

CONVERSATIONS OF CONSEQUENCE

"Termites in the Family Tree"

17 Nov 96 after worship, with lunch, in the Fellowship Hall

What are "Conversations of Consequence"? After a brief description, and a short drama, we'll divide into small conversation groups to consider the theme and make whatever each group chooses of the following affirmations, which we invite you to consider in preparation for the meeting:

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE FAMILY?

- 1 Jesus says (Matthew 12.50 & parallels) his family is "Whoever does the will of God." WARNING: Don't define "family" too narrowly. (M.12.25: no marriage in heaven.)
- 2 As man and woman owe their lives solely to God (Genesis 1.27; 2.7,22), who creates them for complementarity and mutuality, the quality of the husband-wife relationship is the primary determinant of the quality of a family's life. (Matthew 19.3-6.)
- 3 A family should not live only for itself, but so that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed [or "shall bless themselves"]" (Genesis 12.3; 28.14).
- 4 While husband and wife are partners (Genesis 2.22-24), the primary responsibility for taking the initiative lies with the husband (12.1; 15; but in 16.1-2, the wife takes the initiative). (Classic NT case: Acts 16.33-34; see 11.14, but 16.15.)(Josh.24.15.)
- 5 The Bible's physical center of "family" is the father-mother-child/ren nucleus, but the circumference is pervious for kin (relatives), servants, slaves, aliens, and the needy (not all necessarily kin). This is an extended use of what we call the "extended [biological, kinship] family." (Genesis 2.24, "one flesh"; 12.5.)
- 6 As human beings are created in God's "image" (Genesis 1.27), so is the human family (on the model of the Trinity [Father, Son, Holy Spirit]). (Ps.68.6; Gal.3.28.)
- 7 Whatever impedes family intimacy is evil. Because the unforgiving spirit is the chief impediment in the family and in all other human relationships, the Lord's Prayer asks our "Father" to "forgive us..., as we forgive...." (Mt.6.12,14-15; Luke 11.4.)
- 8 Jesus' favorite way of addressing God is by the family word "Father," not the political word (more usual among his contemporaries) "King." (Mt.6.9; L.11.2; Jn.14.)
- 9 The Bible's primary question to each family is not "Are you dysfunctional?" but "Are you devout [God-centered]?" Spouses, are you keeping your promises to each other? Parents, are you passing God's blessing on to your children and their children? Children, are you obeying the Commandment to "honor your father and your mother"? (Jesus supported the Jewish-family structure: Mt.19.16-22; L.18.18-30.)
- 10 Like Noah's, every family is in a container ship, free to determine what to take on board and what to exclude. Listen! God says what to take on board (what?) and what to exclude (what?). (Genesis 6.18-7.9.)
- 11 The Bible-faithful family is covenantal, living with God the God-begun and God-guided relationship that has priority over all other relationships in the family. Grace at meals, thanking God for our food and life together, celebrates this priority.(Eph.5.20.)
- 12 Jesus subordinates family loyalty to loyalty to the gospel: Mt.10.34-39; 12.46-50; M.3.31-35; L.12.49-53. Therefore, by extension, the Christian community is the new family: Galatians 6.10; Ephesians 2.19. (A faithful congregation is a true family.)
- 13 Sick families, sick society: healthy families, healthy society?
- 14 As Israel is Yahweh's wife (Is.54; Hos.), the Church is Christ's (Rev.19-22).
- 15 Much said about household duties--e.g., Col.3.18-19; Eph.5.21-6.9.

(This Thinksheet's other side was a bulletin insert the two Sundays before the after-worship brunch "Conversation of Consequence" on "What does the Bible have to say about the family?" The conversation groups were foursomes, around cardtables, concluding with informal reports from each table. "Elliott Thinksheet..." did not appear on the sheet. P.2 adds some thoughts I couldn't get on p.1.)

16 Christian marriage is a covenant, in the presence of God & of church-&-world communities, between two sinners (Ro.9.23) redeemed-"justified"-saved "in Christ Jesus" (next verse). From this angle, the marriage is a failure from the wedding on, & anything that goes well is a miracle. This low view of the enterprise protects the couple from overexpectation-born frustrations & mutual recriminations. The high, romanticist, view of the enterprise is a termite in the family tree, weakening it with resentments, bitterness, cynicism, hatred, & often causing it to collapse in divorce.

17 Another termite, now leading many marriages to divorce, is the politicization of the husband-wife relationship by the import of the legal concept of equality. Two truths about wo/man: (1) They are equal in being equally under God (again, Gn.1.27 & Gal.3.28); (2) They are equal "before," in relation to, the law (a de jure principle rapidly becoming de facto, the practice of the courts). But an error: They are not equal in relation to each other, but rather mutual (each one inferior [also superior] to the other: Eph.5.21), under the rule not of equality but equity. Equality violates hormones, equity honors them. (Chap.7 of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT.)

18 The chief product of feminist efforts to redesign the male is loneliness. "The war against boys" (Christina Hoff Sommers, 24Oct69 BOSTON GLOBE) details the dismal results of the feministic premise that (as the accompanying cartoon has it) boys should wear a sign saying "ABUSER: I am bad" & girls a sign saying "VICTIM: I am helpless." "The gender bias industry" views males, even 6-year-olds, as "gender terrorists" & is exerting its "anti-male influence on government policy and the schools."

19 The same industry, having polluted the liberal church, has been making headway against what it considers three related three-letter words: S-I-N, M-E-N, & G-O-D (in contrast to Goddess). Three allegedly dirty, interdependent words.

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