

## The Family in God's Design

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† [blogs.lcms.org/2011/the-family-in-gods-design-11-2011](http://blogs.lcms.org/2011/the-family-in-gods-design-11-2011)

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### ***Do we design our families, or does God place us into them?***

by Dr. Gene Edward Veith

The family is not just the foundation of every culture, and it is more than just a group of people who love each other. More deeply, the family with its specific vocations of marriage, parenthood and childhood is an institution established by God Himself.

*Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. (Matt. 19:46)*

What happened back then for Adam and Eve, Jesus is saying, applies to us today. God created human beings male and female. The man and the woman leave their own parents, hold fast to each other in marriage and thus start a family of their own. The two become one flesh.

The Bible uses one flesh to describe both sex (1 Cor. 6:16) and marriage (Matt. 9:56). In God's design, the two amount to the same thing. The male and the female, different from each other down to the cellular level, become one organism. Marriage is enough to constitute a family. But often their sexual one-flesh union results in the birth of a new human being, a child, who shares the parents' flesh and who likewise becomes part of their family.

The very physiology of reproduction demonstrates the connection between the offices of marriage and the offices of parenthood. The father's DNA in which is encoded every aspect of his body combines with the mother's DNA, in which is encoded every aspect of her body. The result of this combination is a completely new individual human being. And yet, the child, while having his or her own uniqueness, nevertheless shares the flesh quite literally with the mother and father. The children share in flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14).

This common physical flesh defines a family. The man and the woman are unified in the one flesh of marriage, and they are unified again in the person of their child, who consists of both parents.

This one-flesh family goes back through all generations. Everyone's ancestry goes all the way back to our first parents, Adam and Eve. As the Apostle Paul told the Athenians, He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place (Acts 17:26). In this sense, though we have our separate families with their God-given boundaries, we human beings are all related.

Our corporate identity with the entire human race as members of Adam's family means that his fall is ours (Romans 5). We have the same flesh that he did, and now our flesh shares in his sin (Rom. 7:18). And yet, just as we are one with the body of Adam, we can also be one with the body of the Second Adam. What Adam lost for us all, Christ has won for us all. God was incarnate, fleshed out to join us bodily, to take our sins into His body on the cross, to rise bodily from the dead and now to be united with us personally by giving us His body and blood.

In Christ, then, we have yet another corporate identity, that is, bodily identity. We are members of Christ's body, which is the Church (1 Corinthians 12). This is another kind of family. Our fellow Christians are our brothers and sisters. We belong to the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

All children come into existence from the one flesh of a man and a woman. And yet this is not the only way a child can come into a family. Nor is it the only way a man and woman can be called into parenthood.

It is possible for someone to be grafted into a family, as Gentiles through Christ were grafted into the family of Abraham (Rom. 11:17-24). A branch from one tree can be cut off, an incision made into another tree and the branch implanted, whereupon the branch and the tree grow together as a single organism. This agricultural technique, used in the ancient world Paul talks about grafting a wild olive branch into a domesticated olive tree and also today, is an image of adoption. An adopted child belongs to the family union just as the child born into that family does. And the parent who has adopted a child is his or her father or mother just as surely as with a child born from their bodies.

We can say that with certainty because adoption describes our relationship with our heavenly Father. As James Lamb, executive director of Lutherans For Life, has observed, God only has one natural child. He adopted all the rest (Gal. 4:45). That is, Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16). The rest of us have God as our Father because He adopted us. Thus, the Apostle Paul writes,

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. (Rom. 8:14-17)*

The Holy Spirit makes us God's sons by adoption. But this is a genuine sonship. We can cry affectionately to our new Father, and we have all of the rights of inheritance that natural sons have. Moreover, we are fellow heirs with Christ. That is, we adopted children will inherit what Jesus, the only-begotten Son, inherits!

So the family is not something we create. The family is used by God to create us. Our families are grounded in God Himself. Our marriages are shadows of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32). Our parenthood is a shadow of our true parent, God the Father. And in our ordinary family vocations, God is at work.

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> See Dr. Veith's upcoming book *Family Vocations: God's Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood*, scheduled for release in February.

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