

Taking Care of the Family. 1 Timothy 5:1-16

Opening portion adapted from "Caring For The Family," by Dean Rhine @ SermonCentral.com

The second grader was assigned to do a school report about his family. So he went to his mother and asked her, "Mommy, where did I come from?" The mother was not quite prepared to talk about that with him, so she used the old line, "*The stork brought you.*" To which he replied, "Mommy, where did Daddy come from?" She used the same line, "*The stork brought him too.*" and then she hurried off to her cleaning. Not to be put off, he went upstairs to Grandma's room. He said, "Grandma, where did Grandpa come from?" She looked at him and thought that really his parents should be the ones to talk with him about those things so she said, "*They found him out in the cabbage patch under a leaf of cabbage.*" The second grader walked downstairs to his room, pulled out a sheet of paper, and started his report: *There has not been a normal birth in our family for the last three generations!*

I'm sure we could spend the whole day telling stories of funny things that have happened in our families throughout the years. Few words carry such emotional meaning and depth as the word "**family.**" For most of us, family is everything. But for many others, their family is filled with dysfunction. Some families have dark secrets that are not discussed because of shame or legal implications. Some have relatives that are never mentioned outside of the immediate family. Some grown families tear themselves apart over their parent's will, and who was supposed to get what. Grown siblings refusing to even talk to each other ever again because of some petty incident that happened in their past. But dysfunction is never what God intended for families. God desires functional families both in the church as well as the home.

We Christians understand that "**family**" is one of the metaphors -- visual word pictures -- that God uses to describe the church. Our Bible pictures the church as a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a kingdom, a vine and branches, a living temple, a flock, the body of Christ, and in **1 Timothy 3:15**, God calls us a **family**, "*the household of God.*" God wants His church family to be not dysfunctional, but a healthy and growing. This idea of "the church as family" is what we have read about throughout the entirety of Paul's letter to Timothy; which is basically instructions on how keep the Church family growing in the right direction.

Remember that Paul having planted a church in Ephesus, a city filled with idol worship, sexual immorality, magicians, and false teachings, then left Timothy there to shepherd this young and growing church and to straighten out any problems that crept in from the surrounding community.

However, Timothy is a young man and apparently some people in the church would not follow his leadership or give him the respect he deserved. Also Timothy was shy and sometimes sickly; or at least was so troubled by problems in the church that his stomach bothered him. The tension in the church had him to the point of giving up, so Paul's letter was written to encourage him to keep on going.

He wrote to Timothy to

1. Correct those who were straying from the Gospel
2. To teach Sound Doctrine that leads to "*love which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience*" (1:5)
3. To always Preach and live as an example of the Gospel (3:14-16)

4. And to pray for everyone, especially those in authority, so that you may live peaceful holy lives and also that everyone may be saved (2:1-7).
5. Instruct the men to control their anger and live holy prayerful lives (2:8)
6. Instruct the women to dress modestly and let their good deeds speak for them (2:9-15)

In the third chapter, Paul outlined the necessary qualifications of elders and deacons who would help lead the church. Basically they were to be mature believers with a sound character who manage well their families, are known for their generosity and hospitality to strangers along with having a good reputation in the larger community. They also have to have the desire to work as "servant leaders" in the church.

In the fourth chapter, Paul cautioned against false practices of godliness such as sexual abstinence and asceticism. He agreed that physical training does have its benefits, but proper spiritual training is valuable both for this life and the next. So we should always pay close attention both to how we live and what we teach.

Now today, in chapter 5, Paul turns his attention to not so much what we do as a family but HOW we go about doing things in a family way.

Some people are drawn to large churches – they offer many benefits: they have lots of programs, they are able to hire multi-talented staff, their choirs and cantatas are great presentations; they have plenty of people to support their capital campaigns. But, there are also many benefits to being a smaller church. One of the key benefits is the closeness and the family atmosphere of the smaller church. When you come to a large church, you are only one face in the crowd, but when you come to a smaller church, you ARE part of the family. You feel connected. When you miss a Sunday in a small church you are really missed; missed for too many weeks and someone will come visiting thinking you are ill ☺. Remember the t.v. show Cheers - Norm Peterson would walk into the neighborhood pub from another hard day at the office and everyone would yell "Norm!" As the theme song said "*you want to go where everyone knows your name.*"

In a family, we know one another, we care for one another, the care stretches across generational lines. Children care for grandparents and vice versa. Age differences do not separate us, but they facilitate our unity. And it is the same way in the church, when we work together as a family. Sometimes those who are not related can become closer to you than your flesh and blood relative! We want to be a church that functions well as a family! So let's see what Paul would teach Timothy about family dynamics in the Church.

First, in a family, you always show proper respect to everyone. Paul writes

Do not speak harshly to an older man,
but speak to him as to a **father**,
to younger men as **brothers**,
to older women as **mothers**,
to younger women as **sisters**
— **with absolute purity.**
1 Timothy 5:1-2

Churches are not like corporations with CEO's that bark and underlings jump, they are a family; specifically God's family created, guided, and intended to grow up displaying God's primary characteristic which is love and respect for all people and desire for everyone to be saved and brought into the family. The saying is true, that love and respect is first taught in the home. So Paul would have us live and teach the same characteristics in our Church home.

Yes, Timothy had been placed in an awkward position, that of a young man trying to lead and teach older people, but as per Paul's instruction this attitude of "**family leadership**" applies for all who would serve as Church leaders; and as Timothy followed his advice it would gain him the respect needed to lead this family. How do you show respect in your family?

You know, that even if they are wrong, in trying to correct your parents, you still do so gently with humility and respect; signaling that you recognize and honor their place in the family; that is if you want to get anywhere with them. **Paul writes that we are to treat everyone older than us as if they were our parent. If you cannot imagine speaking in a certain way or saying a certain thing to your parents, then you had better not speak that way to any other older person (someone else's parent).**

And the same principal of gentle humility and respect also applies to anyone younger than you; treat them like you are the "kindly older brother or sister." The reason we need to act like the kindly older sibling is because kindness is not often the way siblings treat each other. I was the third of four children (an oldest sister and a brother on each side of me); needless to say gentleness, humility, and respect was not our natural way of dealing with each other when the parents weren't around.

In the typical pecking order of a family, if my baby brother did something to make me mad – which he apparently seemed to enjoy doing – and I retaliated, then my older brother would feel the need in his defense to retaliate against me. I distinctly remember one time when my baby brother teased me, knowing that I would punch him in the shoulder, which would cause my older brother to punch me in the shoulder; we literally stood in a circle: tease, punch, punch; tease, punch, punch (you can just visualize that picture for yourself).

Untrained children can be real mean to each other. But we eventually did grow up into those characteristics of gentleness, humility, and respect for each other as they were taught and exemplified by our parents. As a wise poem recites "*Children learn what they live.*"

Here's your first take home for the day:

If you would not want to hear anyone talking to your mother or your father in a certain way, then you had better not talk that way to anyone else's mother or father.

And if you would not want to hear someone talking to your brother or your sister in a certain way, then be sure that you do not speak to someone else's brother or sister that way.

And to these injunctions Paul adds "**with absolute purity.**"

Take an honest appraisal of our current culture: ***uncensored, unrestrained sexuality is the venereal disease of our age.*** Perhaps there have been more morally restrained times in our

national history, but the truth is that sexuality has always been a powerful, often unrecognized, under appreciated, driving force in adolescent and adult life and troubles (male and female). That is why God in our Bible gives us strong teachings on learning and respecting sexual boundaries and prohibitions for keeping all expressions of sex within the constraints of a Christian marriage for which these desires were designed.

So, in our current sexually insane, victim obsessed, culture that on the one hand treats all aspects of sexuality so casually, yet on the other hand also treats any unwarranted approaches as abusive and worthy of a lawsuit, where the latest public advice was to greet everyone "*as if you had a cold*" (keeping all hands at arm's distance), **our call to live with ABSOLUTE PURITY is perhaps the most important instruction Paul can give us TODAY;** This call to absolute moral purity takes in our thought life, the words we speak, the shows we watch, the jokes we tell, and certainly how and where we touch others.

So whether at home, in the church family, or in public life, if we would not want to see someone treating our father, our mother, our brother, or our sister in a certain way, then we had better not treat someone else's father, mother, brother, or sister that way.

Humility, respect and absolute purity must characterize the way we relate to everyone we meet; this is certainly also the way we should train our children.

In the church, we need to be a functioning family. We have much to learn from one another, and we need to work together as a family. We show respect to our elders and we treat those younger like our brothers and sisters. As Paul's letter to the Ephesians would remind us, God's fifth commandment is still in full force.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord,
for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'
this is the first commandment with a promise:
*'so that it may be well with you
and you may live long on the earth.'*
Ephesians 6:1-3

So now let's turn our attention to deciphering this larger paragraph on the Church's responsibility to care for "real widows."

First some historical background. In both the earlier Hebrew and now Roman world, there were no government institutions taking care of the needs of the needy; no welfare, no Social Security, no Medicare, no Medicaid. Everyone's basic needs were expected to be supplied by their family. So, if a person had no family ... then they were truly destitute; homeless orphans lived where by what they could find on the streets. Family-less Widows may have a house to live in but no means to buy food. Thus the Hebrew Bible is filled with God's commands and for the community to supply the needs of these "last, least, lost" living in their midst; and warnings of what He would do to them if they did not (cf: Exodus 22:22-24, Deuteronomy 24:19-20).

As you have read today, that responsibility was then passed on to the Church; which is why James the brother of Jesus could sum up **genuine faith** as caring for the needs of such people

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.
James 1:27

These days, in our western culture, for better or for worse, government programs have taken over care for needy, so we figure that such instructions in Timothy no longer apply to us. But still around the world there are countries where these guidelines are directly applicable, where the Church is still the only group caring for the needs of "widows indeed." And if the recent news of pending Medicare and Social Security insolvency should come true then these guidelines may once again apply to us as well. However, there are still two abiding principles which we need to learn and practice in the care of those in need: parents, widows, orphans, the poor, and the strangers among us.

The first is our in our God ordained responsibility to provide for the needs of our own and extended family. Three times in this paragraph Paul writes that family is first expected to provide for its own (verse, 4,8,16).

If a widow has children or grandchildren, **they should first learn their religious duty to their own family** and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God's sight.
1 Timothy 5:4

In verse four, Paul calls caring for extended family our "*first (primary) religious duty*" and that **such provision pleases God**. He also describes our care for parents and grandparents now as "**repayment**" for the care they gave to us in our youth. To reinforce this point, in verse eight, Paul next turns this command into a negative.

Whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
1 Timothy 5:8

This lesson is that simple: No matter what else good you might be doing in the church or in your community, if you neglect your close and extended family's needs, in God's opinion you are worse than an infidel. Interestingly, in my Bible College days, I first learned this verse as justification for training in Karate. Now before you laugh, realize that proper provision for your family also includes care and preparation for their safety; that is also why I own and know how to use a firearm.

Which reminds me of the old Quaker and his wife who were asleep in their bed upstairs when he heard a noise of somebody breaking into their house. Grabbing his blunderbuss he came to the top of the stairs and looked down to see an intruder climbing up. Speaking in a gentle but firm voice he said, *Sir I would do thee no harm, but thou standest where I would shoot.*

These days, at least in our western world, Dad and Grandma, have police, para-medics, pensions and other government programs to provide for their food, health, safety and daily needs; But these are not all the needs of a senior couple or a widower. **Perhaps the biggest need among our seniors today, especially in our highly mobile nuclear family generation, is the isolation, loneliness, and a lack of purpose for living felt by those left behind.** The kids have moved hours away and as Mom or Dad lose their physical or mental capacity to drive, to live alone, eventually they become imprisoned in their own home or placed in a sr. care facility. Who is left to look after their needs. Our Church **Deacons** primary concern these days are to be the shepherds for such "shut ins", to visit, to give them time, to see that their daily needs are being met, to assure them that they have not been forgotten. The Deacons work hard at caring for the elder members of our church. And yet their ministry does not relieve us from our own personal responsibility to repay Mom & Dad in all the ways we can for all the love and care they earlier gave to us.

So this principle still holds true, no matter how we work things out, **our primary responsibility as Christians is first in caring for the needs of our both our own and our extended family.** Which brings us to our second principle being **our responsibility to also care for the needs of those who have no family to care for them.**

Whether by distance, emotional desertion, or death of their loved ones, there are still elderly people living among us whom Paul would identify as "widows indeed;" in other words those needy people with no family to care for them.

Again, our government has lured us all, especially churches, into complacency towards our Christian responsibilities to care for the "poor and strangers living in our midst" by supposedly having programs in place for such people. But you don't have to look far or hard to see how poorly the various government agencies do their job and how many deserving needy people fall through the cracks. I say this not to shame any of us, but only to underscore that those among our members who are active in supporting in the various ministries that our churches offer; being Deacons, teacher's assistants, serving at The Shepherd's Table, Bedford Christian Ministries, Bedford Free Clinic, and Bedford Pregnancy Center, are not merely occupying themselves in some social feel-good hobby but are truly serving our Biblical mandate to care for "widow's indeed," and the "poor" and "strangers in the land." (cf: Deuteronomy 15:11, Proverbs 14:31)

Now for a moment, I want us to consider one **of the biggest social problems of our day which begs for a much more active response from the church and that is in the care of "orphans."** These days, while there are still orphans who have been given up at birth for adoption, the largest group who now qualify as orphans are those children needing to be temporarily or permanently removed from dysfunctional families for reasons of parental drug use, neglect, abuse, or other forms of criminality. Where can these orphans find shelter? Again

the government has struggled to provide such shelter formerly through orphanages, more lately through foster homes, but the need greatly outstrip their ability. Christian organizations such as **Patrick Henry Family Services** is now raising the call for churches and Christian couples, to once again realize their religious responsibility to provide these temporary possibly permanent orphans with homes, shelter, and nurture though foster care and adoption.

Yes, fostering a child takes a lot of paper work, hopping through government hoops, it is a major responsibility, and may be one of the toughest jobs you have ever had in your life. But from time immemorial, this has been a specific requirement for those who love God; or as James labeled it, your best expression of *religion that is pure and undefiled*. If the Spirit is speaking to you about providing a foster home for some lost child, I can certainly put you in touch with people who will help you make a connection.

So how to sum up such a message. Maybe James said it best, that the truest expression of our Christian faith can be found in how we care for widows and orphans, and how we live "unstained" lives in the world; to which Paul might add, praying and living for peace and so that everyone might be saved.

Let us pray about this.