

Reading 1 Peter Attuned to Kinship Structures and Values

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. David deSilva examines the Epistle of 1 Peter through the lens of ancient kinship structures and values, highlighting how the author uses fictive kinship language to foster pastoral resilience among marginalized Christians. By framing conversion as a spiritual rebirth into a permanent, divinely-begotten household, 1 Peter shifts the believers' primary identity from their natural families to a supportive brotherhood characterized by reciprocal philadelphia (sibling love) and mutual honor. The lecture explores how this kinship framework modifies traditional household codes, calling on wives and slaves to navigate submission in non-Christian homes while asserting their equal spiritual status as fellow heirs under God. Ultimately, deSilva argues that recovering this radical fictive kinship ethos is vital for transforming contemporary church communities into deeply supportive, globally connected families.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Pastoral Setting and Kinship in 1 Peter

- A. Written to congregations across five Roman provinces in western Turkey
- B. Primary challenge: Social marginalization and shaming from non-Christian neighbors
- C. Pastoral response: Utilizing honor, shame, and kinship language to build resilience

II. The New Birth into a New Family

- A. Concept of spiritual rebirth (1 Peter 1:3, 1:23)
 - 1. Begotten by a superior, imperishable seed through the word of God
 - 2. Creates a permanent, alternative kinship group
- B. Privilege of the new household of God
 - 1. Ransomed from the futile ways inherited from natural ancestors (1 Peter 1:18-19)
 - 2. Inheriting imperishable glory and honor from the Creator
 - 3. Cultivating a shared identity as a global brotherhood (fraternity)

III. Ethical Implications of the New Kinship

- A. Mirroring the character of the heavenly Father
 - 1. Call to holiness as obedient children (1 Peter 1:14-16; quoting Leviticus)
 - 2. Conducting lives with reverent fear in exile (1 Peter 1:17)

B. Brotherly love (philadelphia) among siblings

1. Earnest love from a pure heart (1:22)
2. Love that covers a multitude of sins (4:8) and rejects sibling competition (malice, envy, slander)
3. Unity of mind, sympathy, and humble minds (3:8)

C. Critical role of hospitality

1. Opening physical homes to support assembly meetings, travelers, and missionaries
2. Historical perspective of Edwin Hatch: Christianity grew as a great fraternity through widespread hospitality

IV. Domestic Kinship and Household Codes

A. Conversion of natural households (e.g., Cornelius, Philippian jailer, Stephanas, Onesiphorus)

B. 1 Peter's specific adaptation of classical household codes (focusing on wives, husbands, and slaves)

C. Instructions to wives of non-Christian husbands (1 Peter 3:1-6)

1. Compliance with classical ideals (submissiveness, gentle and quiet spirit, quiet evangelism)
2. Fictive kinship as daughters of Sarah through doing good
3. The limit of submission: "Do not fear any intimidation"
 - a. Refusal to worship the husband's household gods
 - b. Direct tension with Roman expectations of domestic religious solidarity (Plutarch's ideal)
 - c. Ultimate allegiance belongs to God

D. Instructions to Christian husbands (1 Peter 3:7)

1. Consideration for the wife as the "more fragile feminine vessel"
2. Distinctive Christian command: Show honor as "fellow heirs of the gift of life"
3. Re-shaping hierarchical marriage with the egalitarian sibling relationship

E. Instructions to slaves in non-Christian households (1 Peter 2:18-21)

1. Focus on urban domestic slaves (oiketai)
2. Injunction to subject themselves to both good and crooked masters with respect
3. Empowerment of the slave's conscience to evaluate just vs. unjust treatment
4. Acceptance of unjust suffering as an act of discipleship following Christ's example
5. The slave's behavior becomes the universal paradigm for all Christians facing social persecution

V. Modern Application: Recovering the Fictive Kinship Ethos

A. Critique of modern church culture as cordial but superficial

B. Practical expressions of active kinship:

1. Supporting vulnerable members (e.g., single mothers)
2. Active reconciliation and conflict mediation among bickering members

3. Restoring fallen members with restorative care, protecting their honor
 4. Global solidarity: Treating suffering Christians worldwide with familial urgency
- C. The "inordinate love" of the early church as its most attractive and winsome witness