1 Tim 2:5). In that instruction, they are not just faithful women, but types of the Church.

<sup>30</sup> Stott, John R. W. *The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1973), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Nordling intriguingly suggests that Onesimus' flight to Rome may not have just inconvenienced Philemon, but "may well have compromised not only the spiritual well-be-

Paul discusses the sensitive topic of Onesimus, he addresses Philemon as a brother (v. 7, 20): Philemon's faith is evident in his love for Paul and the saints (probably the congregation meeting in his home). In verse 16, he bids Philemon to receive his repentant slave back as a "beloved brother" (ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν). Now Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus are brothers in Christ, along with Timothy (and sister Apphia).<sup>32</sup> Although Onesimus may deserve discipline as a rebellious slave who has disobeyed his master (and remain Philemon's slave) in the kingdom of the left, Paul entreats Philemon also to treat him as an equal in the kingdom of the right.<sup>33</sup>

While Onesimus is a brother, for Paul he is also a son: "I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment" (Phlm 10); as with Timothy and Titus, Onesimus is now a child of God by the teaching of Paul. Paul's use of "child" and "father" is far from casual,<sup>34</sup> and

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ing of the one congregation, but also the lifeline connecting the apostle to the churches established earlier in the Galatian interior" (Nordling, John G. *Philemon*. (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 2004), 176). If that is the case when Paul writes to Philemon, he is pleading for the entire family of God in that place to forgive and restore Onesimus.

<sup>32</sup> "In this way Paul prepares Philemon to consider favorably the letter's main request ... How could Philemon refuse to welcome Onesimus home when formal linkages between himself, the apostle, the former runaway slave, and other Christians mentioned in the letter have been insolubly cast?" (Nordling 2004, 217)

<sup>33</sup> The distinction of the two kingdoms in this discussion becomes clear in verse 16, when Paul speaks of who Onesimus is both "in the flesh" (left) and "in the Lord" (right). See Nordling 2004, 247, 256.

<sup>34</sup> "This is no mere picture of the elderly Paul taking the young slave 'under his wing,' as an ersatz parent. Rather what has happened is that Onesimus has been converted:

he has not sent Onesimus back without great concern: "I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart" (Phlm 12).<sup>35</sup> As father, Paul would rather pay damages than have Onesimus suffer for his wrongdoing (18-19), and if Onesimus suffers punishment, Paul will suffer grief.

Paul thus serves as father to both Onesimus and Philemon, interceding so that they might be reconciled in Christ:

*Just as Christ had shown God's grace to Paul on prior occasions, and as Christ even now intercedes on behalf of sinners before God the Father, so Paul presents himself now through epistolary means as the one through whom the forgiveness of sins shall be conveyed to the two feuding Christians—namely, to Onesimus and to Philemon. The triangularity of the relationship is felt in Luther's famous observation: 'What Christ has done for us with God the Fa-*

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he has become a Christian. This is clear from the wording of verses 15 and 16, where Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus 'was separated [from you] temporarily in order that you might receive him eternally, *no longer* as [just] a slave but as more than a slave, as a beloved brother [in Christ].' 'In the Lord' Onesimus is now Philemon's *brother*, and Paul's *child*" (Grothe 1988, 20). Grothe goes on, "If we are to appreciate these passages of St. Paul, we must recognize that for him the life-giving fatherhood of God is that which is primary and real and which, therefore, gives substance and meaning to the word 'father.' That is the word's true referent and therefore its 'literal' meaning. The use of the concept to describe human relationships is secondary, derived by way of comparison, and therefore 'metaphorical.'" (Grothe 1988, 22)

<sup>35</sup> As Paul has associated Onesimus as a brother with all other Christians (including Philemon) already, Nordling suggests that his use of "heart" here is to associate Onesimus with the "hearts of the saints" in Philemon's house (v. 7), whom Philemon himself has refreshed. (Nordling 2004, 239)

*ther, that St. Paul does also for Onesimus with Philemon.*<sup>36</sup>

Pastor Paul is speaking in the stead and by the command of Christ. Whoever hears him, hears Jesus.

### Pastors as Mothers

Perhaps surprisingly, some passages in the New Testament portray pastors as mothers. Thus, Paul writes in Galatians 4:18-19, “It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”

Paul’s allusion to motherhood is not a suggestion toward women’s ordination.<sup>37</sup> Rather, children of God are born by water and word, baptism and proclamation of the gospel, tasks of the holy ministry.<sup>38</sup> The development takes time, and so Paul labors and suffers that those chil-

<sup>36</sup> Nordling 2004, 232. The Luther quote may be found in edition LW 35:390.

<sup>37</sup> See Das, Andrew. *Galatians*. (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 142

<sup>38</sup> Commenting on Galatians 4:18, Luther writes, “Now the form of the Christian mind is faith, the trust of the heart, which takes hold of Christ, clings only to Him and to nothing else besides. A heart that is equipped with such confidence has the true form of Christ, which is provided by the ministry of the Word. 1 Cor. 4:15: ‘I became your father through the Gospel,’ namely, in the Spirit, so that you might know Christ and believe in Him; 2 Cor. 3:3: ‘You are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.’ For the Word proceeds from the mouth of the apostle and reaches the heart of the hearer; there the Holy Spirit is present and impresses that Word on the heart, so that it is heard. In this way every preacher is a parent, who produces and forms the true shape of the Christian mind through the ministry of the Word.” (LW 26:430)

dren may be born: “The physical and personal involvement, the work, the ‘pain’ and the ‘suffering’ of a mother as God’s privileged and chosen co-operating agent in the miraculous life-creating process of birth, is an expression—perhaps a stronger one than ‘I begot’—of the unparalleled closeness and intense involvement of the apostle in the new birth of his converts.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Paul stands in the stead of the Lord, who describes Himself as a mother in enduring labor pains as He waits for Judea’s deliverance (Is 42:14-17);<sup>40</sup> as Das notes, “Many of God’s servants can relate to a ‘labor intensive’ ministry full of suffering.”<sup>41</sup> Jerome draws this parallel between motherhood and the pastoral ministry: “Nor does the work end as soon as [the infant] emerges. This is but the beginning of a new labor, so that he may lead the infant, by diligent nourishment and study, up to the full maturity of Christ.”<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, “But we were gentle<sup>43</sup> among you, like a nursing mother

<sup>39</sup> Grothe, *Reclaiming Patterns*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Das, *Galatians*. 470. Das also explores the similarities of Galatians 4:19 and Isaiah 45:10 LXX.

<sup>41</sup> Das, *Galatians*. 471

<sup>42</sup> Edwards, Mark J., ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Vol. VIII. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 62, quoting Epistle to the Galatians 2.4.19

<sup>43</sup> Literally, “we were children” (ἐγενήθημεν νήπιοι), so Paul is using even more family language. In this case, because the Thessalonians are children in the faith, Paul teaches them at their level. Augustine compares him to “some eloquent father, though he be a great orator, thundering with his tongue and rattling the magistrates’ platforms, if he should have a son, when he returns home, he puts aside the legal eloquence by which he has ascended and with childish language he descends to his little one.” (Gorday 2000, 67, quoting Tractate on John 7.23.4.)

*Paul’s allusion to motherhood is not a suggestion toward women’s ordination. Rather, children of God are born by water and word, baptism and proclamation of the gospel, tasks of the holy ministry.*

taking care of her own children.” Paul’s love for the Thessalonians leads him tenderly to nurse the Thessalonians with the Word as a mother would nurse an infant with milk. He goes on in the next verse, writing, “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess 2:8). The language is both tender and maternal. A mother is able to share her own self with her child far more than a father: she lends her womb for nine months of development and nurses the child from her breasts. If need be, her body leeches calcium from her bones in service to the nursing child. Even if the father fetches a hungry baby at 2:30 in the morning, it is still the mother who must stay awake to provide the meal; perhaps this is also on Paul’s mind as he follows in verse nine that they have worked “night and day.”

Paul’s comparison to motherhood is apt: in describing a typical day in parish ministry, a pastor is far more likely to compare it to the sacrifice of a mother’s labor and childcare than a father’s work of begetting. For his part, Luther draws a very physical parallel between pastor and motherhood: “The breasts of the church are the teachers of the weak, whom they instruct with the milk of more pleasant doctrine.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> LW 10:219. Elsewhere, he writes, “But the breasts which give this milk and which the babes suck are the preachers in Christendom, as the groom says to the bride in Song of Sol. 4:5: ‘Your two breasts are like two fawns.’ They should have a bag of myrrh hanging around them, as the bride says in Song of Sol. 1:13: ‘My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts.’ This means that one must always preach Christ. The groom must constantly be between the breasts. Otherwise things are not as they

### Families Born of Flesh and Spirit

The Church is not an abstract. It is “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments administered according to the gospel.”<sup>45</sup> As each shard of a broken looking-glass is in itself a complete mirror that provides a full reflection, so the individual congregation is the Church in its location. Though there is only one bride of Christ, John writes to the “elect lady and her children” (2 Jn. 1) as he begins his second epistle, and he concludes the letter by including greetings from “the children of her elect sister” (2 John 13). As a local family is a branch of a greater tree, so it is with churches and the Church.

A congregation of saints will usually include a wide variety of men, women, and children of all ages. It will also include families born of flesh and related to one another by blood. Families born of flesh will overlap and intermingle with the family born of the Spirit. Thus, within the local family of the right-hand, there will also be families of the left-hand.<sup>46</sup>

Even where parishioners are not related by blood, the characteristics of left-hand families remain and ought to be respected. For instance, the young are to respect the elderly, for the latter have accrued wisdom (Job 12:12); though an elderly man may

should be. The milk is adulterated if anything but Christ is preached” (LW 30:49).

<sup>45</sup> CA VII:1, Kolb-Wengert, ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42.

<sup>46</sup> For further exploration, one might start with Luther’s discussion of the Fourth Commandment in the Large Catechism, where he writes of fathers in blood and fathers in office, as well as spiritual fathers (¶158-160).

not be one's biological father, he may still provide fatherly advice.

Before God in the family of the right-hand, a mother and brother and sister is one who does the Father's will (Matt 12:49-50), but in families of the left-hand, family members vary in age and sex. Paul sagely warns Timothy that, as pastor, he is to respect these differences: even though as pastor he is father, he is also a brother and a son. Paul writes, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Tim 5:1-2). Though *Pastor* Timothy is a right-hand father to the elderly of the congregation, he should treat them respectfully as left-hand fathers and mothers.<sup>47</sup> No matter the physical or sexual attraction of younger women, he is to treat them in all purity as a brother would defend the chastity of his sister. There is no room for lustful thinking: they are not just his sisters, but Christ's.

While we have focused upon the role of the pastor in the congregational family, the entire family is at work in service to one another. This is evident from the very beginning of the New Testament Church: "And all who believed were together and

had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

Following Paul's instructions to Timothy in verses 1-2, 1 Timothy 5:3-16 provides valuable insight into the life of a congregation in the discussion of the care of widows. Where widows have children or grandchildren, these are to care for her temporal needs. This is in keeping with the Fourth Commandment and pleases God (1 Tim 5:4), who has established the estates of church, marriage, and civil government. Thus, the one who does not provide for his relatives "has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8). A respect for these estates also frees the congregation to care for those who are truly widows: where she is "left all alone" (1 Tim 5:5) and has no left-hand family to provide for her temporal needs, her right-hand family then assumes that role (1 Tim 5:16).<sup>48</sup> Paul especially commends this task to believing women; even within the right-hand family, they are acting as mothers and daughters.

As she receives care from the congregation, a widow has also provided care within that family: "she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work" (1 Tim 5:10). In context, Uhlhorn asserts that the children here is in reference to "other and or-

*Though  
Pastor  
Timothy is  
a right-hand  
father to the  
elderly of the  
congregation,  
he should  
treat them  
respectfully  
as left-hand  
fathers and  
mothers.*

<sup>47</sup> Luther makes practical use of this text in an instance where a pastor has misused the pulpit for a personal attack on a city official. He writes to Pastor Nicholas Hausmann that a private rebuke of the man should take place before a congregational meeting: "Yet even if such a meeting were already arranged, such a scolding would not be right, since St. Paul says: 'Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as you would a father.' And Christ commands, in Matthew 18 [:15 ff.], that admonition in private should first take place. He who does not comply with this order is up to no good." (LW 49:163.)

<sup>48</sup> Thus Luther: "What was said about the estate of marriage, however, should also be applied to widows and unmarried women, for they also belong to the domestic sphere" (LW 37:365).



*The precedent is clear: where the left-hand family exists, it is to take the lead in providing for temporal needs. Where an individual believer has no left-hand family, the church family steps in and provides.*

phan children:"<sup>49</sup> in such a way the congregational family provides care for little ones who have no domestic household.

Within this framework, Paul's words regarding younger widows follow (1 Tim 5:11-14): if they are still of marriageable and childbearing age, they are to find their help within the estate of marriage and a left-hand husband, rather than continue to rely on temporal assistance from the church family. Their desire for domestic company apart from marriage is fraught with all sorts of temptations, leading to sin that would harm their faith and place a greater burden on the congregation.

The precedent is clear: where the left-hand family exists, it is to take the lead in providing for temporal needs. Where an individual believer has no left-hand family, the church family steps in and provides.

### **The Pastor's Families**

In considering the congregation as family, one other aspect must be addressed: the relationship between the pastor's left-hand family and the congregation.

In both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5-11, Paul lists criteria for pastors: for instance, "Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money" (1 Tim 3:2-3). Apart from the ministry, all of these are fine qualities for men in any vocation; however, they are

<sup>49</sup> Uhlhorn, Gerhard. *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*. (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 90.

especially necessary for the pastor who stands as surrogate husband and father, in the stead and by the command of Christ. In that respect, the requirement of "husband of one wife" especially teaches Christ's love for His singular bride, the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church.

Paul's next requirement is especially telling for our discussion: "He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" (1 Tim 3:4-5) Paul repeats the need for a well-managed household for deacons in verse 12, and thus aligns the pastor's left-hand and right-hand families in parallel: he is father and husband to both.

The requirement for a well-managed domestic household is not because a pastor's squirrely sons in worship will upset members or because his teenage daughter's out-of-wedlock pregnancy will rob him of moral high ground. Rather, a congregation can anticipate that the pastor will be a father to them with the same care and discipline that he exercises in his own household. If he permits debauchery and insubordination to go unchecked in his own household (Titus 1:6), he will also permit it in the congregation.<sup>50</sup> If he does not hold

<sup>50</sup> Pastors' children sometimes gain the reputation for acting out wildly and immorally in their teen and young adult years, and I have heard a psychologist suggest that this is because their fathers as pastors serve as exemplars of morality. I have heard it suggested by others that a pastor is disqualified from the ministry if his daughter becomes pregnant out of wedlock; however, what matters is how he addresses the situation should it occur. Does he rightly apply law and gospel to his own child? Does he call her to repentance or excuse the sin? Does he absolve

fast to the word, he will upset “whole families” (ὅλους οἴκους, Titus 1:11); and the οἶκος that he upsets can refer to either a domestic household (1 Tim 3:5, 12) or a congregation (1 Tim 3:15).

It is little wonder that the demands of both will often create tension between the pastor’s families, and both households need to abide by love and forgiveness, rather than jealousy and bitterness. Likewise, the pastor who neglects one family in favor of the other is deficient, and that deficiency could cost him one or both families.

### Concluding Implications

To return to Eberstadt’s illustration that church and family are “the invisible double-helix of society,” they are meant to be closer yet, a single strand. In a truly perfect, sinless world, the church and family are identical; without the fall into sin, every last member of every domestic family would be numbered among God’s people. The church is not a complement to the family: the church *is* the family, and families born of flesh are to reflect, and be part of, the family of God.

To put it another way, Christians should not just feel a fraternal affinity to other Christians or expect greater kindness from them, as if they were more *like* brothers and sisters than unbelievers. In fact, they *are* brothers and sisters as much as biological siblings, “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” in Christ (John 1:13). And as one might have diffi-

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her or hold the sin against her when she repents? His treatment of his own daughter will determine his treatment of similar situations within the congregation.

cult siblings in a natural family, so it will be in the congregation. The natural family is temporal, under the curse of sin. The family of God remains forever—not just in legacy, but every member of the family lives forever, joined to the crucified and risen Christ. And while the saints remain on earth, they tell the story of Christ and his church through their various vocations of husband, wife, parent, child, servant, and master.

Far from being simply a static truth, this reality ought to inform pastoral care. For one example the congregation is not a business or a community center, but a family. It is as unwise to impose a business paradigm upon a congregation as it would be to do so upon one’s natural family. Family is not one more template, as if the congregation were a formless thing that could be fit equally into a “family” or “business” or “outpost” paradigm: the form of a congregation is that it is the family of God in a location. Likewise, while the pastor’s duties will somewhat differ with the size and makeup of a congregation, his role is not interchangeable between “father” and “coach” and “coordinator.” As pastor, he is the surrogate father and husband who stands in the stead and by the command of Christ, and this reality will influence all that he does, from regular worship to weddings and funerals, from visitation to evangelism and education. For now, we leave these discussions to another time. ■

*Christians should not just feel a fraternal affinity to other Christians or expect greater kindness from them, as if they were more like brothers and sisters than unbelievers. In fact, they are brothers and sisters as much as biological siblings, “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” in Christ (John 1:13).*

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*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” (Eph 31-32)*

## Reflection

American Christians live in a sexually explicit society where marriage and the family structure are under attack. In fact, they are being intentionally undermined. Unhealthy, unnatural, and immoral sexual expressions widely promoted in our increasingly secularized society are beginning to erode personal values among Christians. But even more, family virtue is being lost. However, God’s creative act not only creates marriage and the family, He creates the congregations that make up the Holy Christian Church. And this Church is declared to be the bride of Christ. Pastor Pauls celebrates how this declaration allows fellow Christians to see in the congregation God’s creative act of the family and therefore rightly orient ourselves as a family and likewise act as family.

The mystery of marriage is not how men come from Mars and women from Venus. Rather it is how God has intricately and complementarily made male and female, for a union of body, mind, and spirit, intended for a permanent and exclusive commitment to one another while on earth, so that husband and wife may share that love with each other and even create new life together (family) through the miracle of the one flesh union.

Thus, at the heart of the family is marriage, which is an icon and image of our Triune God and His love for us, and points to the love that Christ, the bridegroom, has for His bride, the Church. As the family goes, so goes the Church. Pastor Pauls delightfully reminds us “the church is not a complement to the family: the church is the family, and families born of flesh are to reflect, and be part of, the family of God.”



Heavenly Father, in perfection You created Adam and Eve for one another and called them to be fruitful and multiply. We give You thanks for the gift of marriage and the blessing of family, asking that You continue to sustain Your divinely ordered family structure amid intense attacks. As You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be born of a woman and born into a family, give to us the confidence of the redemption He has won for all the descendants of Adam and Eve. In that confidence, we ask You to bestow Your Fatherly love upon Your Church and our families, giving to us the courage and grace to uphold, defend, and honor marriage and the family, even as we rest in the eternal affection of our bridegroom, Jesus Christ; through the same Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*- Pastor Lucas V. Woodford*

