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Jesus' teaching does not deny, but **adds to** our science-based understanding of social loyalties. He wants his people to recognise the "self-sacrificing" love typical of mothers, and extend it to a new level in loving one another, whether we are related to them or not. In Galatians 3 St Paul wrote,

"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:27-29)

St Paul's vision of human unity not only assumed the common genetic heritage all human beings have, but also recognised that in practice it takes the power of Christ himself to overcome our cultural divisions.

Discussion:

In our contemporary society, the teaching of Jesus and Paul appears to have receded from the collective mindset. Instead we are focussed on our differences. Women seem set against men; ethnic divisions plague us; we are even divided into competing age groups.

In what ways has the church fallen into the sin of division and the failure to recognise our common life in Christ?

In what ways does the church honour St Paul's call to recognise that our differences are of no significance if we are "in Christ"?

How do we each feel personally about St Paul's teaching? For example, How do you feel about the change from traditional to gender-neutral bible translations and liturgy?



THE WAIKATO CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST PETER
Te whare karakia matua o Pita Tapu ki Waikato

Theology of Creation Notes for a Bible Study 4

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Views from the Pews: The wisdom of Solomon

In 1 Kings 3 we read the story of how God gave Solomon a uniquely wise and discerning mind. Soon, Solomon was faced with making a judgement between two women who came before him with a bitter dispute. They shared a house, and both had recently given birth. One of the babies died in the night, and both women claimed to be the mother of the remaining, living child.

Solomon listened carefully to the two of them arguing in front of him. Eventually he called for a sword, and proposed to cut the living baby into two and give half each to the squabbling women. He predicted, correctly, that such a test would immediately cause the false mother to betray herself. How did he know that?

Solomon did not know anything about genes, but he lived in a culture fully aware of the inheritance of family characters, “the seed of Abraham”. Why else would Moses have commanded that “if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother” (Mark 12:19)?

Biology can now explain what people of that time knew without understanding why: a man's genes pass some of his identity onto his descendants after his death. In Hebrew society, the primary function of a woman was to provide sons and grandsons for her husband, and a woman surrounded by many healthy children enjoyed high social esteem. Conversely, a woman who lost a child, especially if it was her only son, was rejected as a social disgrace. Solomon perceived that the false mother would know she had no family responsibility for the baby's survival, and would rather see the baby denied to both of them than see her rival get the credit attached to motherhood.

Therefore, Solomon guessed that the real mother would choose an immediate protest to save her baby's life, even at the cost of giving up her claim over it. Her instant response to the threat of Solomon's sword was an unconscious demonstration of how inborn instinct, controlled by genes passed down the family line, strongly affects apparently conscious human decisions, especially in an emergency. It was as powerful a reaction as that of any cornered she-bear fiercely defending her cubs; she was ensuring that the baby carried part of her family's genetic legacy into future generations.

Theological reflection

It is fascinating that, over 2,500 years ago, King Solomon was wise enough to be aware that a mother's instinct to protect her children could identify and favour her own offspring, even as newborn babies. Although a mother might care for all children, as would we all, her concern for her own has an energy and self-sacrificing character that are unique and very powerful. It grows in her as her baby develops inside her womb, so is already fully formed at the moment of birth, long before she has had time to get to know the child personally.



In our time, science is able to explain this “mother's instinct” in terms of the genetics of matriarchal lineages. However, Jesus' love for all people went far beyond conventional family bonds.

Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” 48 He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew 12:47-50