

A common phrase that is used when referring to family and relationships goes, "Blood is thicker than water." This usually means that the bonds of family and common ancestry are stronger than the bonds between unrelated people (such as friendship). When considering the concept of family, one's experience strongly affects the image that is conjured. For many Americans, family refers to a nuclear grouping of parents and children; whereas for most other parts of the world the idea of family extends to far-reaching relatives, cousins of uncles through marriage. What difference does one's perception and definition of "family" have on the way one's life is lived? Is there a difference in the way a Christian Worldview would influence one's perception and experience of family?

The basis of an American view of family as more individuated and nuclear than the rest of the world finds its origin in the Enlightenment, when the views of family and marriage began to shift. "The meaning of life came to be seen as the fruit of the freedom of the individual to choose the life that most fulfills him or her personally. Instead of finding meaning through self-denial, through giving up one's freedoms, and binding oneself to the duties of marriage and family, marriage was redefined as finding emotional and sexual fulfillment and self-actualization. ...In short, the Enlightenment privatized marriage, taking it out of the public sphere, and redefined its purpose as individual gratification, not any "broader good" such as reflecting God's nature, producing character, or raising children" (Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 28).

Dinesh D'Souza, in his book *What's So Great About Christianity?*, reminds us of the change Christianity brought to the understanding and definition of marriage and family when he says, "Today we take it for granted that the family is the institution entrusted with the care and rearing of children. Incredible as it seems, the family was not very important in ancient Greece. In fact, Plato proposed an abolition of marriage and the family, envisioning a republic in which the whole business of procreation and care of the young was turned over to the state" (57). If that is not the purpose, what is? How does the Bible view marriage and family?

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, is discussing the life of a believer in one's practical and daily walk in chapters four through six and opens chapter five with this thesis statement: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (vv. 1-2). He follows this thesis with specifics in relation to home life in verses 22 through 6:4, in which he summarizes with "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. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (5:31-6:1). Here we have listed the members of one's nuclear family with specific instructions as to how we ought to relate. Our function as a believing family is to reflect the mystery of the relationship of Christ and the church with children growing and learning within this protected environment, coming to see and understand Christ and His love for them because of their exposure to the love of their father for their mother.

But for Christians, Jesus Christ presents a wrinkle in our neat definition of family and devotion to this family as defined in nuclear blood relationships. In Matthew 19, Peter asks Jesus about the rewards in

the kingdom for leaving all follow Jesus and Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you , in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (vv.28-29). In Luke 14:26-27 Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Then, in Mark 3:31-35, when Jesus is teaching and his mother and brothers come to see Him, Jesus says, “‘Who are my mother and brothers?’ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.’”

With these pronouncements, and even throughout the rest of the New Testament, the family is encouraged as a unit through which the Gospel is proclaimed throughout a community and the world, but the purpose of God’s creation of marriage and family is not for the propagation of the family itself, but for the representation of relationship with God in His family. The basis of family that Christ has created through the shedding of His blood and the sanctification, justification, and ultimate glorification that sacrifice provides is our adoption as sons into His family! John Piper, in *This Momentary Marriage*, states, “In the true people of God formed by Jesus Christ, monuments, names, offspring, and inheritance do not arise through marriage and procreation. ...the true people of God - will be produced not by physical procreation but by spiritual regeneration” (110).

For a Christian, blood is thicker than water; but the blood is not our own, it is Christ’s blood and its ability to allow us entrance into God’s family that producing a lasting bond.