

Daddy's DNA

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Though the circumstances differ dramatically from those following the death of Anna Nicole Smith, paternity and DNA are back in the headlines. This time the controversy surrounds not one child but 416 children taken from the Yearning for Zion Ranch in Eldorado, Texas. The state of Texas finds itself in a custody quagmire as it tries to sort out who belongs to whom among the families of the polygamous Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS). These self-styled heirs to the theology and practice of Joseph Smith acquire multiple wives as a part of the process they believe leads to eternal salvation. Once thought by many to be a practice of days gone by, polygamy is alive and well in America.

The paternity issues surrounding Anna Nicole's daughter, Dannielynn, and the children of Mormon fundamentalists are as different as Anna Nicole's fashions and the prairie dresses of the FLDS's female members. Both cases, however, possess a common element that highlights a crisis in our culture – the crisis of marriage. In the Smith case, at least five men claimed they could be Dannielynn's father. In Texas, some FLDS men have as many as twenty wives. The cult's "prophet," Warren Jeffs, claims seventy wives for himself. Granted, Anna Nicole's promiscuity fits more with mainstream America than Jeffs' polygamy, but the underlying issue is essentially the same – a breakdown in God's design for the home.

Polygamy and promiscuity do not pose the only threats to marriage. An ever-increasing and vocal minority advocates gay marriage. In addition, one in two marriages ends in divorce. Divorce statistics don't seem to have risen significantly in the past decade, but the appearance is deceiving. Divorce rates have not risen dramatically because couples opt for cohabitation rather than commitment. Casual sex and single-parent families are commonplace; to question the propriety of either seems unthinkable to most. To say the nuclear family has fallen on hard times is an understatement.

It may seem that the solution for this huge social problem is a return to a “culture of marriage,” but that answer is only partly right. Marriage is not one cultural option among many. Marriage is essential to culture, period. When God created Adam and Eve, he brought them together to form the first family (Gen. 2:24). It was to them as a married couple that God gave the command to subdue the earth. It was in the context of a monogamous marriage that God commanded our first parents to have children and cultivate (create culture) the earth (Gen. 1:28). Without marriage as God defines it, a life-time commitment between one man and one woman, we will descend into barbarism. The fight for marriage is not a battle for the Religious Right or any other special interest group. It is a battle for civilization itself.

Many Christians want to be on the front lines of the culture wars, reclaiming art, music, and literature for Christ. I applaud these talented, dedicated believers. But we must not forget that for those of us whom God has called to be married, reclaiming our culture for Christ begins in our homes. In addition, our homes need to be salt and light in our society. Perhaps the best way to pursue these objectives is to begin by reflecting on the basics of the theology of marriage and renewing our commitment to these essentials.

First, God ordained marriage. Singleness was not God’s plan for Adam. He created a woman for him. “And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man” (Gen. 2:23). Christ set his seal of approval upon marriage when he performed his first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-12).

Next, marriage is spiritual. Matrimony is more than a metaphor, but it is certainly not less. Marriage pictures the relationship between the Lord and his people. In the Old Testament, Israel was the wife of the LORD (cf. Isa. 62:5; Jer. 2:2). In the New Testament, the church is the bride of Christ (Rev. 19:7; 21:9). None made this truth clearer than the apostle Paul who wrote, “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we

are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:29-32).

Thirdly, we should hold marriage in honor, in spite of the divorces we see or the heartaches we feel (Heb. 13:4). Even those who flaunt a promiscuous lifestyle and reflect a jaded and cynical attitude toward marriage know deep in their hearts that they long for someone to show them true love and commitment, the essential building blocks of a marriage. Marriage is honorable, and we must seek to reflect the honor God places upon it by the way we act toward, speak to, and talk about our spouses.

Lastly, marriage is a calling, not a convenience. Christians should wed, not just because they are in love, but because they believe God has called them to marry. Young people contemplating marriage should not just ask themselves, "Do I love him/her?" They should ask the Lord, "Is this the person you have called me to commit my life to? Is this your will for me? Is being married to this person the best way I can give glory to you?" Not everyone gets married, and the church should recognize singleness as a calling too. Paul knew that both individuals and couples have their roles to play in the kingdom of God (see 1 Cor. 7). These four truths form the basics of the theology of marriage, and if we ignore them, we do so to the peril of our homes and culture itself.

In the 1970's a popular motto read, "I'm a lover, not a fighter." Let's revise that motto. "I'm a lover, so I'm a fighter." If we want to fight the culture wars, then we must fight for marriage. Let's support a marriage amendment, if that's what it takes. But let's begin by loving our spouses and by letting that love shine as one of the good works that others see, and for which they give glory to our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).