

The Family

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[0 : 00] We've been looking on Sunday mornings at Paul's letter to Timothy, the first of the two letters that he wrote to Timothy. And every single week we've said that this letter is all about Paul giving instructions to Timothy a pastor in Ephesus about how to do life as a family together in the life of the church.

And we've really seen three very big commands throughout the whole letter so far that he said, this is what life and the family of God looks like.

And the three are protect the gospel because there were elders and in this passage it's mentioned also women alongside those elders that were really distorting the gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus as the only way to salvation.

And so he says protect the gospel. That's one of the big things. The second thing he said was teach doctrine and truth in the church so that it issues forth in love. So doctrine never stands alone. It should always breed love amongst the body of Christ. And then the third thing we saw last time, Derek preached on Paul's command that training for godliness is just like training for sports that it's very important and then what we have to train for godliness.

[1 : 20] Now look, today he makes clear what he has been assuming the entire letter so far and that's that the church is the family of God, that we're family.

And all of these commands, that's why we titled the series First Timothy, Life and the Family of God. This letter is all about how the church is a family. And so all these commands have to be heard in the midst of the context of understanding that we're in a family.

And today we live in a world that is highly individualistic. We often talk about the contemporary culture from the 20th century forward as an age of individualism.

And so it's very important in the midst of the age of individualism that we hear Paul say to us the church is an eternal corporate body, a community that will last forever.

And so there's two lessons here I want us to see that Paul points out. The first is what Paul assumes in this passage and that's the fact of family. And then the second is what he makes very explicit and that's that the family has got to have rules, the household rules.

[2 : 31] So let's look at those two things together. First the fact of the family. If you look down at verse one you'll hear Paul say to Timothy, when you speak to men in the church who are older than you, they are your fathers.

And when you speak to women in the church who are older than you, Timothy, Timothy was young remember, they are your mothers. And when you speak to people that are your age and your age range, they are your brothers and sisters, their siblings.

And the key word there is the preposition. He says, speak to them as fathers. Meaning he's saying when you think of how a son should speak to a father in a normal biological household, do it like that.

It's as if it was a biological family. You see, and then in the verse nine, verse six, other places he says, if you have a person in your family that's vulnerable, a widow in this instance, it is absolutely critical that a family takes care of the people in their family who are vulnerable.

But the whole reason that he says that talking about the biological family is he's saying if a biological family in the church cannot care for somebody, then the church does it. The church has to do it.

[3 : 46] And all I want to do is point out the assumption in that. And that's, he's not just saying the church is like a biological family, he's saying the church is a family.

And it's a family that doesn't negate the biological family, but builds a new family on a different register, an eternal register of a different quality.

And the quality we're told in other passages, that's first John, John the apostle tells us, first John one, three, he says, brothers and sisters, we are children of God.

So there it is very explicitly, brothers and sisters, we are children of God. We are family. God is our father and we are siblings together underneath God.

Ephesians three, 15, if you believe in the Lord, you have an eternal family that God gathers from all the nations. He makes a new family from all the families of the earth. And so what Paul is doing here is saying biology is very important.

[4 : 43] Bloodlines are critical, that there is an imperative that when you have family that needs to be taken care of, that they must be taken care of, and that the church is also that family, that it is a family of a new register and a different quality.

And that's so important because Paul's call to us here in this assumption that he's making is weighty and glorious and grand precisely because he is saying that if you believe in Jesus Christ today, if you're a Christian, then you are given by God a corporate identity as child of God, member of the family of God.

And the reason that that is so important is because unlike Paul today, we live in a world that we often call individualistic, a world where we live even by osmosis all the time being trained and taught in this ideology of individualism.

And individualism is the air we breathe and it doesn't just say that individuals matter. That's exactly what Christianity says, that because of the image of God, individuals matter so much, but individualism does something more than that.

And it answers the question of identity, who am I in a completely different way than pre-modern people could have answered that question. So in the pre-modern world, the world prior to the 19th century, identity was primarily based in external authorities.

[6 : 20] You ask the question, who am I to a pre-modern person? They're going to give you an answer based on what the church tells them, their parents tell them, and the community they live in tell them. They get their identity from the outside and it moves inward.

So the point in a pre-modern identity is you conform your inside, your feelings, your heart to external authority. But in modernity, that gets flipped upside down.

And so the world of individualism that we live in says the exact opposite. It says this, I am most authentically me when I can act out my deepest feelings on the outside.

And so identity in the world of individualism comes completely from the inside, not from the outside.

And so everybody we're told in this modern world is reaching an ethic.

There should be an ethic where we're trying to become truly authentic and authenticity is primarily letting my feelings out, becoming who I really am at the deepest level.

[7 : 17] That's my true identity. Now look, we could say so much about this problem, but let me just point out a few things to you about why it's such a problem as it relates to Paul talking about the church's family.

And the first thing is this, individualism trains us, even if we don't realize it, to think I don't really exist to serve communities.

Communities exist to serve me. And so what happens when that happens is that the church or any community becomes a place not of giving myself but of consuming, where my primary way of thinking about it is that I come here only if this place can, quote, make me a better person.

Or if this particular church gives me the things I need from a church I'm looking for. And if it doesn't, then I leave. And that's a transactional way of doing life.

And it's birthed out of individualism, of turning everything into a consumer relationship. It says I don't exist for the family. The family exists for me to give me opportunity to help me to realize who I really am, my authentic self.

[8 : 28] Now the great problem with this, let me just tell you three of them. What that means, what that costs us, what that costs the church. Individualism, very simply, it destroys communities.

Individualism destroys communities because it's fundamentally a posture of selfishness. It says I am here, I don't come here to serve others, I come here to be served fundamentally.

The second thing, it assumes, it assumes something, it assumes that what I feel is always right.

And that's one of the fundamental errors of the modern age of individualism, that my feelings and my desires can't be wrong.

Now let me do a thought experiment with you. Imagine that you are a Viking teenager in the 900s. And I know that you've all already done this at some point.

You've thought about this. At some point you've thought about what it would be like to be a Viking teenager in the 900s. And you're a Viking teenager and you come to Scotland to take over the land. [9 : 30] And you end up going up against a Pictish warlord. The Picts were the people that dominated the area at the time. And as a Viking teenager, the son of a chief or something, you come across this Pictish warlord and he dishonors you.

And what do you feel? Well, you feel anger and you feel aggression. And you want to kill him and then you do. And then the other Vikings hoist you up and celebrate that now you've become a man. Now if a modern teenager did something like that, he had the same feelings, anger and aggression. But then he let those feelings come from inside to outside.

And he did that. He would be jailed for life and he would be rightly called a man who has acted in an evil way and he would have therapy and medicine his whole life. And you see, nobody truly believes that what you feel is always right.

It's simply that culture tells you what feelings you're allowed to express externally at different times in history. And the truth of the matter is that underneath our external facade, many if not most of our passions are actually evil.

[10 : 42] They're sinful. That's what the Bible says. And that's one of the great errors of individualism. It goes out proclaiming who you truly are. Your authentic self is what you feel.

But of course we know that that's never really true because you have to say that some of your passions, your feelings are evil. They're sinful. They're broken. Right?

Now the third thing that means then is that individualism ignores what's so fundamental and that's at the very beginning of human history, God created communities to be the fundamental domain in which our personal identities are formed as individuals.

And individualism strikes against that from top to bottom. True authenticity, Paul is saying to us is actually when you come to a body, a true community and you spend yourself for it.

And that's why individualism doesn't breed joy, it breeds emptiness. But when you give yourself for a community, you find real joy. Now this is what Paul is saying to us.

[11 : 45] The church can never be a place where we can say things like this. I go to church because it makes me feel good on Sundays. Or I go to church because it affirms me in my lifestyle.

Or I go to church because they cater. This particular church caters to my personal needs. Or I go to church because I can slip in and slip out and remain hidden.

And Paul is saying those are all phrases of individualism, but you are the family of God. And family is of an utterly different quality. That is upside down and we got to be turned right side up.

Now here's why we can't live as individuals as we close this point and get to the household rules.

One of the ways to answer this is to go to Luke 15.

Luke 15 is the very famous parable of the prodigal son. That if you've been in the church your whole life you know, and if you've never been in the church you probably know as well because it's very famous.

[12 : 43] And in Luke 15, remember, there's a son and he leaves his father's household and he takes his father's money and he squanders it and he lives recklessly.

And then he regrets that and he comes home. And when he comes home, his father runs out to the hill and he brings him home and he throws him a feast and he kills the fattened calf and he gives him his own ring and his own robe.

But then the elder brother, his older brother is there and his older brother says, Dad, how could you do this? This son of yours has squandered our money and he's ruined our honor and our family reputation and he comes home.

It's not just that you let him live here, it's that you threw a feast for him. You put on your own robe. Your robe on his back and his father says, I love him, I'll eat the cost.

And you see a lot of people look at that parable and they say, and rightly so, look at the love of the father who is God and how he runs out to the farthest hill to bring his prodigal son home.

[13 : 49] But the more fundamental point of that parable, it's often missed, is that it's more about the elder brother. And you see what the parable is really trying to say is, if you lived in a true family, a truly glorious family, then you would have an elder brother that when his little brother goes off to Babylon, he wouldn't stay home counting his money.

He would put on his backpack and he would go to Babylon and he would bring his little brother home. He would be the one that would go out to the farthest hill.

And the parable is saying, you need a true elder brother. And we read from this scripture, the first scripture that we read a moment ago, Hebrews 2 says that Jesus Christ when he was hanging on the cross was not ashamed so that he could call you brother and sister.

Jesus was not ashamed of the cross so that he could say to you, brother and sister, Jesus Christ is the true elder brother. And he came as your elder brother to bring you home again.

And you see the reason that you can never act in the church like just an aggregate of individuals that come here, slip in and slip out, that think of the church as a place, the family as a place where you're primarily here to get something instead of give something, is because it's not factually true.

[15:13] You see? If Jesus, if you believe in Christ today and Jesus Christ came as your elder brother to make you a brother or sister, then you don't have a choice, you just are the family of God.

It's not something you choose, it's not something you get to do. You are the church if Jesus Christ is your elder brother. And so what Paul is saying is act like the family, be the family of God in the way you serve because you actually are the family of God, because Jesus Christ has come as your elder brother.

And now four very practical questions as we move on just to leave you with on this diagnostic questions, and I think there will be something here in these questions for everybody.

First, do you want an eternal family? Maybe you're here today and you don't know that you have that.

One that will never leave you and never forsake you and never abandon you, a perfect God, the Father, and a perfect elder brother. That's what's on offer in the cross of Jesus Christ.

[16:17] And let me say that you might say, I've been around churches and I've seen the church act like something less than a family, and you would be absolutely right to say that, but not Jesus Christ, the true elder brother.

He has never left you or forsake you. He wants to say brother and sister to you, and you can have eternal family today by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, for Christians today who Paul is talking to here in this letter, do you see the people of this place, but also of the global church as truly your family, your brothers and your sisters, not abstractly, but truly, that they are your eternal family, your eternal community.

Is that the way you consciously think of the people of God? I think that's the question Paul is asking us. Thirdly, if you love Jesus, Dave, you believe in Christ. Let me ask you, have you joined the family?

Because if you believe in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, then part of the call on your life actually is to say outwardly, I'm part of the family.

[17:28] It's to become a member of a church, whether it's here or somewhere else. That's the way of outwardly displaying I am part of the family of God. I'm not here to be a consumer. I'm not here to be an individual.

I'm here to be family. Have you joined the church? And fourthly, do you, if you're a member, if you've been here a long time, are you in a place right now where you're living in this space more as an individual than as a family member?

And that's a call to come out of hiddenness and be known and serve and be served. All right.

Secondly, Paul has been assuming here that we are a family.

That's the assumption he's making in this text. We haven't actually even gotten to the text really yet, but don't worry. We're past halfway. Secondly, we've got to look at what Paul does here.

And that's, he gives us the household rules. So Paul is saying in this passage that every family has got to have rules. We all know that. And here, here are five of them that Paul gives us.

[18:31] And we're just going to run, run through them quickly. Okay. The first is this, Paul teaches us here another implicit to pray for wisdom. And the reason for that is because Paul, if you, if you read along with me, you would have, you'll have clearly noticed that Paul is talking about two very specific issues.

One of them is how people of different ages and stages in the church talk to one another and treat one another. And the second issue was how to care for widows in the life of the church.

And the reason that he's giving us these is because these were things that were very specifically happening in Ephesus that needed to be dealt with. But also what he's doing is he's saying, look for

the timeless principle alongside the cultural wisdom.

So he's doing both here. Paul is not saying that every single command he gives in this passage is timeless. For instance, he says a one, a widow that's going to be enrolled in the order of widows needs to be 60 years old.

The reason we know that some of this is timeless principle. Some of this is custom or wisdom applied to a specific context is because the commentators point out that this text is just like 1 Corinthians 7.

[19 : 44] And in 1 Corinthians 7, he treats some of the same issues and he very explicitly says, what I'm about to tell you is both a mixture of divine command and my advice to you.

He says that very explicitly in 1 Corinthians 7. And most commentators come and say he's doing the same thing right here. For example, he says if a young woman's husband dies and she becomes a young widow, he says she should remarry.

But Paul's not saying she has to remarry because we know in 1 Corinthians 7, he talks about the same thing. And in 1 Corinthians 7, he says she can remarry or I'm totally, I would love to see her also be single.

And he says because I wish everybody would be single like me. But Paul's not giving him command. He's giving advice here. And so the first implicit principle, the household rule that we see first here is that we've got to pray for wisdom in how we treat one another and do life together because always the Christian life is applying biblical law alongside wisdom in a specific cultural context.

That both of those are in play at all times. And that's exactly what Paul's doing here. Now the second thing to get more specific. The second household rule Paul gives us here in verses 1 to 3 is how we express our own trust.

[21 : 01] Christ like love differs according to age and stage. And you see this in verses 1 to 3 very clearly. Paul is talking to Timothy, the pastor, and he says, Timothy, when you go talk to the older men, treat them as fathers, older women as mothers and so on.

And there's a principle underneath that and that's that Paul is saying there is always, this is timeless, a decorum of age. And that honor is due to people according to their stage of life. Now we see that in the Old Testament, we see that in the New Testament, but what's not timeless is how that's applied in every single culture. That we actually have to learn to apply that with wisdom according to the symbols of the current culture we live in at all times and places.

Now he says as well, if you have a peer, a person around your age range, this is your sibling. This is your sister. He's saying love and respect according to age, not as strangers but as family.

Now you've got to see the balance in what Paul is saying here because on the one hand he says young men, young men in the church, these older men are your fathers in the faith and young women, these older women are your mothers in the faith and mothers to sons and fathers to daughters and all of it, every relation you can think of.

[22 : 26] But then the whole reason that he's saying this to Timothy is because he's saying you're about to have to go rebuke one of these old men. So he says as you go rebuke one of these fathers in the faith, treat them like a father and you see what he's saying?

He's saying on the one hand honor the men and women in the family of God that are older than you in a way that is appropriate. But being older doesn't mean being right because he's saying, Timothy, you're a young man and you've got to go rebuke an old man and that's exactly why in the fifth commandment in the Old Testament honor your father and mother, honor the authorities above you, the word is honor not obey.

The call to honor your authorities, your parents is not outright obedience because sometimes parents are wicked and evil and do terrible things.

The call instead in honor is love, respect, a willing ear, care and sometimes being willing to learn forgiveness. And you see the balance is both there that being older, being younger doesn't make you right but being older does require a level of honor on behalf of the younger people.

And so there's three little principles within this principle. One, honor those above you. Two, young men. He points out young men, the Christian women, Paul says, in your age range are your sisters.

[23 : 52] He points this out very explicitly. Treat Timothy all the women in your age range with purity. And that means that it doesn't mean don't pursue marriage with one of them. We love that here.

Instead, what it does mean is if you're not pursuing marriage with one of them, then she's your sister. And so you relate in a way like a brother relates to a sister and vice versa.

And the third one is men to men, women to women in the same sphere of age, these are your closest spiritual friends. Now it's not an exclusive rule, it's a principle.

And it's saying these are likely the people where you ought to be confessing your sin, seeking encouragement for your daily spiritual walk. You see, in all these ways, this is just like a biological household.

There are household rules, a way to relate to one another, but it's all as family. Now third, third of five. Verse three, the second issue, the issue of widows, the vulnerable in the household of God must be cared for as family.

[24 : 54] The church, we're told about Paul here, has a responsibility to care for the deep needs of its people, both spiritually and materially. And material is exactly what Paul's talking about here.

And the specific issue here is widows, how to care for widows in this first century church. And care for widows is axiomatic in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

And theologians will talk about the economy of God, the way God identifies himself when he comes down into our world. And this is how God, listen to how God identifies himself when he comes down into our world.

He says, Psalm 68-5, I am the protector of widows and orphans. And God comes to do that because the widows had a disadvantage in the ancient world particularly.

So farmers were instructed in the Old Testament to leave grain and leave olives and grapes for widows to glean and to be able to eat from. And the social witness of the early church from the time of this letter, all the way for the first several hundred years of the early church, was very clear that people were enrolling those in the church that were particularly vulnerable onto a list.

[26 : 09] And that list meant that you would get a daily distribution of food, clothing to meet your basic needs. And the principle underneath it, that it's not just widows we see across the Bible, it's orphans, it's immigrants are listed quite often.

The poor, anybody within, he's talking about in the household of God, people in the household of God have got to be treated like family. And that means that the family of God cares for the vulnerable very specifically.

Why? Because God identifies himself in light of his love for the vulnerable. Deuteronomy 10, 18 is another famous passage where God says, I execute justice for the orphan and for the widow.

So God is saying, I expect the family of God to look like me, to be people of mercy, to care for the vulnerable and their midst. All right, fourth. He nuances that, fourth rule for household life.

He says, family care and family mercy is absolutely necessary and it requires discernment and great wisdom. And you see in verse three, he makes it clear again that honor those who are truly widows.

[27 : 18] Honor means care for materially here. And he's saying that there needs, in this time there was a list and what Paul is doing here is he's gotten a hold of that list and he's doing the very difficult thing.

He's scratching names off of it. And he's saying some of these people in the church that you're giving money to and supporting are truly vulnerable, but some of them aren't.

And so he's saying that this has actually got to be approached when the church decides we're going to care for this person very intentionally. It's got to be done with wisdom and discernment. And that's what he says here.

He says that there are two conditions. One, does she have family? Does this person have family that can take care of them? And then two, now listen closely here because he's talking about believers, professed Christians publicly.

He says that they have to be living responsibly, not living a life of self-indulgence. Now when Paul wants to talk about care for people and need outside the church, it's a completely different ethic.

[28 : 21] There's no rules. We just do it because we don't expect people who aren't Christians to live like Christians. But when he talks about professing believers, he says here, if we're giving money and they're living with that money, a self-indulgent lifestyle with the material, then that means they've got to be taken off until they can reform their lifestyle again.

And he's talking about people within the church. And so he's doing something very radical. He's saying the church has got to be a place of radical mercy, of care for the vulnerable, and it's got to be

done with great wisdom and with some expectations.

And the reason for that, the assumption is he's saying the church has limited resources and it's got to be about church planning, evangelism, mercy, putting a roof on if you need a roof, all of these things.

And so there's always got to be both mercy and wisdom brought together every time we support somebody. Fifth and finally, Paul says how does this happen?

How do we care for the vulnerable in this way in the church? And he's clearly assuming here that as the family, this is all of our ministry. He's assuming that if you're not the one in great need, then you're to be serving those in great need.

[29 : 34] Nevertheless, he comes here and makes very clear that certain women ought to be registered for this type of specific ministry.

That's where he goes here. And you can see it in verse 9 to 14. There's a second role. There's two roles in this passage. One is for people in particular need. One is for people who can give particular need.

And verse 9 talks about the second role. Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60, having been the wife of one husband in a great reputation for good works.

And there it's talking about actually a role of widows in that time that would serve the people that were particularly vulnerable. Now we talked a few weeks ago as we wrap up that we saw Timothy, Paul said to Timothy very clearly that women could not be ordained ministers, could not deliver the sacraments or the preached word.

And if you want an explanation for that, just go back to a few sermons ago. But we said in that sermon that it's very important to recognize that most men cannot do that either.

[30 : 39] And that 97% of all ministry is for everybody. 97%, 98%. That's evangelism, mercy, giving, serving, all of it.

It's for everybody. But here also Paul comes back around later and says there is clearly across the New Testament a role in churches of particular women that were deemed qualified to serve alongside the officers in particular ministries that were of almost always a diagonal nature, the nature of caring for the vulnerable.

And we see this in the book of Acts. Luke talks about the widows in Joppa, all the widows, the role of widows in Joppa. And among them he mentions Dorcas, which is an amazing name.

Dorcas, it says, was certainly full of good works and acts of charity. She was one of these women. We have records of this from the early church. Tertullian is one of the church fathers from the late second century.

And he writes of the order of widows in his church, how they prayed together, nursed the sick, cared for the orphans, visited the Christians in prison, evangelized pagan women, and taught the female converts before their baptism to prepare them for baptism.

[31 : 52] And Paul gives us qualifications. He says 60 plus, remember, timeless principle but also cultural wisdom. What he's saying is, is this woman able to serve in a way that she's not hindered by so many other things in her life, like caring for a bunch of little kids or whatever it may be?

That's the first one. But then he goes on to character. And this is where we want to wrap. This is where we want to finish today. Because listen to this list.

This is what Paul says. This is what the women that are particularly charged by the officers of the church to be in ministry along with them. Verse 10, they've shown care for children.

They've shown care for the vulnerable. They've show hospitality already in their normal lives. They wash the feet of the saints. And they help those in trouble.

And St. Columbus has a women's pastoral team that tries to recognize this New Testament reality. And it would be impossible to do ministry without it, without them.

[32 : 51] And it's right here. It's very clear. But let me close with this. For the family of God, that list is everybody's list.

That list of qualifications. That we care for the children. We look out for the vulnerable. We show hospitality for the family.

We wash one another's feet. We help those in trouble. Now today, is Christ your elder brother? Is Jesus Christ your true brother?

And if you believe in him today, then he is. And that means then collectively, you are part of the family of God, and we can all say this together. I was poor, and Christ came for me.

I spend my resources today here because Christ spent all his resources on me. I wash feet in this place because Christ came to earth to wash my feet.

[33 : 49] I'm awake to the needs around me and the family of God because Jesus Christ did not sleep on my needs. He came for me. In other words, Jesus Christ's radical love for us is the ground and motivation for such a high and holy calling as caring for the family of God.

And so our charge today is to love the family of God because Jesus Christ has made us family.

Let's pray.

Father, we do ask for hearts of great love and service for the family of God. And we repent of the ways that we have treated the family of Christ individualistically as mere consumers, Lord.

And so we pray for both those who have needs today that they would be known, that we would move forward to them in great love.

And we also pray that for those who are not currently in a place of deep need that we would be moved towards giving ourselves and washing feet and going low and spending our time, talent and treasure for the household of faith.

[35 : 04] And we give thanks that all of this is rooted and grounded in the fact of you Christ, our elder brother who did not leave us in the wilderness. You came. And so we give thanks today.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.