

# Family means gentleness and purity

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Date: 10 June 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] We've had a little while of getting to know one another by now, haven't we?

So I imagine many of you by this stage have picked up that I come from quite a large family. I have four brothers and two sisters. Now with any group of that many people, there are always going to be ups and downs in your relationships with one another.

There will always be somebody in a group of that size who's having a difficult time of it or somebody who is rejoicing. There will always be tensions to varying degrees amongst that group.

There will always be somebody struggling to get by and so on. A few years back, whilst Joe and I were still living down in Derby, I got a phone call one evening quite late on from my parents.

And they were ringing because one of my brothers had got himself into something of a hole. He'd stayed in Watford when my parents moved away about a year before this and it started well.

[ 1 : 10 ] He had a job that was going fine and so on. But by the point of this phone call, he'd left that job, got another job and then been sacked from that job.

And at this stage, he owed his landlord about a month's rent and owed various other people money as well, I think. And basically hadn't eaten in a week or so. In his desire to stand on his own two feet, in his desire to make a good run of living on his own, he hadn't told any of us any of this.

We didn't even know that he'd left the first job, never mind that the second one had fallen apart. But by this point, he'd finally got to the point where his landlord was saying, you've got two days and then you're out.

And at that point, he managed to swallow his pride and to phone home. Now, what do I, as his brother, do in that situation? It's pretty obvious, isn't it?

You rent the van, you get a bunch of cash out of the bank, you get a bag of food that can be eaten on the road, you drive down there, you stick everything he owns in the back of the van, and you get him out of there. That's what family does, isn't it?

[ 2 : 16 ] There's not really any question at that point, is there? That's just what you do. If you're not willing to do that, can you call yourself a brother? I'm not sure. That's what Paul's talking about here in these opening verses of chapter 5, as he writes to Timothy.

He's telling him church is that kind of family. Church is the kind of family that is committed to one another. Paul isn't just saying church is family when it's easy.

He means the whole idea of family. He means family in the difficult times. He means that kind of unquestioning, absolute, and total commitment to one another. Paul here is picking up the same idea from chapter 3 and verse 15.

If I'm delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. So he's picking up that idea of a household, that sense of family, and he's putting a bit more meat onto those bones.

Yesterday I came across this quote from a lady by the name of Anne Brushers, who I gather is a writer of young adult fiction.

[ 3 : 28 ] Here's the quote. Parents were the only ones obligated to love you. From the rest of the world, you had to earn it. What she's saying in that quote, she's saying that what sets family apart is that you don't get a choice.

You have to love one another. It's not optional. And Paul says that kind of attitude should characterize the church. You don't get to choose in this building who to love.

These people, as you look around, are your brothers and sisters and sons and daughters and fathers and mothers. If the church is a family, if the church is a household, how should the Ephesian believers treat one another?

How should we treat one another? In the rest of the chapter and so on, Paul's going to set out a number of different ways in which the church interacts, ways that they are to lovingly care for one another.

And he does that having opened this section with this kind of overarching paradigm, paradigm, this kind of theme for this section, these first two verses that we're looking at today.

[ 4 : 42 ] So it's picking up that idea from 3.15, and it's also continuing and developing some of what we looked at last week. This returns to the issue introduced in 4.12, the issue of Timothy's comparative youth that could have led some of them to dismiss him.

Well, he's coming back to that and thinking about particular examples of how Timothy is going to live as an example so that he will not be dismissed.

So Paul fleshes out what it will mean for Timothy to be an example for them in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. Now, if this is what it means for Timothy to be an example, what does that mean for the rest of the church?

Well, it means they're going to do these things too, doesn't it? The point of an example is to be copied. Timothy is an example for the church, as he treats them like family. Therefore, they are to treat one another like family.

So we'll take a look at the specific points that Paul mentions here about treating older men in a particular way, and then how he addresses younger women, and then we'll come back to a few more general thoughts, and then next week we'll dive into the more specific applications in verse 3 and onwards.

[ 6 : 02 ] So, chapter 5, verse 1. Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Guys, how do you treat your dad when he's wrong about something?

Well, all but the very youngest here have probably had that somewhat sad moment of realization that daddy is not infallible.

That there are actually things that he doesn't know. And worse than that, there are things that he thinks he knows, but doesn't know. And most of you can probably think of times when you've realized that, or you've realized that dad just doesn't know.

That whatever the reason is, he's wrong about this. Even the best of fathers have their moments of weakness. Now, most of us can probably also think of times when, despite our confidence that we were right and dad was wrong, in the end it turned out he did no best after all.

So, let's not be over quick to correct. But what Paul has in view here does seem to be a situation where the older man is indeed in the wrong. Because whilst this man may not need to be rebuked, he does need exhortation.

[ 7 : 15 ] He needs encouragement. And the sense of that word here isn't so much encouragement to carry on down the path he's on, but more exhortation to choose a different path.

So, when Paul says do not rebuke, he isn't saying don't correct, but he is cautioning with regard to manner. So, the Greek word behind the verb rebuke here, this is the only time that that verb appears in the Bible.

So, when we read in 2 Timothy 3.16, all scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, that there is a different word for rebuke. Paul knows rebuke does sometimes need to happen.

There is a need for correction, for saying that's wrong, do this instead. And in other places, in this same letter, in 1 Timothy, we've seen that there are people in the Ephesian church who need to be corrected.

In fact, the word for older men here, that's the same word as we've translated as elders elsewhere in this letter. Now, given the other groups referred to in these two verses, given that he's also talking about younger men and older women, and younger women, then older men is the correct translation.

[ 8 : 29 ] But surely, surely he has in mind more than just the official elders then. But the elders aren't excluded from that group either. He is talking here about these people who do need to be corrected.

But he's talking about how to do it. So it's an unusual word for rebuke. And in fact, the origins of the sense of this verb are something like strike at. So maybe we could see Paul as saying something like, do not let your correction of the older men of the church be a slap in the face to them.

Correction needs to happen, but it should not be harsh. Even these false teachers who are leading others astray. Timothy needs to be very firm with them. That's clear elsewhere, but there are limits to what that looks like.

It's possible, isn't it, to say to somebody, to tell somebody that they are wrong in a way that treats them as beneath your contempt. How could you be so pathetic as to have misunderstood?

Surely the truth is obvious. Everyone knows. And the reality is that I can think of too many times in years gone by where that would have been my attitude to my dad.

[ 9 : 48 ] And that that would have been pretty obvious to other people around, though generally pretty bad at seeing that in yourself at the time. I think the two of us do better now, but that's not the kind of thing that Paul means here, is it?

That's not what Paul means when he urges Timothy to treat older men as a father. No, he's thinking of a genuine respect. He's thinking of how we treat our fathers at our best, not how we treat them at our worst.

He's talking about the kind of deference that should characterize our better moments. You remember last week we looked briefly at Elihu who says in Job 32, I thought age should speak, advanced years should teach wisdom.

But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.

Again, we have there the norm that the elders, the older men, ought to have wisdom, ought to have understanding. And so Timothy is not to be quick to rebuke.

[ 10 : 59 ] He is not to correct in a disrespectful manner. In the social customs of the time when Paul is writing, much more so than today perhaps, to treat a man as a father means treating him with respect, with dignity, with honor.

It means if you do want to correct him, then you do so by gentle persuasion, not by browbeating. So that means if you and I are to treat older men as fathers, it means we don't delight in showing them up to be foolish.

Nobody is well served by that, are they? And that I think will stand as distinct from the culture that we live in. Because we will refuse to have that kind of attitude that dismisses the elderly.

We will refuse to treat people as somehow past their prime and having nothing useful to contribute.

We will refuse to act like all men should just move out, get out of the way, so that the young can get on with things.

Exhausting an older man as if he were your father means exhausting him, encouraging him, seeking to correct him. Yes, fine. But doing so in a way that recognizes the possibility that he might not be completely wrong.

[ 12 : 19 ] That he just might know better. That he could conceivably have something useful to contribute. Do not rebuke an older man harshly.

The second specific that Paul draws out is with regards to the younger women who are to be treated by Timothy as sisters with absolute purity.

So Timothy's relationships with the younger female members of his congregation are to be marked with purity. The use of the word absolute is important here.

This isn't a mere appearance of purity. This isn't a skin-deep veneer of respectability that masks something completely different. This isn't how close to the line can we get before it becomes a problem.

This is a purity that avoids even a hint of impropriety. Purity is a broad concept, isn't it? But here with this focus, here as we talk specifically about relationships between young men and young women, here we are thinking particularly about sexual purity, aren't we?

[ 13 : 28 ] In other words, we could equally refer to chastity. And it is not surprising that this needs to be said in the sexually charged atmosphere of the city of Ephesus.

And sadly, in the sexually charged atmosphere of the Ephesian church. Do you remember back in chapter 2 that there the women of the church had to be instructed to dress modestly?

Do you remember that those lists of qualifications for deacons and for elders, both of those lists have to specify that they are to be faithful to their wives? This is not a church that has it sorted out when it comes to relationships between men and women, is it?

The sad fact of the matter is that the men and women in the church in Ephesus were not above temptation. Far from it. And the sad reality is that men and women in the church in New Mills are

not above temptation.

And the reality is that Timothy, in authority over the church in Ephesus, was not above temptation himself. He had to be cautioned to purity in his relationships with young women.

[14:42] And not just purity, but absolute purity. The sad reality is that around the world, church ministers and church elders are not above temptation.

The sad reality is that in the Free Church of Scotland, ministers and elders are not above temptation. The sobering truth is that here in Covenant Church, the minister and the elders are not above temptation.

They are not immune. And Timothy is to treat younger women as sisters with absolute purity. Women are not to be objects of lust.

They are not to be looked upon. They are not to be pursued. There is to be purity. Friends, we cannot afford, we cannot as a church be derailed by impurity in our relationships with one another. We cannot afford the impact that that will have on the witness of the church to have our purity called into question. We cannot afford actual impropriety and nor can we afford the appearance of it.

[15:55] And so, brothers and sisters, consider carefully where and with whom you are spending your time. If there is a risk of impurity, if there is a danger of giving the appearance of impurity, then I urge you to reassess.

And we cannot be derailed by this. And so, if we are not to be, then we must have our eyes open. We must be willing to head this off before it becomes a problem.

And that means, if you have the slightest inkling of concerns about your brothers and your sisters, then you are obliged to speak to them. You have a responsibility to do so.

And if you are particularly concerned or if you don't see a change come from speaking to them, then you have a responsibility to bring it to the session as well. And to speak to any of the elders and say, look, I don't know all the details.

I don't know what's going on. But I'm worried. I'm concerned. I want to head this off at the pass. And I promise you two things if you do that.

[17:01] I promise you, firstly, that we will take it seriously. That we will not dismiss your concerns as trivial or misguided. If you're concerned, there's a good chance that others are too.

And at that point, it is harming the witness of the church. We cannot afford to be derailed. And number two, I promise that we will not make those concerns the subject of gossip.

Now, that doesn't mean we're promising total confidentiality. It's likely the session would discuss it, if nothing else. But it does mean that you don't need to worry that by telling the elders, it will somehow become the talk of the town.

Or the talk of the church, for that matter. Guys, we have this responsibility for one another. We are accountable before God for one another.

Our relationships are to be marked by absolute purity. Timothy, as a younger man, is to treat younger women with absolute purity. purity.

[18:04] But, purity is not the only thing here. There is also the same fact with these sisters, as with the other three groups mentioned. There's the fact that they are family.

Timothy is to treat these younger women as sisters. It would certainly be possible, and I think it's a very real danger, as I speak to some of my peers, it is possible that we are so, so hyper-concerned about the merest hint of the slightest appearance of possible conceivable ever impropriety.

We're so paranoid that it doesn't allow for ministers or elders or really any men ever to ever spend any time alone with any younger women. And when we have reached that point, then something has gone a little bit wrong, hasn't it?

Because the instruction to exhort in verse 1, that covers all of these relationships. Timothy is supposed to be exhorting the older men and the younger men and the older women and the younger women.

The verb treat there in the middle of verse 1 that the NIV is put in, that's the NIV figuring out a tricky sentence in Greek by supplying an extra word for us in English.

[19:23] The whole sentence is one thing. It's all governed by exhort in the Greek. So these younger women are to be exhorted by Timothy. And that matters because that means Timothy still needs to be able to go and exhort these women.

He's supposed to have the kind of relationship with them where he knows them as individuals. He's supposed to have the kind of relationship where he knows what they need to be taught, where he

knows how they need to be rebuked and corrected and trained in righteousness.

He needs to actually know them and he needs to have opportunities to speak the truths of God's word that they individually need to hear. So yes, Paul in Titus 2 does commend the younger women being taught by the elder women.

But that doesn't mean that Timothy and Titus themselves have no longer any responsibility for the younger women in their congregations. That doesn't mean that the elders in these churches can somehow abdicate responsibility for a significant portion of the church just because they can't figure out how to do it without a hint of impropriety.

No, you have to work hard enough to do the work without the danger. So treating women as sisters means not withdrawing.

[ 20 : 47 ] It can't mean not spending time together. It doesn't even necessarily mean never spending time alone together. But being sisters with absolute purity does mean doing so very cautiously and conscious of the fact that it can take but a moment for that line to be crossed.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers older women as mothers and younger women as sisters with absolute purity.

the church is a family. Why is the church a family? The church is a family because we are united to the one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As we are adopted into the family of God then we are adopted into one another.

We have no choice about those relationships. We are brothers and sisters together. And so we have these family obligations to one another.

We have those family joys with one another. So as we come to some broader reflections on the nature of life as family in the church in my head it's helpful to think in my head it's helpful to think in kind of along the scale if you like with kind of two different poles of areas to think about.

[ 22 : 21 ] on the one hand you have the very small scale. You have the little things the mundane the everyday the countless little unnoticed things.

The times when you spend a little bit of time together you just continue where you left off last time because it's just a natural relationship. The kind of family life where you pop around unannounced and you spend twenty minutes chatting with one another whilst you're drinking tea and chopping vegetables together ready for tonight's dinner.

Or you spend a few minutes doing a bit of fixing up somebody's computer or you do those trivial little bits of DIY tasks that so many dads up and down the country are still doing for their sons and daughters because so many of my generation are utterly mechanically inept.

It's the little things isn't it? Family small things. It's mowing the lawn for someone who's having a busy week and can't quite get round to it. It's the countless things that you would be doing for your brothers and your sisters if they lived just round the corner from you because they do.

For many of you you know better than I do what it's like to have brothers and sisters living round the corner from you. Maybe you can teach me a thing or two about what it is to have that kind of family life. I've never really done that as an adult.

[ 23 : 39 ] But Paul tells Timothy that that kind that kind of everyday assistance ought to characterize our relationships in the church. What would you be doing for your sister if she as a single parent or as a woman whose husband isn't available right this minute if she's trying to organize to get her family to church what would you do for your sister in that situation?

Because I think there are families maybe perhaps especially some of those who are a little bit on the fringes of our church here. There are families where yes maybe some of their intermittent attendance is due to not choosing to prioritize it but sometimes I think sometimes part of it is well dad's working on Sunday and I'm trying to get 18 people out of the door in some semblance of being dressed by far too early in the morning and that's hard.

And if your sister were trying to do that I think you might be working harder at helping. Friends if your brother was ill what would you do?

If your sister's husband had just been moved into a hospice what would you do? If your sister had just moved into a new flat what would you do?

We don't need to go through a list of what it is to be family do we? We know how to be family.

[ 25 : 13 ] The trick is to genuinely grasp that sense of one another as family and the rest follows. Is that not going to transform our lives together?

The amount of time that we spend together the way that we spend that time when we have it. That's one end of the spectrum. That's the small help in the everyday. Another quote.

The informality of family life is a blessed condition that allows us to become our best while looking our worst. Family brings out the best in us doesn't it?

Because family means not having to be on your best behaviour. Family means not having to always put out the best china. Family means being able to drop by unannounced and it's okay that the washing is all over the sofa in the living room and it's okay that actually I haven't hoovered in two weeks.

It's okay. We're family. Family brings out the best in us because it means not having to be on your best behaviour. It's the everyday.

[ 26 : 21 ] But there's the other end of that spectrum too isn't there? There's the situations more like my brother trapped in his mess of debt and inability to deal with it.

There are the extreme situations sometimes aren't there? And what does family mean then? Well family in the moment of crisis means absolutely nothing is too much trouble.

Family means I will always be there for you whatever it is. Family means if it's urgent enough that you're ringing me at three o'clock in the morning then yes I will be answering that phone and I'm trusting you that you're not going to do that for the trivial.

Family means in the most stressful in the most difficult of situations family means being willing to put ourselves out massively in order to do what we can in order to fix that situation.

So sometimes being family together might mean giving up big chunks of your time. Might mean not the 20 minutes here and there it might mean yeah I'm going to take a day's holiday from work in order to come and help you fix that thing.

[ 27 : 34 ] Would you do that for your brother or your sister? Sometimes being family together might cost you money because family isn't optional.

Family isn't something that you choose. It isn't true of the families that we've grown up with. It isn't true of this family here. Take a look around guys.

These men and women are your brothers and your sisters and your children and your parents.

Whether you like it or not whether you like them or not that's who they are.

That's what the church is. So don't rebuke one another harshly. Don't allow a hint of impurity. And behind both of those things love one another.

Value one another. Be there for one another. Let's pray. Lord we thank you that you welcome us not only into relationship with you but that that brings with it these hosts of other relationships.

[ 28 : 44 ] As we join together as brothers and sisters around the world and most especially in the church where you have placed us. Lord would you help us to see one another in that light.

To think about what it means to be family in the everyday. To think about what it might mean to be family in the times of difficulty. Lord we thank you for that privilege of being there for one another.

We thank you that we do it following your command and your instruction and therefore we do it in your strength and not in our own. Lord we thank you for the joys and we thank you too for the chance to mourn together to go through difficulties together to support and encourage and uphold one another.

Lord would you guard our relationships against any kind of impropriety. Would you keep us pure in your sight and in the sight of those around us as well.

In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.