

In Chapter 5, Rynkiewich defines and presents a broad overview for various frameworks for understanding kinship, descent, and marriage and sex. He begins by defining kinship, or “a system of terminology...that frames relations with certain others who are thought to be biologically linked...or associated by marriage...or any other relationship that leads people to treat others ‘as if’ they were kin” (79). He then proceeds to analyze the existing six general models for kinship terminology worldwide, namely the Eskimo (bilateral), Hawaiian (generational, non-linear), Iroquois (generational, certain relatives emphasized), Crow (matrilineal), Omaha (patrilineal), and Sundanese kinship systems. In short, “kinship terminology does not mirror genealogical relationship, as Westerners like to think, but always points to socially constructed statuses and roles” (86). Next, Rynkiewich turns to the concept of descent, which he defines as the rules that specify genealogical links within a certain group in society. He introduces two new terms here: “lineal,” or encompassing a line of descent from a distant ancestor, and “lateral,” or encompassing only the generations directly above and below ego. He then categorizes descent into the following models: patrilineal (lineal with male ancestor), matrilineal (lineal with female ancestor), cognatic (ambilineal), and bilateral (non-linear). Last but certainly not least, Rynkiewich addresses the topic of marriage and sex, that is societal rules for marriage and sexual partners. He establishes that “incest taboo” is near universal, at least within the nuclear family (parent, children, and siblings); some societies, however, prefer marriage between cross or parallel cousins. He elaborates on such terms and concepts as endogamy and exogamy; polygamy, polygyny, and polyandry; and virilocal, uxorilocal, partilocal, matrilocal, and neolocal.

In the beginning of the chapter, Rynkiewich uses Scripture as evidence of treating fellow church members as kin. Upon reflecting on this statement, I realized the profound implications of this, for as evidenced by Rynkiewich’s discussion of kinship terminology, to treat others as kinfolk necessitates a shared cultural understanding of what kinship means and how it functions. Especially when the author labelled kinship as “a metaphor for social relations,” I immediately saw the correlation between the rules for addressing older men, older women, younger men, and younger women in a familial context and my church context, growing up in a monoethnic church. It is also worth noting that the author seems to use marriage and sex interchangeably, and therefore does not distinguish between socially acceptable marriage and sexual partners. The implication, then, is that premarital sex is taken for granted as off-limits, but in an increasingly sexually liberal society, such terms as hook-up culture, consensual sex, and polyamorous relationships both within and without of marriage must be addressed.

- (1) As we are called to treat the members of our church as kinfolk in 1 Timothy 5, how might we accomplish this in a church context where shared cultural understanding of kinship may not (yet) exist, as in cross-cultural missions or multiethnic or multiracial churches?
- (2) How might the church re-frame language regarding marriage and sex as interchangeable so as to address the issue of premarital sex in today’s society?