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## A SCRIPTURAL STUDY ON "FAMILY MINISTRY"

The need to offer programs of Christian support and education for the family has never been greater than right now. With the breakdown of the traditional family, the high percentage of "blended" families, two career households, and single-parent households, the stresses and strains of family living have increased tremendously. Helping our families cope against outside forces of drugs, free sex, disrespect of life and authority and holding firmly to foundation of God's will as presented to us in Scripture is a constant challenge for all of us who serve our Lord in the ministry.

Traditionally in our Lutheran circles very little has been done to promote the family setting or to nurture proper family bonding among the members of our congregation. Traditionally we have had or may still have our Men's Club, Ladies' Aid, Youth Group, Adult Choir, Junior Choir, Lutheran Pioneers, and similar groups which rather than bringing families together can in fact splinter them even more as we add separate activities for each member of the family. At times our PTO or Christian Education Societies may provide avenues for family growth, still only for those congregations which provide for Christian Education. As this happens, we wonder why we are having so many family problems and we look for answers. We see other churches offering a smorgasbord of ministries to seemingly meet ever Christian's needs, including the Christian family. And now suddenly, we are told that we need to retool and focus our ministry on the family and away from the individual. "Family Ministry" becomes the catch phrase and everyone needs to consider this a vital priority in his ministry to God's people.

In accomplishing this newly defined purpose, we find ourselves in somewhat the same situation as having an excellent sermon illustration or sermon introduction and all we need now is the text to fit it. Which brings us to the purpose of this paper – to provide a scriptural study on "family ministry" both by definition and in practice.

### I. THE FAMILY

It becomes increasingly important that when we consider "family ministry" that we have a clear understanding of "family." Today's definition of family is far removed from that which we consider the traditional family. In the October 28 issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, John Leo writes,

Preparations for the 1980 White House Conference on the family broke down over the left's insistence that the word "families" should be used. The "impressive diversity" of family types, said one observer, included single-parent families, stepfamilies, and homosexual couples.

Sociologists Brigitte and Peter Berger called this "a radical semantic shift" that took plain fact (family breakdown, the increasing number of unwed mothers, gays living together in committed relationships) and quietly translated it into a norm of diversity.

This process is now far advanced. The no-marriage, no-child, no-kinship, "family" is well entrenched.

A family is now any household with one or more living creatures from one or more species. A New York court, for example, decided that two gay men with no children constituted a family. A New Jersey court ruled that group renters – that is, male college students on renewable four-month leases – fit the definition of family...

As is often the case in the zaniness sweepstakes, California has the last word. For a \$10 filing fee, the state now grants gold-sealed certificates to all comers, declaring that they are members of a family, even if they live alone or if the family is made up of goldfish.

Obviously, when encountering such a diversity of definitions for family, we need to establish a norm by which to minister to our people, and the norm that we use is the family unit as established in Scripture. We note that God, Himself, established the family unit when he first created Adam and Eve and also gave them the directive to be fruitful and multiply.

*GEN 1:27-28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

*GEN 2:24-25 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

*MAT 19:4-5 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?"*

A family is correctly established when a man and a woman are married. Children are not a necessary criterion for "family," but are an additional blessing to a family.

*GEN 1:28a God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."*

*PSA 127:3-5 Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame.*

*GEN 17:16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."*

*GEN 33:5 Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant."*

To this institution of marriage and family, God also established parameters for the relationships that would be involved in the family.

#### To Husbands and Wives:

*COL 3:18-19 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*

*1PE 3:7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

*1TI 2:11-15 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

*1CO 11:3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

*1CO 11:11-12 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.*

*1PE 3:1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,*

*EPH 5:22-24 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

#### To Parents towards their Children:

*EPH 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

*DEU 6:6-7a These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

*DEU 6:1-3 These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.*

*DEU 31:12-13 Assemble the people--men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns--so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."*

*PRO 22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

*HEB 12:7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?*

*MAR 10:14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

#### To Children towards their Parents:

*LEV 19:3 "Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.*

*EXO 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*

*MAT 15:4 For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'*

*COL 3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

We also need to consider that Scripture refers to the "extended family" which might include a variety of people not considered "immediate family. (Servants, fellow believers, and friends.) How often are God's chosen people of the Old Testament not referred to as the "children of Israel" and how many times did the apostles refer to one another as "brothers." This extended family can also be understood in the term "household" and has similar relationship directives.

*GEN 14:14 When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.*

*EPH 6:5 Slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.*

*EPH 6:9 And masters treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven and there is no favoritism with him.*

*MAR 3:31–35 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

*JOH 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*

For the purpose of discussion, based on the Scriptures we have studied, we can define "family" as any group of people God brings together in a special way (marriage, birth, baptism, etc.) and for whom God has given specific directions for conducting their relationships.

Hopefully we will find this definition impervious to "radical semantic shift." So that as we focus our study of "family ministry" we can be focusing our attention on a stationary target and not one that sways with the winds of society. Regardless of the life styles of the rich and famous or morally bankrupt and infamous – the relationships of wives to husbands and husbands to wives remains founded on the love of Christ and are to remain faithful. Regardless of the varied difficult situations facing parents – children are still to honor and obey them. Regardless of the social indicators and peer pressures – parents are still responsible to train their children in the Word of God. Regardless of the self-centered directions of society we are still to love one another, put the best construction on all things and help our neighbors to improve and protect their property and business. God said in Mark 10:9, *Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.* While this passage applies to marriage, we can easily extend its application to the relationships which God has established for "family." They are not to be tampered with and can therefore also be considered the norm by which we base our Scriptural definition of family as well.

## II. THE MINISTRY

Understanding the term "family" as defined above, it also becomes necessary to also define "ministry." For the parishioner, "ministry" may only be the vocation of the man dressed in the robe. To others the ministry means people having the right to demand your time at their discretion and not yours. It is sometimes considered absurd that pastors go to school for eight years to study to be a pastor while any layman can tell them exactly what to do in just a few short minutes. But when we define ministry in our current setting of "family ministry" we need to see it not as the vocation but as service. Service to God and to those He has called to be His own and to those who do not know of Him yet. Scriptures to point this out are:

*MAT 28:18–20a Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

*ACT 6:2-6 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

*ACT 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

*ACT 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

*ROM 10:14-15 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

*2CO 5:18-21 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

*GAL 1:1 Paul, an apostle---sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead---*

*EPH 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,*

*MAT 16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

*EPH 4:20-24 You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*2TI 4:2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage---with great patience and careful instruction.*

*1TI 4:11-13 Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.*

*EPH 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*

How often we are directed to serve in the ministry and to serve God's people, and those who do not know him. We are called to equip or prepare individuals with the power of the word so as to meet not only the needs of day to day relationships but also their relationship with their Lord. Again for the purpose of our discussion, "ministry" is defined as that service which through the Means of Grace prepares souls to establish the proper relationship with God and with their fellow human beings – relationships which God has identified himself.

### III. FAMILY MINISTRY

Combining the terms now, we come up with "Family Ministry" and a title that is looking for a text – to which I have none. Except for the following considerations:

*ACT 10:1-2 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.*

*ACT 10:24 The following day he arrived at Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.*

*ACT 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.*

*ACT 10:47 "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.*

*ACT 16:14b-15 ...The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

*ACT 16:31-33 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.*

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*ACT 18:8 Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.*

*2TI 1:5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

I am hard pressed to find passages that direct us specifically to conduct a ministry that segments the believers into groups or into "families" or to directly assist such groups. Paul doesn't try to teach the parents how to communicate with their children, or cope with stress, but rather to get their relationship right with the Lord and to fulfill the relationships with which God has blessed them. And except for the fact that Ephesians deals with wife, husband and children all in the same area, we need to recognize (and I am aware that this may foul up the entire conference series) that there are no clear directives for "family ministry." While the individual group needs of a congregation may be met in unique ways such as in Acts 6, what we need is more individual caring and sharing ministry and less program. We dare not be ashamed that we do not have a variety of ministries in our individual congregations, but we do need to be certain that the administration of Word and Sacrament is being carried out effectively to all members at all levels.

Owen Dorn wrote an article entitled "Reaching Out to the Single," for the recent issue of *The Lutheran Educator*. He notes that in dealing with singles, no one particular program will meet all their needs, since you have single people on a variety of levels and in numerous subgroups. The statement that stands out in the article (and is even headlined within the article) is "Congregations need to develop a greater feeling of "the church family," a family in which every child of God can feel comfortable and significant." (*Lutheran Educator*, Feb. 1992 page 85). To my way of thinking, this would be scriptural family ministry. Or as Owen Dorn concluded his article, "We all, in some way, need the support of our fellow Christians. As we grow in our efforts to produce a feeling of belonging, and as we strive to provide mutual support within our church family, may more of our efforts and prayers be directed towards our single Christian brothers and sisters." To which I would add, "and toward all the children of God." The examples of "family ministry" listed above really point at individual ministry that bears fruit and that is where we should be concentrating.

With just a brief perusal of our past history, it is good to note that in many areas our synod is not the first one to try new ideas. As a matter of fact, we have even been accused of waiting until a new idea has totally run its course before we adopt it as our own. On the other hand, it is safe to acknowledge that when a new idea comes into our circles it is all but consuming and we pour all our energies into it, at times to the neglect of the traditional. Our membership views with some jealousy the quick growth of the charismatic churches or the department store selections of the mega-churches. And to some degree, we have all been guilty of chasing after some of these things ourselves. While what we really need is not a new form of ministry, but the scriptural form of ministry enlivened by a faith compelled by grace through the study of the word. We need hearts yearning to share, to assist and to comfort. Minds focused on things above and thinking of ways we can aid the individuals that make up the family of God that we serve. This

then would be true "family ministry."

It should be clearly understood that I am not anti-: family-ministry, youth-ministry, seniors-ministry, singles-ministry, cross-cultural ministry or any other-ministry. But what I see in scripture is "ministry" without the modifiers – for they all will fit at sometime. There were no programs at Pentecost, but thousands were baptized. And it was Paul who truly modelled and told us the scriptural position to take toward all our programs including "family ministry" in I Corinthians 9:19–22:

*Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not have the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so as to win those not having the law. To the weak, I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

A Scriptural definition of "family ministry" is then becoming all things to all people in whatever place or at whatever level they may be. In short – it's the ministry – which you and I by the grace of God have the pleasure of performing.

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