"THIS IS A GREAT MYSTERY ...." (EPH 5:32)
The Concept of Family in the Bible

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Abstract

Marriage and the family were God's idea and divine covenant between one man and one woman, a lifelong union of two partners created in God's image to govern and manage the earth for him. Gen 1:26-27 and 5:1-3 emphasise that humankind is created as a community not as an individual; consequently it is not the individual but the community (family) who fully reflects the image and likeness of God. However the bible does not conceive any contradiction between individual and family. God designed it so that the man needs the woman and the woman needs the man (1 Cor 11:11). Both are equal persons and yet have distinct roles to fulfil. If sex is removed from the context of the marriage commitment, sex becomes a superfluous object of hedonism. Bible is of the opinion that God created marriage for a purpose bigger than itself: Marriage is a picture of the believer's relationship with God. Marriage is an earthly picture of the spiritual relationship that exists between Christ, the bridegroom, and the church, His bride. In this respect family life is a great mystery (Eph 5:23). Family must be the subject and object of evangelisation, liberation and humanisation.

Even though the biblical revelation is a familial issue, the reality of family is broader than the written form of the revelation unfolded in the pages of the Bible. The biblical narratives starts with the creation

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of first family of Adam and Eve and it ends in the Book of Revelation with narration of the heavenly family regained by the lamb that was slain and the heavenly feast is the nuptial celebration of the Lamb. Even though the biblical narratives *en masse* present the salient features of family life, there is a movement afoot to "redefine" marriage and family. Media and modern culture are pushing for same-sex marriage and the so-called normalization of homosexuality, divorce and co-habitation. Family in the modern era is most often defined as a mere political or social issue, rather than a moral or *biblical* issue. The contemporary culture is in a deep crisis regarding marriage and family today. While the crisis has important political, social, and economic ramifications, in the ultimate analysis only a spiritual return to the biblical foundations will address the root issue of the current crisis.

A number of anthropologists[1] of the last half of the nineteenth century, developed the theory that the original form of the family was one in which all the women of a group, horde, or tribe, belonged promiscuously to all the men of the community. Following Frederic Engels,[2] many socialist writers have adopted this theory.[3] However, this theory is rejected by scholars like Westermarck[4] and Letourneau. In reply to the arguments just stated, Westermarck and others point out that the hypothesis of primitive communism has by no means been proved, at least in its extreme form; that common property in goods does not necessarily lead to community of wives, since family and marriage relations are subject to other motives as well as to those of a purely economic character. The biblical narratives are presenting negative credential to the communist theory of marriage.

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[1]Johan Jakob Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht*, Stuttgart: Morgan, 1861; Bachofen, *Ancient Society*, London, 1877; John Mc'Lennan, *The Patriarchal Theory*, Lang: London, 1885; John Mc'Lennan, *Custom and Myth*, London, 1885; John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man*, London, 1889.

[2]Frederich Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, 1902, *Private Property, and the State*, tr. from the German, Chicago.

[3]The proponents of this theory hold on to the following arguments: the assumption that in primitive times all property was common, and that this condition naturally led to community of women; certain historical statements by ancient writers like Strabo, Herodotus, and Pliny; the practice of promiscuity, at a comparatively late date, by some uncivilized peoples, the system of tracing descent and kinship through the mother, and certain abnormal customs of ancient races, such as religious prostitution, the so-called *jus primæ noctis*, the lending of wives to visitors, cohabitation of the sexes before marriage, etc.

[4]Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, London, 1991.

Scriptural Etymology

Though the Jewish weddings conjure a variety of Hebrew words (*ahavah* - love, *shidukh* - matchmaking, *chatunah* - wedding, *chatan* - groom, *kalah* - bride), the terms *mishpachah* (hxpXm) and pamalia constitute the core of the meaning of the term family. Joshua 7:14-18 is the *locus classicus* of the OT usage of the terms regarding family. The word *mishpachah* (hxpXm) is derived from the root xpX meaning add, join together or attach. In the OT the word hxpXm appears over 300 times and means a nation, as in the phrases *mishpachot haamim* (the families of nations - Ps 96:7) and *mishpachot haadamah* (the families of the earth - Gen 12:3) or a group of people of the same profession as the family of scribes who lived in Jabez (1 Ch 2:55). The term pamalia entered the Hebrew in rabbinic times and is derived from the Latin *famul* or *famulus* meaning slave. The Hebrew language, which borrowed the term from the Latin, gave the word a twist in meaning, the *pamalia* (aylmp) is a group attached to one another with clear obligations in the meaning of an entourage.

In the New Testament, family is expressed by *patria* (patria - Lk 2:4; Ac 3:25; Eph 3:15) and was closely related to the household, which in turn was expressed by *oikos* (oikoj) or *oikia* (oikia) and once by *oiketeia* (oiketeia - cf oikeibj%; at times, both *patria* (patria), and the more usual *oikos* (oikoj) were used to refer to household in the New Testament. Within the New Testament, the constituent elements of the family would comprise at least four elements, as indicated also in attempts to translate the NT notion of family for our context today:[5]

1. Combined with its composition, structure, and purpose, the broader role which the ancients perceived households to have played within society is a distinguishing aspect between ancient and modern households: Greco-Roman households were multifunctional, in the sense that it was more than simply a domestic residence but also had specific political, economical and religious functions as well, not to mention its broader socio-cultural impact.

2. Within the Roman rule, only the marriage between two Roman citizens was counted legal (*matrimonium*). Even after the marriage the woman was under the custody (*manus*) of the father, and husbands

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[5]H. Moxnes, H., "What Is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. H Moxnes, 13-41, London, New York: Rutledge, 1997, 23-36.

had only partial rights over the wives. Marriages between the slaves were not legal so that they could be separated at any time through the selling of one partner.[6]

3. Families as households went beyond the boundaries of the nuclear family, and often included slaves, who could occupy different roles and positions in the household; in addition, other family members, associates through work or organisation.[7]

4. Role expectations differed widely from modern sensibilities, since children were not simply accepted into the household; once accepted, they were not only nurtured but had to play an active role in contributing to the household. The role of the head of the household, the *pater familias*, was powerful, managing the household and exercising authority over every single member of it.[8]

5. Wide spectrum of values was attached to family terminology, not common today, such as the connection that was often even if not exclusively made between children and economics.[9]

Can Bible Be Normative? Is Bible Anti-Familial?

In religious circles, but increasingly also in broader society, today a return to "traditional family values" is often proposed as the exclusive remedy for post-modern anxieties about a range of concerns: a sense of loss of identity and purpose, experiences of alienation, and concern with declining morals. Equally as often, the Bible and New Testament in particular is claimed in support of such values. However, we shall not be unaware of the reality that the modern biblical scholars *en masse* do not think that the sacred scripture provide normative and regulating principles or guidelines for determining the content and structure of "traditional" family values.

A great number of theologians[10] and sectarian groups of evangelical nature hold on the view that in Christian spirituality,

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[6]James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity*, New York: Intervarsity Press, 1999.

[7]For details see, M.Y. MacDonald, "Kinship and Family in the New Testament," *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, ed., Dietmar Neufeld, Richard E., New York: Routledge, 2010.

[8]Cicero, *De Officis*, 1.53.

[9]See C. Frilingos, "'For My Child, Onesimus:' Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119/1 (2000) 91-104, 93-97; S. Tsang, *From Slaves to Sons. A New Rhetoric Analysis on Paul's Slave Metaphors in His Letter the Galatians* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 81), New York: Lang, 2005, 23.

family is insignificant as the family concepts are demeaned in the Bible. Some scholars are of the opinion that references to the family and related concepts in the Bible are more useful for theologising than moralising, for understanding God's involvement in human lives than for human relationships.[11] The biblical notion of family is often questioned for its attempt to justify and keep on the unjust status-quo of slavery and biased gender consciousness. Emphasis on efficient households as the cornerstone of society ensured that the hierarchical framework of society, as the philosophical and political ideal of the time, remained firmly in place, complete with inter alia patriarchal marriage and slavery.[12] Moreover, they point out that Bible had a tendency to accentuate the rights of the city/nation over the family. Even before the time of Hellenistic and Roman empires, certain laws were considered to transcend those of polis and thus obligatory to obey. A powerful counter current to loyalty to the city was found in the laws of family, although those were generally interpreted to be a subset of laws of the city.[13] Scholars often observe that, with regard to the family, the modern church promotes four ideas that are unbiblical:

1. The modern church teaches that the preservation of the family is unquestioningly part of God's will. However, many of Jesus' teachings contradict this view (Mk 10:21; Mk 13:12). W.A. Meeks is of the opinion that in the gospel traditions, discipleship was preferred above family ties, and community cohesion above family integrity. The detachment which characterised the portrayal of Jesus and the disciples in the Gospels included their detachment from ties of place and family, which was no frivolous matter in a first-century rural culture, as both were determinative of identity.[14] C. Osiek went to the extent of affirming that no positive sayings about the goodness of the family were preserved or attributed to Jesus.[15]

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[10]For a detailed survey of these theologians see, Jeremy Punt, *Family in the New Testament, Social Location, Households and "Traditional Family Values,"* paper presented at the 10th UNISA Classics Colloquium on "Family as strategy in the Roman Empire / Early Christianity," Pretoria, 15-17, October 2009.

[11]J. A. Sanders, "The Family in the Bible," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 32/3 (2002) 117-28.

[12]C. Osiek, "Family Matters in Christian Origins," 201-220, in ed. R.A. Horsley, *A People's History of Christianity*, vol. 1, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005, 216-217.

[13]W.A. Meeks, 1986, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Library of Early Christianity), Philadelphia: Westminster, 19-39.

[14]Meeks, *Moral World of the First Christians*, 97-123.

[15]Osiek, *Family Matters*, 218.

2. It is often pointed out that to claim God's intention to use the family as a key building block for growing the church, is contradicted by many of the NT passages. For example, when Jesus was approached by his mother and brothers, Jesus doesn't even seem to acknowledge them and expresses little concern for their request to see him. Instead he states that his familial obligations fall to those who hear God's word and do it, and not to those who are family by blood (Mt 12:46; Mk 3:21, 31-35; Lk 8:19). Jesus is portrayed as taking an interest in and being sensitive to the family life of others, but at best seems to stand aloof from his own. While Jesus is portrayed as appreciative of religious requirements regarding the family (e.g. Mt 15:3-6/Mk 7:10-12), and sensitive to the needs of and longing for family life in an environment harsh towards the marginalised (e.g. Mt 9:18-26/Mk 5:21-43/Lk 8:40-56; Jn 4:46-53), his attitude towards his own family was hardly one characterised by enthusiasm (e.g. Lk 2:41-51; Mk 3:31-35) except in the end for one portrayal of his death which is characterised by concern for his family (Jn 19:25-27).[16] The conclusion that many theologians draw from these passages is that from Jesus' perspective believers have little or no obligation to our natural family members who aren't truly his disciples.

3. The Church is of the opinion that Bible identifies the family as the ideal environment for spiritual growth. However, many scholars have argued that it is not the case always (Lk 21:6). Far from contributing to the spiritual development of the believer, the family often acts in opposition or as an obstacle to God's will for the individual. The gospels' suggestion that Jesus anticipated the dissolving of family bonds (cf Mt 10:35-36/Lk 12:53), taking his cue from Micah 7:6, implied the disruption of the household for the sake of the gospel. Jesus re-envisioned the composition and function of household, its social place and social roles, referring to his followers in household terms, as brother, sister and mother, but not as father or wife and thus without notions of authority, procreation or patriarchy.[17]

4. The modern church teaches that the believer's responsibility to their family is a fundamental aspect of their following

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[16]Osiek, *Family Matters*, 2-6.

[17]D.B. Martin, "Family Idolatry and the Christian Case against Marriage," in *Authorizing Marriage? Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions*, ed., MD Jordan, MT Sweeney and DM Mellott, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 17-40.

Christ. However, Bible at times warns us that family can distract us from our devotion and pursuit of Christ. Jesus' clear command is that his followers cannot be distracted from their devotion to him because of family concerns (Mt 4:21; Mk 1:19; Lk 9:59; 14:26).

5. Again, the ecclesial emphasis on procreation and rearing of children, according to some scholars, is against the heart of the biblical teaching. Though God is not against believers having children, Paul's language regarding the distraction of marriage (1 Cor 7:28-35) would also apply to child rearing. Taken together many of the NT passages (Mk 13:17; Lk 21:23) show that we cannot simply assume that God's will is always in favour of our having children. Rather, it seems that God wants us be mindful of our circumstances, wisely and prayerfully considering how having children may affect our walk with God.

However, these arguments are far from convincing, as they presuppose a hypothetical and imaginary tension between salvation and family life. The central theme of biblical religious life is that of sanctity: "For you shall be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). In other words, sanctification is the actual reason for the very existence of the People of God. It is thus not without significance that the Hebrew word for Jewish marriage (*Kiddushin*) means "holiness or sanctification". Not only is the relationship of marital commitment itself seen as holy — indeed it is seen as the ideal state of adult life — but the family as the central institution and focus of Jewish life, is the key to the realization of the people's *raison d'être*, to be "a holy nation." Not without portent then, it is the extension of the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — known as the children of Israel — that becomes the nation. Indeed the nation is the sum total of its families.

The most important external relations of the family are, of course, those existing between it and the State. According to the Christian conception, the family, rather than the individual, is the social unit and the basis of civil society. To say that the family is the social unit is not to imply that it is the end to which the individual is a means; for the welfare of the individual is the end, both of the family and of the state, as well as of every other social organization. The meaning is that the State is formally concerned with the family as such, and not merely with the individual. This distinction is of great practical importance; for where the State ignores or neglects the family,

keeping in view only the welfare of the individual, the result is a strong tendency towards the disintegration of the former.

The OT Basics of Family

The Bible defines "family" in a narrow sense as *the union of one man and one woman in matrimony which is normally blessed with natural or adopted children*. After the creation of man and woman (Gen 2:18, 20), the inspired writer remarks, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This verse sets forth the biblical pattern as it was instituted by God at the beginning: one man is united to one woman in matrimony, and the two form one new natural family. In this regard, "become one flesh" not only refers to the establishment of one new family but also to the husband and wife's sexual union leading to the procreation of offspring. This command in *J docmnt*, in turn, is in keeping with God's original command to the first human couple in the *P document* to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion" over all of creation (Gen 1:28).

These aspects of marriage — the complementarity of male and female, and the irreplaceable role of male-female relations in reproducing the human race — are part of the original order of creation, and are evident to all human beings from the enduring order of nature.

• The initial creation of the human being singly — as opposed to all other creatures that are created in pairs at the outset — is itself understood in Jewish Tradition, to have moral purpose: namely, to teach that every human being is unique — a whole world in him/herself; and at the same time, that we are all descendants from the same one common ancestry (*Mishnah, Sanhedrin*, 4.5). However the essential purpose of the narrative in describing the separation of the female part, to create two separate human persons, is not just physical, but above all moral. In the Midrash, Pirke de Rebi Eliezer it states, that the reason it is not good for man to be alone is "Lest it be thought that God is one alone in Heaven and man is one alone on earth" (see also *B.Ketubot* 63). Mutual dependency is of essential moral value in preventing the dangers of arrogance - even self idolatry - and the delusion of self-sufficiency. The scripture is of the opinion that conjugal/familial complemetarity is that which singles out human beings from God.

• The Rabbinic tradition went to the extent of affirming that it is only in marital union that human beings represent the image of God,

it is only male and female together that make up "Adam," the complete human being, created in the Divine Image. For example, Rabbi Jacob in the *Midrash Rabba on Genesis* 17:2, says "He who has no wife, lives without good, help, blessing, or atonement; and Rabbi Joshua of Sakhnin in the name of Rabbi Levi added 'he is also without (real) life.' Rabbi Hiya the son of Gamada says 'he is not a complete man' as he diminishes the Divine Image!"

• John Paul II in *Familiaris consortio* argues that Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being "created in the image of God" (no. 11).

• In *Mullieris Dignitatem* John Paul II observes that the two creation narratives in the Bible are pointing towards the essential principles of Christian family life. The first narration states that, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). This concise passage contains the fundamental anthropological truths: wo/man is the highpoint of the whole order of creation in the visible world; the human race, which takes its origin from the calling into existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation; *both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree,* both are created *in God's image.* The individuality and integrity of human – being is expressed in the first description. The image and likeness of God, which is essential for the human being, is passed on by the man and woman, as spouses and parents, to their descendants: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). The second narration in Gen 2:18-25, the woman is created by God "from the rib" of the man and is placed at his side as another "I", as the companion of the man, who is alone in the surrounding world of living creatures and who finds in none of them a "helper" suitable for himself. Called into existence in this way, the woman is immediately recognized by the man as "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones" (cf. Gen 2:23) and for this very reason she is called "woman". In biblical language this name indicates her essential identity with regard to man — 'is-'issah - something which unfortunately modern languages in general are unable to express: "She shall be called woman ('issah) because she was taken out of man ('is)": Gen 2:23.

Marriage: Contract or Covenant/ Autonomy or Heteronomy?

According to the biblical traditions marriage and the family are not viewed as social contract that can be entered into and severed by the marital partners at will. Within the contract-vision of marriage what is exclusively safeguarded is the most cherished principles of independent-minded, freedom-worshipping, individual rights-exalting culture. If one or both marriage partners want to get out of the marriage, nothing should hold them back, or else the culture's supreme values — individual choice and libertarian freedom — are not given their due.

By contrast, the Bible makes clear that, at the root, marriage and the family are not human contracts based merely on a temporary consensus and time-honoured tradition. Instead, Scripture teaches that family was God's idea and that marriage is a divine, not merely human, institution. The implication of this truth is significant indeed, for this means that humans are not free to renegotiate or redefine marriage and the family in any way they choose but that they are called to preserve and respect what has been divinely instituted (Mt 19:6). For this reason, marriage is far more than a human social contract; it is a divinely instituted covenant.

But what is a "covenant"? In essence, a covenant is a contract between two parties that is established before God as a witness, a contract whose permanence is ultimately safeguarded by none other than God himself. In this sense, marriage is a covenant: it is entered into by the husband and the wife before God as a witness. Because it is ultimately *God* who has joined the marriage partners together, the husband and the wife vow to each other abiding loyalty and fidelity "till death do us part." Rightly understood, therefore, a marriage entered into before God involves three persons: a husband, a wife, and God. After the example of holy trinity, marriage is described as a triangle with God at the top: the closer each partner moves to God, the closer they move toward each other.

For this reason, it is not self-interest, human advantage, or an unfettered commitment to personal freedom that governs the marriage relationship, but the husband and wife's joint commitment to conduct their marriage based on God's design and sovereign plan. God's plan for the marriage covenant involves at least the following five vital principles:

1. *The permanence of marriage*: Marriage is intended to be permanent, since it was established by God (Mt 19:6; Mk 10:9). Marriage

represents a serious commitment that should not be entered into lightly or unadvisedly. It involves a solemn promise or pledge, not merely to one's marriage partner, but before God.

2. *The sacredness of marriage*: Marriage is not merely a human agreement between two consenting individuals (a "civil union"); it is a relationship before and under God (Gen 2:22). Hence, a "same-sex marriage" is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Since Scripture universally condemns homosexual relationships God will never sanction a marital bond between two members of the same sex.

3. *The intimacy of marriage*: Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships, uniting a man and a woman in a "one-flesh" union (Gen 2:23 -25). Marriage involves "leaving" one's family of origin and "being united" to one's spouse, which signifies the establishment of a new family unit distinct from the two originating families. While "one flesh" suggests sexual intercourse and normally procreation, at its very heart the concept entails the establishment of a new kinship relationship between two previously unrelated individuals (and families) by the most intimate of human bonds.

4. *The mutuality of marriage*: Marriage is a relationship of free self-giving of one human being to another (Eph 5:25-30). The marriage partners are to be first and foremost concerned about the wellbeing of the other person and to be committed to each other in steadfast love and devotion. This involves the need for forgiveness and restoration of the relationship in the case of sin (Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18).

5. *The exclusiveness of marriage*: Marriage is not only permanent, sacred, intimate, and mutual; it is also exclusive (Gen 2:22-25; 1 Cor 7:2-5). This means that no other human relationship must interfere with the marriage commitment between husband and wife. For this reason, Jesus treated sexual immorality of a married person, including even a husband's lustful thoughts, with utmost seriousness (Mt 5:28; 19:9). For the same reason, premarital sex is also illegitimate, since it violates the exclusive claims of one's future spouse.

6. *The OT Laws Concerning the Family*: The biblical laws, by and large, were intended to safeguard the integrity of family life. The following are some of the examples.

❖ As the alienation of the ancestral property was a major threat to the family, the laws safeguarded the continuous possession of the patrimonial property (Lev 25:25-28). Even the tribal interchange of the property was prohibited (Num 36:7-9).

❖ Property must be transferred from parents to the children with a double share to the eldest son (Dt 21:15-17). The daughters could also inherit the property, provided they shall not marry from other tribes (Num 27:8-9). In case of barrenness, the property will reach to the immediate relatives (Num 27:9-11).

❖ The Levirate law was also intended to safeguard the integrity of the family (Dt 25:5-10).

❖ Although androcentric it appears, the divorce laws were implemented in view of protecting the rights of the vulnerable in the family (Dt 24:1-2; Cf. 22:13-24).

❖ Regulations for the sabbatical year and jubilee year were implemented with the intention of retaining the original integrity of the family (Ex 21:2-6; Lev 25; Dt 15:1-12).

❖ The responsibility of the children to obey their parents and protect them in their old age was bound by law (Ex 20:12; Sir 31:1-16). The laws regarding a rebellious son accentuates the significance of the law (Dt 21:18-21).

Sin: The Paradise Loss of Family

God's creation of man and woman was the moment of his institution of marriage. This happened prior to the human fall; hence marriage is the solitary sacrament hailing from the paradise. Any study of biblical history shows, humanity's rebellion against the Creator's purpose led to at least the following five negative consequences: polygamy, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, and sterility. It is significant to observe that these marital failures are equated with idolatry, the denial of the first commandment.

❖ The first shortcoming, *polygamy* — marrying multiple wives — violates God's instituted pattern of marital monogamy, as envisioned in Gen 2:18-25. Yet within six generations after the fall of humanity, Lamech took two wives (Gen 4:19). Later, prominent men in Israel's history such as Abraham, Esau, Jacob, Gideon, Elkanah, David, Solomon, and others engaged in polygamy and resulted in disruptive favouritism, jealousy between competing wives, and decline into idolatry.

❖ The second human compromise of God's ideal for marriage was *divorce*, which disrupted the permanence of marriage. While divorce became so common that it had to be regulated in the Mosaic code (Dt 24:1-4), the Bible makes clear that God hates divorce (Mal

2:16). Divorce is also used repeatedly as an analogy for spiritual apostasy (Is 50:1; Jer 3:8). The conservative school of Shammai allowed for divorce in cases of immodest behaviour or sexual immorality. The more moderate school of Hillel allowed divorce in any instance where a wife had done something displeasing to her husband. It appears that this more permissive interpretation held sway among most of Jesus' contemporaries (see Mt 19:3). There are only two (or possibly three) biblically sanctioned instances of divorce: (1) sexual marital unfaithfulness (i.e. adultery or incest — *pornea*); and (2) the Pauline privilege — the unbelieving spouse's refusal to continue the marriage after the conversion of the other partner. In addition, marital separation (though not necessarily divorce) may be needed in cases of persistent physical spousal abuse, as in the case of Hagar.

❖ A third shortcoming was *adultery*, the breaking of one's marriage vows. The Decalogue stipulates explicitly, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18; see also 2 Sam 11). The Book of Proverbs calls adultery both foolish and dangerous (Prov 2:16-19; 5:3-22; 6:32-33; 7:5-23; 9:13-18). In the Old Testament, adultery is frequently used as an analogy to depict the spiritual unfaithfulness of God's people Israel (Jer 3:8-9; Ez 16:32, 38; Hos 1:1-3:5).

❖ *Homosexuality* is a falling away from God's creation purposes as it violates the divine will for marriage to be between one man and one woman. Heterosexuality is the only possible arrangement for marriage (Gen 1:28). Homosexuality is outside of God's order for life. He did not bring "Adam and Steve" together in the Garden, but Adam and Eve. His pattern is (and always will be) one man, one woman, married for life. God is not "anti-gay," he is "anti-sin," no matter how it is expressed. He also loves all people, and wants them to come to repentance and enter into relationship with Himself. The Bible does not give an ambiguous statement on this topic (1 Cor 6:9-10; Rom 1:22-27). There is no confusion on this issue, unless our confusion is with the Bible itself.

❖ A fifth shortcoming of God's ideal for marriage is *sterility*, which falls short of the fertility desired by the Creator, caused either due to personal sin (Gen 20:17-18; 2 Sam 6:23), or as the result of the fallen nature (Gen 11:30; 25:21; 30:1; 1 Sam 1:2). However, God is often shown to answer prayers for fertility offered by his people in faith (e.g. 1 Sam 1:9-20).

Biblical Sexual Ethics

The biblical sexual ethics is derived from a faith perspective. Just as Joseph asked to the wife of Potifar, "How could I do this wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God" (Gen 39:6-15). The following four ethical stances are often observed at the background of biblical sexual narratives.[18]

➤ The classical Christian stance on sexual ethics as envisioned in the Bible is derived from two principles: purity before marriage and fidelity within marriage. Both these principles are intended to safeguard the sanctity of the marriage. The commands like "you shall not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14; Prov 6:32; Mt 5:27-28; Jas 2:11), "abstain from fornication" (Acts 15:20; 1 Cor 10:8) are intended to this end. According to the biblical understanding of sexual morality, sexual intercourse outside the marital bond is an intrinsic evil whereas the sexual act within the marital bond is a moral good. More recently Daniel Heimbach had developed another approach in *principle ethical approach* of biblical morality. He argues, "the true biblical morality of sex is all the more to keep the sex holy. According to God, good sex is holy sex, and sex to be holy it must consistent with God plus nothing."[19] From this fundamental biblical principle, he derives seven other principles of sexual morality as well: personal, intimate, exclusive, fruitful, selfless, complex and complementary. The Catholic moral theologians prefer to translate biblical sexual ethics in terms of natural law. The divine will regarding the sexual act is reflected in the nature as to impart love and generate new life. These goals are attained in purity only within the nuptial covenant of marriage. Consequently as marriage is natural it is morally good, whereas fornication is against the nature, it is intrinsically evil.

➤ There is a growing tendency among the biblical sexual ethicists to redefine topic in terms of responsible love. Placing love at the centre of ethics is obviously biblical as the proponents of this movement argue, "love does no harm to another, If I am seeking to love another person, I can best begin by trying not to do any harm to the person."[20] Any sexual act that causes physical, psychological, spiritual or relational harm to the other is sinful.

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[18]Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009, 23-93.

[19]Daniel Heimbach, 29-30. 14n

[20]Hollinger, *Meaning of Sex*, 32.

➢ Justice is also suggested as the governing principle of biblical sexual ethics. Farley, for example, argues on the basis of the Sacred Scripture that personhood, namely autonomy and relationality are the guiding principles of the biblical morality. "Persons are ends in themselves, because they are autonomous in the sense that they have a capacity for free choice... which means a capacity to choose not only our own actions but also our ends and loves. Relationality means being related to the others as ends in themselves.[21] Mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness, social justice and causing zero harm to the other are the principles of justice based sexual ethics.

➢ The Aristotalian virtue/character ethics are also traced at the backdrop of biblical sexual ethics. According to this view what really impacts moral decisions are deeply ingrained virtues which shape our being. That is to say, ethics is not more about what we do, but about who we are. Stanley Hauerwas, one of chief proponents of narrative ethics, argues that the biblical sexual narrative world is influenced by two frameworks which in modern terminology could be called realism and romanticism. Realism approaches sex merely as any other natural human need forgetting about its glory and evil, whereas romanticism had tried to mystify the sexual act absolutising the principle of love. The ecclesial narrative derived from the Scripture and lived in the Church helps the believer in discerning his sexual character. Accordingly the issue is not whether a particular act is permitted or not rather "the narrative we provide for ourselves sexually forms a character ready to sustain a common history God may call us to develop with another."[22]

The Eschatological Restoration of God's Original Design for Family

The eschatological meaning of the family can be understood only in association with the relationship between the church and the family envisioned in the NT. From the very practical perspective that the initial gatherings of the followers of Jesus took place in a house, within a household,[23] the association between household and church

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[21]Hollinger, *Meaning of Sex*, 37.

[22]Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994, 46, 47.

[23]It should be remembered that it was not always a household as a whole but sometimes only individuals that joined a community of Jesus followers; cf. Crispus and Gaius (1 Cor 1:14-16; cf 1 Cor 7:12-16, 1 Pt 2:18-3:16 for the possibility that women, even wives, and other dependants could make their own decisions; cf C. Osiek, "The Family in Early Christianity: 'Family Values' Revisited," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 58/1 (1996) 1-24, 14-15.

is rather obvious. Then there is also the link with the OT where the faithful of God became known as the household of God. And in a context where believers were described as adopted sons (Rom 8:15-17) or as servants and stewards (1 Pt 4:10), the description of the church as household of God (e.g. Eph 2:19) or household of faith (Gal 6:10) is hardly surprising. The prominence of and many references to the household in the NT testifies to its importance in the growth and stability of early Christians.

The nuptial imageries of the Bible, especially in the eschatological context are numerous:

1. The nation Israel is Yahweh's bride; God the Father is Israel's husband (Jer 3:1,14). Unlike the pagan practice of deeming the capital city as the wife of the patron deity with name daughter (tb) or virgin (hlwtb), Israel as a whole was counted as the wife of Yahweh. Israel's idolatry is compared to harlotry (Jer 3:8) and she is divorced (Jer 3:14-20; Isa 54:1).

2. The Sinaitic covenant was a marital bond between God and Israel. The command "to consecrate and sanctify the people for the next day and the following day" in Num 12:8; Ex 19:10 could be interpreted as the preparation for betrothal. The Hebrew word for "consecrate" (vwdq) is used to designate the official betrothal as well (Cant 3:11).[24] The new covenant that Yahweh is going to establish between him and Israel is also marital covenant (Jer 31:31-33).

3. Even though Israel proved to be an unfaithful wife which God put away by divorce, He promises to remain faithful to her in His relationship as husband. Moreover, in order to divorce her, she had to first be married (Hos 2:2, 7, 16, 19-20).

4. Ez 16 is a classical example of God marrying Judah. This marital covenant represents God's ongoing love for his people (Isa 61:10; 62:15; Mal 2:14).

5. Song of Songs is interpreted as an allegory that sings the romantic love between Yahweh and Israel in the salvation history.

The use of the nuptial imageries in the OT is derived from the notion of the covenant in the OT. The Jews being champions of monotheism began to doubt that Yahweh is only a warrior God and for the fertility of the nature and humans they need other gods. As fertility arises due to the mingling of the male and female, Yahweh

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[23]Richard A. Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery*, Leiden: Brill, 1971, 13-14.

[24]For details see, Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery*, 9-11.

the single Godhead was counted as an unfitting candidate for procreation. Consequently, syncretism and idolatry intruded into Israel. The advent of the messianic era as well as the kingdom of God in the NT is presented through the frequent presence of the Messiah at wedding feasts (Mt 22:1-14; 25:1-11).

6. The forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist is presented as the companion of the bridegroom, the Messiah (Jn 3:29; Cf. Mk 2:18-20 and par.).

7. Heavenly bliss is frequently compared to the nuptial banquet of the Lamb that is slaughtered (Rev 19:7; 21:9; 22:17). Within the nuptial structure of the Book of Revelation, it is often divided into two parts: 1:3-4:22 (the bride groom's loving exhortation to the bride); 4:1-22:21 (Brides awaiting and preparation for marriage).[25]

8. Paul presents the Christian life in nuptial imageries. The believers here upon the earth are betrothed (αρμοζω) to Christ to present them as a pure bride (παρθενος) at parousia (2 Cor 11:2-3). Compromising loyalty to Christ would violate the status of the believers as a pure bride. The present life is presented as an intermediary period (*zwischen den Zeiten*) between betrothal and marriage.

9. If Christ is the second Adam, one can reasonably argue that Church is the second Eve.[26]

10. The nuptial covenant between Christ and the church is celebrated in every sacrament of marriage (Eph 5:22-33).

11. Christ the bride groom had gained the church by paying an unbeatable price (*mohar*) for his bride. The price was his own blood and life (1 Cor 6:20; 7:21; 1 Pt 1:18-19; Heb 10:10, 14).

12. Christian way of living that is free from the Jewish law is compared to a woman who is free of the bondage of marital obligation (Rom 7:1-6).

The NT teaches that the restoration of God's original design for marriage in Christ is part of God's realignment of all things under Christ's authority and lordship. In the book of Ephesians, we read that it is God's purpose "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph 1:10). Thus marriage is not an end in itself but part of God's end-time restoration of all things

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[25]Johns Varghese, *The Imagery of Love in the Gospel of John* (Analecta Biblica, 177), Rome: Gregoriana, 2009, 54-59.

in the person of Jesus Christ. Part of this restoration is that all evil powers are brought under control and are submitted to the supreme authority of Christ (Eph 1:21-22). It is in the same sense that the gospel traditions emphasise the significance of faith over the family relationships (Mt 4:21; 10:34; Lk 9:59; 12:51-53; 14:26). Later on in the same letter, Paul addresses the subject of marriage in general, and marital roles in particular, within the larger context of believers needing to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:21-28).

Celibacy/Singleness is not Opposite to Family Life

Marriage was the overwhelming norm in OT times, in keeping with the foundational creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2. Consequently, singleness and the unmarried state were rare and were limited to widows, eunuchs, those who could not marry due to diseases such as leprosy or severe economic difficulties. However, the NT gives a somewhat different picture as its major figures such as John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, and Timothy were unmarried. Jesus spoke favourably about "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:12), and Paul even called celibacy a "gift from God" (1 Cor 7:7). He further suggested that married people's interests were divided while the unmarried could devote themselves wholly to the Lord (1 Cor 7:32-35). Jesus taught that in the eternal state, there will be no more marriage, but all will be "like angels in heaven" (Mt 22:29-30). Thus we see in the sweep of biblical history a trend from marriage as the norm to a marriage-less state in heaven where the only "marriage" will be that of Jesus, the heavenly bridegroom, to the church as his spiritual "bride." Consequently we can conclude that the celibates and the singles for the sake of the kingdom are also married as they partake in the marriage between Jesus and the church.

Family as the Cradle of Values

The purpose of family is both to nurture the values of Tradition and above all to transmit the commitment for these to the next generation. The primary value was to foster the attitude of honour to the parents. For example the Babylonian Talmud (*Kiddushin* 31 b) tells of Rabbi Tarfon who would bend down so his Mother could use him as a footstool to get onto her bed. That Talmudic text also refers to Rabbi Joseph who, when he heard his Mother's footsteps as she approached, would declare "I rise before the Divine Presence which

is approaching" (see also, Jerusalem Talmud *Kiddushin*, 1.7). Furthermore the Fourth declaration of the Decalogue is the very connection between the commandments concerning our relationship with God and the commandments concerning relations between one person and another.

Children are given two primary responsibilities in the family: to obey their parents and to honour them (Eph 6:1-3). The 4th Commandment is the first commandment that relates to humans (20:12). The first three are vertical and are toward God but the next seven are horizontal and directed toward others. Family is the foundation of any nation and people and when the institution of the family starts to crumble, so does the foundation of the nation. The 4thCommandment is the only one with a promise, the promise of a long life for the children that honour their parents. This command is unconditional and it does not give a time limit to which it expires (Ps 1:8-9). 1 Tim 5:8 (But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever) may sound like its talking only about food, shelter, and money but here a father is presented like the priest of the family and when he is spiritually and morally bankrupt, the family truly suffers. If a father doesn't provide all these things for his family, God says that he is worse than an unbeliever. This man that does not provide for his family has denied the faith in the sense that he has no evidence of being a Christian. It is almost like denying Christ Himself.

Bible insists on the need of faith formation of the children in the family. Prov 22:6 (*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it*) points out that what the children learned at home will not depart from their minds. The purpose of this educational emphasis has already been noted. While respectful and loving relationships are both the foundation and purpose of family, the Jewish family has a holy purpose beyond itself and even beyond the social realm. Its purpose is to sanctify, through living God's Word and Way, all aspects of life. Accordingly as mentioned, the family is the central institution of Jewish life around which daily, weekly and annual religious observance revolves. For example, the Dietary Laws, the Sabbath, the Festivals, as major components of religious formation of the individual, focus overwhelmingly on the home and around the family table.

Concluding Remarks

From the above discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn,

1. Marriage and the family were God's idea and divine covenant between one man and one woman, a lifelong union of two partners created in God's image to govern and manage the earth for him.

2. Gn 1:26-27 and 5:1-3 emphasise humankind is created as a community not as an individual; consequently it is not the individual but the community (family) who fully reflects the image and likeness of God. However, the bible does not conceive any contradiction between individual and family.

3. God created Adam as "a helper suitable for him" (2:18). There is no basis for the view that men are superior to women. God made the woman to be a helper "suitable for" (lit. = "corresponding to") the man. God designed it so that the man needs the woman and the woman needs the man (see 1 Cor 11:11). Both are equal persons and yet have distinct roles to fulfil.

4. If sex is removed from the context of the marriage commitment, sex becomes superfluous object of hedonism.

5. Sin always hinders intimacy, even in marriage. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they recognized their nakedness and began to hide themselves, not only from God, but also from one another. Family life cannot be rectified without rectifying the integral dimensions of spiritual life.

6. Bible opens the narrative with an esteemed positive note on family (Gen 2:18-25), however the sin disfigured the divine economy of family and its climactic presentation is the cosmic baptism of deluge resulted in the survival of one single family, that of Noah whose descendents include the patriarchs. It shows that divine economy was revealed never outside the family framework.

7. The Bible says that God created marriage for a purpose bigger than itself: Marriage is a picture of the believer's relationship with God. Marriage is an earthly picture of the spiritual relationship that exists between Christ, the bridegroom, and the church, His bride.

8. Family must be the subject and object of evangelisation, liberation and humanisation.