

# Family Dynamics

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, so I'm going to look for a little while this morning before the children come back up. I'm going to... We're going to look at this passage that we've been looking at. We're just going to go through the whole letter as a church right towards the end of the year and take each section.

As it comes, we recognize these sections as... All of the Bible has been living and significant and important for us as a Christian, so that's why it's central to our worship every day.

So, Struan and Connell and Iona clearly look like their parents, and you can't deny them.

When Struan and Connell run up from Kids' Church, if you've seen their parents, then you'll know exactly. Yep, that's... They belong to them, that's for sure.

And as they'll grow more and more, I'm sure that'll happen more and more. They'll be more and more like their parents. And that's a great thing. That's a great thing.

[ 1 : 0 0 ]     They'll physically look like them, but they'll probably start imitating them in different ways as well, because that's what we do as kids. We imitate our parents. For good or bad, we imitate our parents.

And when you get to my age, what you say to yourself is, oh my goodness, I'm turning in at my father or my mother, because that's what we see so often, isn't it?

In life, we see that the importance of our parental influence is so great in all of our lives, and we see it for good, and we do see it for ill, don't we, in life.

And it has this tremendous impact on us. Sometimes it's things we can't deal with like physically, we just look like them, we can't, you know, we say, oh, I know who your dad is, I know who your mum is, or it can be just in our character.

And we know that childhood with loving parents is such a tremendously important thing. And they will listen, they will learn, they will be guided, they will be taught, they will example their parents' behaviour.

[ 2 : 0 3 ]     And sometimes they will mimic their parents' mistakes, and we see that. And where there is a loveless family relationship, we see the impact of that as well.

But often that imitation is implicit, and it's subconscious or unconscious in a child's life, but nonetheless very significant.

And John, who is right, the last of the apostles, the beloved apostle John, is here writing to this young church. And it's really the theme of this letter to this young church is encouraging them and reminding them as Christians that they are to become more and more like their heavenly father.

That is really the emphasis that he's talking about, all the time he's talking about being part of God's family, being children, dear children, little children, he uses that phrase all the time.

And he's reminding them that they are a family together who have a father, a heavenly father, who loves them and the Son, Jesus Christ, who has come to be their redeemer and Savior.

- [ 3 : 09 ] And that's hugely important for them. And that's what he's emphasizing. And he's encouraging them to walk in the light as Jesus is in the light, as God is the author of light. And he's encouraging us to do that, that we become followers of Jesus. We don't just confess Him and then ignore Him, that we become followers of Jesus and are calling us believers is to become more like Jesus in our lives.
- And that is what the Bible constantly teaches us. And there's, you know, it's belonging to a great home, a safe, having a beautiful identity, having a loving divine parent who's done everything for us so that we might live with them eternally.
- And that's really what this letter is all about. But imagine coming to the Thompson's home, the lovely new house, which we haven't seen yet, but we hope to see soon.
- And someone comes and lives with them who's a real nightmare, just a disaster, causes all kinds of tensions in the family home, divisions, encourages, strewn and conical in time.
- [ 4 : 25 ] I want to just ignore their parents and disobey them, introduces doubt into the family, starts telling lies about what their parents are like or about each other as children and pitting them against each other.
- Can you imagine that in a loving family scenario that we see? And then tries to take the children away. And that would be serious.
- And that would require strong action. And all of us, you know, we feel instinctively, we feel that we would protect that family, we would protect the children, we would protect the parents from this insidious influence that has come into the home.
- And that's similar to what John's saying here as well to this church, this young family of believers. Because leaders had grown up within that church who actually heard the gospel, who knew about Jesus, but who chose to change it and make it different and believe something else.
- And it was really damaging to the young church. It wasn't light they were bringing in, it was darkness. They were saying things like, and we see it later in the letter, that they were saying that Jesus didn't really come in the flesh.
- [ 5 : 43 ] He didn't come to die for sins that, sins aren't really real, that you don't need to follow the Jesus that the apostle John and the other apostles and the gospel spoke about. Just follow us.
- We are much more enlightened. We have a much better idea. And they cause division and they cause disrespect and damage and really unhelpful criticism for this young church.
- So John uses strong language and he calls them anti-Christ. And that's just, it means against or in place of, anti in Greek just means against or in place of Christ and replacing Jesus with another false messiah and teaching that salvation, that the way to heaven comes a different way and not the way that this young church had been brought up to recognize and the many lives that had been changed by Jesus in that church.
- John says, no, no, that's got to stop. You can't go on with this. You're bringing words of death, not words of life and it's destructive and you're not really offering any kind of meaningful alternative.
- It's something that's really just about your pride and about your position and you're wanting to take over and have influence in an unhelpful way.
- [ 7 : 01 ] So John is speaking in this section and throughout the letter as well. He's just wanting to emphasize to the church there and also to us, God through John to us that the gospel is real, it's not make believe.

The gospel that we believe that has transformed our lives as Christians is real. It's not make believe. So in the first chapter, John says, you know, I was in one verse two, he says, the life was manifest.

We have seen it and we testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life. And he's just, he's reminding his readers that he's one of the apostles who was an eyewitness of Jesus, both his life, his death and his resurrection.

And the Jesus himself set them apart as apostles to be the foundation of the New Testament church and inspired them to proclaim the gospel and tell the gospel and write that gospel down.

He speaks a lot about writing down the truth and the facts of the gospel and remembering it and bearing it in mind and living it. And of course, that everything that Christ was that he came in the flesh and everything that his resurrection from the dead proves, not just what he said, but also what he did, the resurrection proves that.

[ 8 : 22 ] And what he said before he went to the cross, which was, I am the way, the truth in the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. So John is saying all of that is true.

It's not just something you can take or leave or throw away. It's just big stuff. John says it's true because he says it's true because we've seen it to be true and our lives have been transformed by the truth of a resurrected God, Son.

And if we think about that, John was probably, he was an old guy by now and he was the last of the living apostles. And there's no real motivation for John to make this up, to say, you know, I've made this up and it's better than what you've made up.

There was no, you know, the reality of the message talks about us not being at the centre of the universe, talks about sin and being under God's judgment. It talks about the sovereignty of God.

Speaks about a crucified saviour, a risen saviour. Speaks about grace and holiness. And, you know, it didn't bring to anyone in these early days, didn't bring them wealth, didn't bring them power, it didn't bring them status or significance or popularity.

[ 9 : 37 ] John, as an old man, had probably witnessed most of his closest friends being martyred as apostles, as disciples for their faith and he was the last of them still living.

So there was no human benefit for him to say that this was important if it wasn't true. And that is highly significant for us.

The gospel he says is reminding us that it's real. It's not make-believe, it's not just take it or leave it. And that's the focus of this section.

He's wanting them to hold on to the truth. And probably the key verses, verse 24, where he says, let what you've heard from the beginning abide in you.

If you do what you've heard from the beginning, if it abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. So he's given us two things that are very important here quickly.

[ 10 : 32 ] He's not giving them quickly, I'm going to give them quickly. Something objective and something subjective. So he's saying, remember what you've heard from the beginning. And that is always really important in the New Testament and in the Bible is that there's something that they've heard, something that's been written down, something that's been recorded in the gospels, something that is historical and real.

It's attested, it's happened. It was genuine. There's nothing that is better evidence of happening in the ancient Erestone, the story of Jesus and his life and death and resurrection.

It's Jesus of Nazareth who came and who came to be a Savior, a Redeemer of people, of you and me to take us from death to life.

And his message being that, you know, death isn't just a natural thing, it's a spiritual reality and it comes from us rebelling against God and ignoring God who is the author of life.

And so it leaves us under His just sentence. But Christ came because we couldn't make ourselves right. Christ came to pay the price because of His love. And He came to die in our place and take what is the just wrath of God against us now.

[ 11 : 52 ] That is revealed. That is objective. It can be examined. It can be tested. It can be understood. It can be discovered. It can be rejected, clearly, as many people do.

But that is the reality of what the New Testament teaches is there's an objective truth of Jesus that we are to be challenged by. Now, it's an interesting thing today in 21st century secular, postmodern Scotland and UK maybe in the Western world even.

There's a great shift when it comes to truth because truth used to be accepted as something kind of outside of yourself, outside of ourselves, something that would challenge us as to our perspective and that we would be molded to because it was objective and it came from the outside.

But that has changed recently over the last maybe 30, 40 or 50 years so that truth now is something that comes from within ourselves and that no one can question.

That truth is what I make it. Truth is what I believe it to be. Truth is what I think it might be. It's not objective, at least in terms of religion and in some areas of life as well, maybe not everything.

[ 13 : 06 ] But there's that really subtle but powerful change that it all depends on what we think from the inside out and what we accept and our word is final and nobody can challenge that.

But if you think about what a great way that is for every individual, you know, what comfort is there if it comes from within ourselves that truth comes?

What comfort is there in failure or in loss or in guilt or ugliness or aging or poverty or even in death itself?

You know, this philosophy causes or weighs down on us to find a meaning of the existence of our very beings within ourselves and that is a critically heavy burden to bear and it provides ultimately no answers for us.

So the truth comes with something very objective. Jesus comes with something that is very objective outside of ourselves to be challenged by and to think about. But there is also a subjective element to it and we can't forget that.

[ 14 : 18 ] And that same verse it says, let what you've heard from the beginning abide in you. So there's something also very subjective about it.

So we need to take that objective truth in our lives constantly as Christians and recognize the need to have faith in that, to put our trust in that and to believe it and experience the forgiveness which is what we've done this.

Of course, isn't it, forgiveness to know His love and to know the anointing or just the giving out of God's Spirit into our lives and hearts that transforms us so that we can love Him and we can love one another as He wants us to do.

So there's this subjective element which is God's work as we entrust our lives to Him and to Jesus as our Savior. He's transforming us. So it's relational.

It's a spiritual relationship. So which is why John speaks about the children, you know, the churches as children and God is their Father. And there's this great intimate and close relationship that we have the solid rock on which to base our lives and our future and our hope, which is subjective, but it's based on the objective truth of Jesus Christ.

[ 15 : 35 ] And that means that our fellowship as believers with the God the Father is real through Jesus Christ. And Jesus is that foundation, it's never ending, it's this great identity, His love, His protection, His victory over our own feelings sometimes of inadequacy or failure and forgiveness and of course, the hope for the future both as we age and as we face death and into eternity.

So we have this fellowship with God and He says that this truth can be known through the Holy Spirit in us in verse 25. It speaks about that, that we abide in Him.

The Spirit of God is in us. And that's something that is beyond then teaching. It's beyond knowledge. It's beyond objective truth.

It's something subjective in our hearts. And that's why He goes on to say that I think in verse 27 He says, if I can find that, yet no one, you don't need anyone, He says, if you have the anointing that you received from Him abides in you and you have no need for anyone to teach you.

And despite what you made, just cheer within yourself and say, hey, no need for any teachers, no need for the preaching. I think what He's meaning there is not that because He says different things and the Bible says different things about that in lots of places.

[ 16 : 59 ] And He's saying that no one can teach you what is that subjective reality. It just can't be taught. It's something very real and something very...

We would say in Scotland, there's an old phrase which helps, I think, us to understand, it's better felt than tell. And that's exactly what it is. You can't just know it in...

We can't just know it in our heads. We can't just receive it by teaching. We've got to accept that it's better felt than tell. We put our faith and trust in Jesus. It's not just a matter of knowing about the truth.

It's about knowing and experiencing and putting our faith and trust in Jesus Christ who is the truth. So, just as we come to a conclusion then, let's revisit John's tough words in the light of that because he says in verse 21 and verse 22, I write to you not because you do not know the truth but because you know it and because no lies are the truth.

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. And maybe we can understand the toughness of these words a little bit better in the light of what he's protecting and in the light of the importance of the objective truth as well as subjectively putting our faith and trust in Jesus.

[ 18 : 24 ] So he's just, he's really speaking here about those who were teaching against Christ, antichrist, not so much a person as more of a belief system that they were advocating that was causing great problems within the church.

And so he's really saying it's not okay for us to change the truth, to suit ourselves if it's true. If it's not true, none of it matters anyway, isn't that right?

And John gets that. John gets that he's saying that it matters because it's true. And if it's true, then we need to protect it. And if it's not true, let's just throw it out the window anyway.

And the baptism and the worship and the Bible and all the rest is a waste of time. It's that kind of fundamental reality that he says that we can't change what has been revealed.

We can believe it, we can reject it, you can pause it alternatives to it, but the truth, you know, by its very nature is exclusive. Now, you know, it's absolute.

[ 19 : 30 ] It can't be changed. You know, meaningless Google facts for you. It takes 18 minutes and 19 seconds for light to travel from the sun to the earth.

And you can disbelieve that. You can reject it. You can ignore it, but it's just a fact or the fact that it's impossible for a crocodile to stick its tongue out.

Now, there's a fact. It's an insignificant fact unless you're faced with a crocodile face to face, maybe. Well, even then, I'm not sure if it may be a deal of difference, you probably want to make sure that as a person you can run very fast, faster than a crocodile.

But you know, there are facts in the world. There are things that are true and things that are important, things that are not quite so important but are true. And John is reminding us here that this is the claim of Jesus Christ that He is the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father but by Him. And we all face up to that and we need to protect that and we need to live it in our lives. And ask the question, do the alternatives that maybe you believe in, if you're not a Christian, do they stack up?

[ 20 : 49 ] Do they provide answers? Do they bring us hope for the future in this life and beyond? Can they provide us the identity and the security and the future that we are looking for?

John thinks not. So he calls those false teachers that were plaguing this early church. He calls them liars. It's just strong language. He says they're leading other people astray.

He says they're counterfeit. He cares because he cares. It's not because he doesn't love them and he's harsh. It's because he cares and he wants the children in that church, which is all the church, to be protected.

And so knowing faith in Jesus Christ is for us today as Christians, everything as well. It's absolutely everything. Everything else pales in in significance.

All the other things that sometimes we regard as important, we need to watch that they don't become idols for us or false messiahs. In whom or in what are we putting our trust as believers?

[ 21 : 54 ] What is important to us? What is significant? Do we remind ourselves, as John wants us to be reminded of, of the importance of unity around this gospel message, around this person Jesus and around the salvation he offers, the forgiveness, the opportunity to know his love in our lives, his life that becomes eternal in us so that even Jesus, even though we die, yet shall we live.

And recognize that for us as Christians, it's always a battle. It's always a battle to do this. It's always a battle to protect the truth.

There's always doubts and fears and alternatives and temptations that come our way to take us away from Jesus and from His truth because it's a battle, because it's a struggle.

And sometimes even religious leaders do that today, as they did in John's time. They'll say, no, I don't believe the gospel that has been spoken for the last 2,000 years. There's something better. There's something newer.

There's something more flash. There's something that'll give you wealth, health, prosperity in this life. Don't believe all the other stuff that you heard. It's old hat. It's for old times sake.

[ 23 : 12 ] It's not relevant anymore. Then we find that those who peddle a different message and deny either that Jesus came in the flesh or that he's the only Savior, they are anti-Christ in the same way that they are leading people astray in the great, great burden.

He's on them for doing so. So we seek as Christians to know it. We seek to live it. We rejoice it. We come under its forgiveness and the grace of God and His transforming love.

And we know it transforms families and individuals and brings friends together and enemies closer. And we pray that this gospel which will be symbolized in the baptism very shortly through the washing of water, symbolizing the cleansing from sin and the life, water being the source of life, meaning as of the Spirit of God who comes in, dwells in us by faith, which is promised to the children of bleers.

I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment. So we give thanks for sometimes, all the time, but we give thanks that sometimes in the Bible are tough words because it reminds us that there's something worth protecting.

There's something that we need to hold on to as believers and something that we share because we know our lives have been changed, have been turned upside down for good by the gospel ourselves.

[ 24 : 46 ] And we want to protect that what we have heard from the beginning, what's always been there and live it with the strength and courage that God gives us.

And I hope if you're here today, you're maybe not a Christian, that you'll be at least challenged to think of the message that has always been that comes through God's Word in the Bible about Jesus who loves us, who loves you and who gave himself for you.

Let's pray briefly before moving forward to the baptism. Father God, we thank You for Your Word, we thank You for its truth, we thank You that we believe it to be truth and exclusive that we think otherwise we just should walk away and not pretend.

And we thank You for who You are and for Your patience and grace and love and forgiveness and we pray that You would bless Your Word today and remember us as a church family, that You'd protect us, protect our unity, protect the way we love one another and also the way we love our friends and neighbors and help us to introduce them to the Savior who's made such a difference to us in our lives also.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.