

The significance of the family

Introduction

Recently, Alistair Begg launched an ecclesiastical firestorm when he gave pastoral advice to a confused grandmother. This lady had witnessed to her beloved granddaughter to no avail. The grandmother was then invited to the transgender wedding of her granddaughter – should she attend? Begg, with caveats, said that she should. The grandmother did so and gave the couple a Bible as a wedding present.

Begg was then attacked from all sides from virulent Christians who insisted that the grandmother should not have attended. They were especially angry since Begg had been a testimony to good church leadership for decades. Begg then doubled-down in an explanation of his position delivered in a sermon to his church, which was well received by the congregation. He gave the Biblical background to his decision. This provoked even more fury from claimed Biblical commentators.

Now I did get asked about this and entered into some correspondence. However, I am not going to give my full opinion here as that may sway reader's thought processes. I want readers to figure this out for themselves by understanding the relevant truths. This is what this paper seeks to supply.

The family is God's gift

The principle of the family originates in God. God understood the nature of man, especially loneliness, and placed people into family units from the beginning.

God sets the solitary in families. Ps 68:6

Before the Mosaic Law the family was the unit of divine worship. The father, the head of the family, was a priest unto God (Exod 19:22-24). The father offered sacrifices to God (Gen 8:20, 12:7, 13:4, 22:3; Job 1:5). As the family grew into a clan, the father retained the position of priest and even prophet. Thus the tradition of the head of the clan blessing all his heritage with prophecies (e.g. Jacob / Israel; Gen chap. 48-49). In essence, the extended family was originally a church until the law was given at Sinai and the law of the Tabernacle established with the priesthood being Aaronic.

Before the rebellion of Israel in demanding a king like the heathen nations, the father of a clan also acted like a king as prosperous families had servants. Authority was decentralised. Thus Abraham (Abram) gathered his clan of over 300 to wage war against the four heathen kings to rescue his family (Gen 14).

So a father originally was a type of Christ as prophet, priest and king, reigning over his family for good. Before the idea of a nation with separate kings, priests and prophets (Moses was the closest to being all three) it was the family that modelled these offices.

God is interested in family life as a testimony to the community of the Godhead. This is why the church is meant to be a family and never a formal institution.

The family testifies to the Fatherhood of God

I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the

whole family in heaven and earth is named. Eph 3:14-15

The idea of a father comes from God, our Heavenly Father.

The family is a human representation on Earth of the family of God, the divine community of love in heaven. As such it is of huge importance and to be protected. It is noteworthy that one of the chief current objectives of the Devil in his work on Earth is to destroy the family.

The way the family works is to follow the way that the Trinity functions and the chief expression within the Godhead is love. Nothing can stop this divine love and nothing can sever the commitment of each member of the Trinity to each other.

The reason why God is love is that the foundation of the Godhead is mutual love, perfect love, divine love.

The covenant of God works in families

God works out his covenant through families.

When God converts a person who goes on to have a family, the covenant is meant to work in that family. Note the people of God in the OT; we see election working through families (though there are exceptions like, Esau). God is the God of Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, then Joseph etc.

When a man is saved, his wife and children are set apart for the Gospel in principle. They are not automatically regenerated but they are treated as separated to God. The marriage is holy. If individuals rebel they are lost but those who grow in this are saved.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 1 Cor 7:14

1Co 7:14 - Is sanctified in the wife (h`giastai en th| gunaiki). Perfect passive indicative of a`giazw, to set apart, to hallow, to sanctify. Paul does not, of course, mean that the unbelieving husband is saved by the faith of the believing wife, though Hodge actually so interprets him. Clearly he only means that the marriage relation is sanctified so that there is no need of a divorce. If either husband or wife is a believer and the other agrees to remain, the marriage is holy and need not be set aside. This is so simple that one wonders at the ability of men to get confused over Paul's language. **Else were your children unclean** (epei ara ta tekna akaqarta). The common ellipse of the condition with epei: "since, accordingly, if it is otherwise, your children are illegitimate (akaqarta)." If the relations of the parents be holy, the child's birth must be holy also (not illegitimate). "He is not assuming that the child of a Christian parent would be baptised; that would spoil rather than help his argument, for it would imply that the child was not a`gioj till it was baptised. The verse throws no light on the question of infant baptism" (Robertson and Plummer).

AT Robertson, Word Pictures in the NT.

With the calling of Abram out of Ur in the Chaldees there was a new beginning in the works of God in election. God established a covenant with Abram saying that from him he would make a family from many nations who would be included in that family by faith. Faith brings people into the covenant of God established with Abraham.

And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly. Gen 17:2

My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. Gen 17:4

I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Gen 17:6-7

And God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My **covenant**, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations'. Gen 17:9

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds', as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed', who is Christ. Gal 3:16

For you [Gentiles] are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal 3:26-29

For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. Rm 4:13

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. Rm 4:16

So there is one big family of faith that share in the covenant promises of God, to inherit the Earth (not just Canaan) and to dwell with God and be fruitful.

Within that family are smaller family units based upon the conversion of a single person, which is meant to lead to the conversion of the other family members. When I was converted it led to the conversion of my wife, my sister and then my mother. Eventually my father had a deathbed conversion. My children were brought up in the faith and baptised,

though two backslid. The four children of one child all made a confession of faith. This is the covenant working throughout a family unit.

So the members of a family are important and it is never too late to have hope for them all. They are separated into that family and potential members of God's covenant until they have faith and inherit the covenant blessings or rebel and are lost. Being lost is not clear until the end (death or the end of the world). A person may rebel and sin grossly (like the prodigal son) but eventually return and be converted. We cannot judge until the end.

Therefore we have familial responsibilities to every member. That means showing love and mercy, despite their shortcomings.

Family is important

As a result of what we have shown so far, it is clear that the family is extremely important. Sadly, many Christians today focus so much on formal church meetings that they neglect the family and fail to see how important it is.

The primacy of love

Do I need to explain this?

Why was Jesus sent to the Earth? Because God so loved the world (Jn 3:16).

What remains at the end after the burning? 'And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love', (1 Cor 13:13).

What renders every gift useless if it is not expressed and motivated in the gift? Love (1 Cor 13:1-3).

What never fails? Love (1 Cor 13:8).

What edifies? Love (1 Cor 8:1).

How does faith work? Through love (Gal 5:6).

How do we abide in the light? Through loving our brother (1 Jn 2:10).

How do we know who is born of God? Those who love¹ are born of God (1 Jn 4:7).

So divine love is primary.

God created the family to be a repository of love; a reflection of the divine family.

Love, being primary, is more important than anything else. It is more important than orthodoxy, being correct, being consistent, being justly angry or even obeying the law. Jesus affirmed David's action when he arranged, out of love for his starving men, to eat the bread of the presence (showbread) which non-priests were not allowed to eat (1 Sam 21:4-6; Matt 12:3-4). Jesus, out of love to share the Gospel with those that needed it, mixed

¹ This is *agape*, unconditional love arising from God not human erotic (*eros*) love.

socially with sinners counter to the law (Matt 11:19; Mk 2:16-17). Jesus, out of love to save an adulterous Samaritan woman socialised with her contrary to lawful custom (Jn 4:7ff.).²

So love trumps everything else.

Love creates a bond

Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. Col 3:14

People are bonded by love; it creates the perfect bond. A perfect bond is not destroyed by anything else.

The love in family bonds are impenetrable. Nothing can sever the bond of love in a family except the disobedience of family members to each other (cutting themselves off). It is a great sin to sever, in practice, familial bonds.

Therefore, if a family member commits some sin, it is the bond of love to continue to accept such people in mercy. God will deal with the sin issue; our job is to love.

Increase and abound in love to one another and to all. 1 Thess 3:12

You yourselves are taught by God to love one another. 1 Thess 4:9

Let brotherly love continue. Heb 13:1

The family contains recalcitrants

As a result of the Fall, every family is mixed. There are those obedient to God and those who are not. This is even true where the head of the family is a true Christian who has witnessed to his growing family about Christ.

However, there must always be hope for rebellious family members, and constant prayer for their conversion.

This is exemplified in the parable of the prodigal son.

The prodigal (dissolute) son behaved very badly and squandered his inheritance on riotous living. He was stupid. He was selfish. He was arrogant. He was sinful. But he was the son of his father. Eventually he came to his right mind and returned home. The father was not critical, not censorious but was overjoyed and celebrated the return. This is a picture of the love of God for his remorseful children.

Sinful behaviour in families is to be expected. Some people will cave in to temptations more than others. This is not unusual. The prerogative of parents is to continue loving in this situation. Parents (and grandparents) do not stop loving because of sin. To fail to love a child or grandchild would be a sin in itself.

² Rabbis would not even talk to their wives in public let alone a stranger, let alone a Samaritan woman.

Love covers sin

Love for a child would include attending a wedding that was a sinful union. The primacy of love overrides the sin:

Love covers all sins. Prov 10:12

He who covers a transgression seeks love. Prov 17:9

[Love] bears all things ... endures all things. 1 Cor 13:7

Above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'. 1 Pt 4:8

The counsel

From what we have observed, the reasoning behind Begg's advice is understandable. The primacy of family love overruled condemnation of the union as a testimony against sin. Especially as the grandmother had previously witnessed to the girl and explained the sinfulness of the issue.

The near universal condemnation of Begg, mostly by unknown YouTube personalities, failed to understand the nuances of the situation. They reacted simplistically as if separation was the only required behaviour; anything else was confirming the sin. Well the grandmother had already condemned the sin in private, so that is not an issue. There was no countenancing of the sin.

The hypocrisy of Begg's accusers

Superficial Christians often react strongly to fashionable issues and ignore others. Currently, the Transgender madness is a key social issue and so these commentators reacted explosively. For these, no Christian should attend a wedding involving such obviously sinful people.

What about every other wedding involving equally sinful people? How many of these critical Christians have attended weddings involving: alcoholics, gamblers, liars, gossips, hypocrites etc. without any qualms? All these sins are equated with adultery and homosexuality in the Bible. Lying is equated with murder in 1 Tim 1:9-10 and Rev 21:8, 22:15. Covetousness is equated with murder in Rm 1:29-30, as is envy, malice, strife, deceit, backbiting, pride, boasting, untrustworthiness, being un-loving, being unforgiving, being unmerciful, disobedience to parents and whispering. In 1 Cor 6:9-10, coveting, drunkards and revilers (railing) are equated with fornicators, thieves, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, and extortioners.

If you make a stand that you cannot attend a wedding for one sin, then you cannot attend any wedding at all or you are a hypocrite. If God condemns all sins, including backbiting, boasting and whispering, then you must accept that all sins are equally abhorrent and not just pick out one.

Are these people saying that being a Trans person is a worse sin than murder, theft or sodomy?

Conclusion

Family is very important. We are mandated by God to love all people but especially love our family members. This love is unconditional and represents the love of God who loved us while we were yet sinners. Equally, we are to especially love sinners in our own families.

Love covers sin. Love covers transgressions. Love is more important than a family person's sins.

We could also say the same about mercy. As we have been shown mercy by God, so we must show mercy to others. This especially means showing mercy to family members.

Refusing to attend the wedding of a sinning granddaughter is showing judgment. It means that judgment has already been passed and the punishment is separation from a formerly loved family member. This is usurping the prerogative of God.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. 1 Cor 4:5

Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.
Rm 14:4

Also separation from a family member is a sin. It is severing that which God has joined together in the bonds of family love. To separate without good cause is wrong.

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