

Sermon on 1 Timothy 5 1-2: Rebuke & the Family of God

1 Timothy, Chapter 5 Verses 1 through 2. Let us listen attentively to the word of God. Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.

Let us pray. In these exhortations, God, we read here, Lord of Paul reminding Timothy of his duty, but in doing his duty, he should not be especially harsh in drawing attention to sin and warning them or admonishing them, but rather, Lord, to take in consideration who they are in the natural, that is, there are some that are old and some that are young, others that are women and others that are men, and to adjust his reprimand accordingly. Our God and Savior, help us to reconsider again in a day and age in which these distinctions are attacked and torn down in many ways, to renew our commitment to what is the case - that there are young and old and that there are male and female, but God, in particular, Lord, that we are called as brothers and sisters.

The greater picture here, in the faith that this is a metaphor to describe our new relationship, that although we don't have much in common other than being fellow humans, now in Christ Jesus, we have much more in common, and that comes with responsibility, the rebuke or the exhortation here as we read in the rest of the Bible. And to that end, God, may we learn or relearn and be recommitted to the call to rebuke, to exhort in the context of the family of God. In your glorious name, we pray. Amen.

Like most passages of the Bible, a doctrine is intertwined with practical issues of that day. It may be difficult problems or simple encouragements, as we run across a few times, for the task at hand, as Paul does in the prior verses of chapter 4 for Timothy, or the Christian life in general, as he does in the other epistles. But it was something that needed to be done then and there. So Paul and Peter and the others wrote or spoke to the issues at hand, applying God's will to their situation.

Here, in this text, the problem was bringing together different people around a new institution, the New Testament church. With such a transformation from the Old to the New Testament era, many questions gushed forth, such as what to do with circumcision, for example. And we know that culminated in Acts 15, Jerusalem Council.

Or in this text, how to relate to each other. In the rest of chapter 5, you see him unpacking other things that seem so obvious to us, but clearly were not obvious to them. And so he warns Timothy, you need to admonish and tell them, this is how you're supposed to treat one another, and even take care of your own family.

Paul explains here to Timothy how to relate in a non-Jewish way, because the old way was a Jewish way. To be clear, they are the same in many, many ways, of course. This relationship that is kindness and fairness and the like.

But Paul is explaining to Timothy that the relationship has not changed. Rather, a new responsibility has been superimposed on top of the existing natural relationships. As we see in this text, young and old, male and female.

Which includes admonishing and discipline, as well as encouragement and the like. Given the authority of Timothy, as a pastor, to admonish and warn, how should he exercise it in the new spiritual relationship? Paul urges the young man to exercise such discipline with an eye to the family metaphor. To tamper it.

That the converts to Christianity should not be treated as customers, like it's a business, and that's unfortunately a common model in the American church scene. Or voters from a national party, like it's all about politics or something, but as family members. We know how you treat those differently, don't we? Those three different contexts.

So let's look a little more carefully here at what that entails and what that looks like. We have this, which will be mostly this sermon, mostly emphasizing and explaining a rebuke and admonition and the like. Then I'll have another sermon after this to back up and go further to the larger idea behind here, which is the family of God.

What that looks like and what it is and what it is not. I'll touch a little bit about that here in the first point.

The Family of God

The family of God, what it is, it is a spiritual relationship.

Obviously, it's not biological. I don't have other than a few members here. Any direct or even indirect, except that we're all from Noah and from him to Adam, relationship with you.

It's not a feeling, that is a family of God, but a fact. It's not a social relationship or a civil relationship, although those are intertwined. If we're neighbors and traditionally for thousands of years, if you were in a local church, you were also neighbors.

So you have a civil relationship already or a social relationship with one another. But the church is not that. It's not a political relationship, but a relationship with respect to God and Christ.

A spiritual relationship. And such a relationship, of course, does not destroy all those other ones. It's not like you become a Christian and now you're no longer a neighbor.

Now you no longer have social responsibilities or civil and legal responsibilities towards each other. Of course you do. None of that changes.

Now you have both. You have an additional responsibility to one another in Christ Jesus. As we say sometimes, now you have a new hat.

You've got to wear the hat of civility, the hat of the family, the biological family. Now you have the spiritual hat of the spiritual family. This relationship is from the Father in Christ Jesus through the Spirit.

And we see this somewhat here in the prayer, the blessing, the doxology of 2 Corinthians 13-14. 2 Corinthians 13-14, we heard a sermon about it actually at Presbytery. Because on

Tuesday night, that first Tuesday night of the meeting of the Presbytery, we always have a worship service.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Jesus, here, as the head of the body, is the source of our grace.

We are united to Him by faith and faith alone, and therefore we share that relationship. The Father, of course, here, the love of God, is given to us. He has chosen us from eternity past, not as individuals, but as individuals gathered together into one body with Christ as the head.

And in that union with Christ, it is through what? The Holy Spirit. What we see in particular in 2 Corinthians 13-14 is that all three, although different graces and functions of the members are emphasized, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, for example, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We also have fellowship with God the Father.

We also have fellowship with the Son. But this text specifically here specializes and emphasizes upon the communion or the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with you all. Not with you individually, but together collectively.

That's the relationship that we have. It's a new entity compared to the rest of our life. So we have this communion or fellowship or union from and through the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit, because this communion of the Holy Spirit must exist because of the love of the Father and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They're all coordinated. They all work together in our Christian walk. But again, the emphasis here is that it's a new relationship, it's a spiritual relationship, and it's based upon our relationship, our referent point, spiritually speaking, to God.

The Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, from whom we have all our graces and our mercy. And he's gathered us together and bound us in the, what, initiation of baptism. In the initiation of baptism.

That's the public, I mean public baptism in particular. Of course, it points to spiritual baptism, being born again. The communion of the Holy Spirit or the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that we have in and through him and with one another.

But baptism is an outward sign, is a visible demarcation or separation from the world that we are in a new relationship. Yes, we have our family members. Yes, we have our neighbors.

But now in addition to those things, we have one another. And baptism expresses that. And it's maintained by the church ordinances.

Baptism, of course, being the first one, that's the initiation or the initiative sacraments. And we have the other public means of grace, the gathering together of the saints, preaching, prayer, praise, participating in the sacraments, the Lord's Supper in particular. These are common events, weekly, consistent public events in which, what, we share together.

This expresses this spiritual relationship that we have with one another outwardly by action. The action either of sitting and submitting and listening to God's word, by praying through the mouth of the pastor, and through praise, of course, and singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Church discipline is one of those ordinances given by God to maintain this spiritual relationship with one another and with Him.

That's the negative description that sets out. This is what you should be doing in this union that we have with one another in the family of God. And, of course, positively, the fellowship, or again that word communion, in 2 Corinthians 13, with one another and through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

This is the sharing of lives, not just on Sunday through the public means of grace, but throughout the week as we have prayer requests and praises and Thanksgiving. We have needs for one another. We just enjoy one another's fellowship and have lunch together, or Bible studies, the women's meeting, things like that.

So, both, remember the language before, the church organized, the church officers, I can also put under the ordinances here as well, to help you grow, to help you maintain unity with one another, and the church organic, in which you do these things even without the church officer there involved or the preaching. You're like, we are one in Christ, and we have much in common, and we wish to help and be friendly towards one another. And so this family of God, what it is, and how it's maintained, and what's based upon the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is important.

And it's also cross-generational. It's not like the church becomes a new church every generation, but it has this organic continuity between generations. Children of Christian families are part of the covenant promises, and baptism formally and publicly expresses what is theirs, and shows their fellowship, therefore, and the sharing in the life of the church as well.

Because again, as I pointed out at the beginning, I didn't spend a lot of time on it, but being the family of God does not eradicate natural relationships. You're still supposed to be a good neighbor. You're still a neighbor.

You're still supposed to be a citizen of this nation and do the appropriate responsibilities, and you have a family, a biological family. The family of God is a metaphor that overlaps existing family relationships. It does not destroy them, but rather reinforces them, as we will see for the rest of Chapter 5.

So what it's not. You already got an idea of this, I think, what the family of God metaphor is not. And unfortunately, I have to say this because it happens. People end up replacing their own family with the church, or at least they try, because you really can't do it.

You just simply can't. You don't live with these people. You don't live in the same house throughout the week.

They didn't give birth to you. Those make serious differences, don't they? We understand this. When you get old, when your parents get old, and they have to be taken care of, who's

going to go to their house to change their bedpan? Someone in the church or you? You're going to do it.

Because you have that special, biological, natural relationship. That's how God designed it. And unfortunately, there's talk at times of the church is supposed to replace broken families and the like.

We will try, brothers and sisters. We will do what we can, but at the end of the day, we really can't. There's still going to be a gap there.

We're limited in our resources, limited in our abilities, and in the grace of God, we'll have to cover up the rest. This is all there is to it. And we should not be naive about this.

Because if you overpromise to converts, come to the church, we're going to fix all your problems, we'll be your new family because your family's broken, they're going to be sorely disappointed. So, we can be an assistance, but it's limited, unfortunately. And it's, of course, related to this idea that the church as a family is a metaphor, is not an excuse not to take care of your family.

Well, I have to spend all my time at church. I have to support the ministry. I've got to save souls.

I mean, that sounds very noble, doesn't it? Think about it. I've heard this growing up. Maybe you've heard this once in a while in different ways.

They don't quite outright say it all the time. But somehow you're more holy if you spend more time and more money and resources on the church and foreign missions and everything else, and you neglect your family. And we see this in 1 Timothy 5, 8. Eight verses later, six verses later.

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Clearly, Paul said there's problems going on here. And Timothy, you need to warn these people.

They're not taking care of their family. Why is that? I submit to you because the New Testament and the great miracles and the wonderful things, they thought Christ was coming, and we just drop all our natural responsibilities for one another. This is it.

And we got the church, and we're going to heaven. Or something like that's going on. He says, no, no, a thousand times no.

You have to take care of one another. That is your natural responsibilities. And so that's the limits of the metaphor, of course.

Another way of describing the limits of the metaphor is for the local church, and the metaphor fits a lot better in the local church than, like, say, the presbytery. You know, my relationship to the other church in the presbytery is as a pastor, I see their leadership twice a year at least, maybe sometimes more, but not often. I'm not as close to them as I am to you.

And that's proper, and that's good. That's the way it's supposed to be. So the metaphor in that sense, you can't do much with it in terms of concrete action.

So there is a limit there. Other limits, of course, are language. You're going to have different denominations and churches based on language, because you just literally can't mix with a different language, or even a different culture at times.

I've mentioned this before. This is a reminder, in other words, that don't misunderstand this metaphor used here and elsewhere in the Bible as being blind to these kind of differences. He's not saying, forget those differences, just unite together, because we're supposed to be one in Christ, forget all the languages, and somehow we'll just get along with one another.

You know, that doesn't work that way. Unless we all of a sudden have the language of miraculous language abilities, as they did in the book of Acts, it's not going to happen. It just doesn't happen.

The same with cultural differences. Some cultures just simply don't mix very well. Of course, sin.

Sin is one of the things that breaks down that metaphor as well. And in fact, we would not leave our family or disown them in the way we might more readily leave a church if there was problems in the church. That's another difference in which the metaphor breaks down.

Because sometimes people will urge, we're a church family, don't leave, please don't leave. Like, okay, but you're blaspheming God. You know, you're grooming my kids.

I'm not going to stay here because of your metaphor. Right? There's a limit to it. It's not to be used and abused that way.

Rebuke and the Family of God

But it is to limit here, as we'll see here in the second point, rebuking in the family of God, being too harsh as a church leader. That's what he's especially going after. But not only them.

Of course, the rest of us can be too harsh. Even if you're not a church leader. Sometimes Christians fall into the trap of being overbearing is a word that we use sometimes.

So here, rebuke and exhortation uses two words here. Do not rebuke an older man, Paul tells the young pastor, Timothy, but to exhort him as a father. The word rebuke here is interesting.

It's only used here in this form. It means to inflict with blows. So the translation would be, the application would be strong or sharp rebuke.

Obviously, Timothy wasn't running around hitting people. It's not how it's used. It can be used that way, but it's not used that way here.

It just means a sharp rebuke. Being very aggressive, apparently. Don't do that.

Don't take it that way. But rather, there's another similar word here. Rebuke them.

Don't sharply rebuke them, but you could rebuke them. Preach the word, we read in 2 Timothy 4. Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke.

He uses that word, although it's not quite the same. You hear the same in English. Like, what's going on here? Don't rebuke, but rebuke.

This word more specifically is a sharp rebuke, like inflicting a blow, I guess, verbally, in this case, instead of with his hands. But there's a time to, of course, be strong in your rebuke. Paul does that elsewhere, as we see.

But here, I think what he's saying is, as a general rule, be careful and hold back a little bit. Don't be so strong in your discipline, verbal discipline, probably, in this case, as in most cases. Rather, exhort him as a father, or to call to one side.

The word could be translated comfort, encourage, entreat, or exhort, or even pleading. We run across that in Acts 16.9. And a vision appeared to Paul at night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him.

That's the same word. Saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. So, pleading is probably a little better idea here.

You can use exhort that way. But typically, when I hear exhort in English, I hear lift up and make him feel good or happy. That's not what he's saying here.

He's saying, don't be harsh and sharp with him in your rebuke. But when you do rebuke, probably plead with him. Strength, encourage him.

Go the right way. Don't go the wrong way. This is not good, brother.

Something like that is what he's driving at here. He should not quickly resort to strong rebukes. Enact the change from bad practices or beliefs by entreating, exhorting, or pleading them.

The same idea, but with less sharpness is the emphasis here. Not something different. He's not just saying, don't be negative.

Don't say bad things. No, but if you're going to be negative, you don't have to be harsh about it. That is negative in the sense of, you shouldn't be doing this.

This is bad. This is not helpful for you. It's going to be worse at the end of the day for you.

Or another way of describing it is, don't bark all the time. Don't be barking at people. What's your problem? Why are you doing this? What in the world? Don't do that.

It's true for Timothy. It's true for us as well. But the warning, is my point, is still there.

Exhortation here is just saying, give the warning in a little nicer way, please, Timothy. Now, he says, rebuke the older, rebuke the younger. Rebuke the older and rebuke the younger.

Rebuke the older man. Timothy, of course, is a young pastor. He must not exercise his office in an aggressive manner, is the idea here.

But entreat the older men towards godliness, towards obedience, and away from sin, not with angry tirades and sharp rebukes. And the redirect, his exhortation, is a little more gentle, as I pointed out before. And older women as well, as mothers, he says here in the next one.

But verse 2, older women as mothers. Timothy should entreat them when they sin, like he would entreat his mother. And you know you're going to do that differently.

This metaphor, of course, assumes a healthy family relationship. He's not saying, pick the worst example in your life, in your family, and just go with it in the church. But rather, in a healthy family, you're more respectful, you're more careful in talking to your mother, in this case, in the church context, to an older woman.

Now, it's a little more difficult. It can be if you come from a different culture. That's why I pointed this out.

Again, in the South, I always come to my mind because I was born in the South. You say, yes, ma'am, no, sir. We don't do that as much out here.

They expect that from two and three-year-olds. That's what you've got to do. And if you don't do it, what? You're not showing proper respect to an older woman or older man.

And people will say something about it. Not as much out here. So we have this kind of weird mixture in the churches.

So we have to have, I would urge us to be doubly more kind and more careful and understanding and people communicating and understanding. OK, maybe there's a misrepresentation. You're misunderstanding because the way I spoke or something like that.

One way of looking at this is the older woman, the older men, it's not just another club member, but a part of the family of God. Have more care and consideration and love. It's not like you hate your club member, but you're going to treat them a little differently because they're not family members.

This picture here and elsewhere in the Bible paints the church of God as something more close to a family than any other human institution that we could use as a metaphor. Because there are business aspects to the church. We've got to take care of budgets, right? That's kind of a very limited metaphor, as it were.

And the like, but family especially. Rebuking the younger, men as brothers, women as sisters. Of course, again, not like fighting brothers, but respectful brothers.

A good relationship and the like. Women as sisters, gentle and carefully. We see here, and what in verse 2? With all purity.

With all purity. So let's look at these four people or groups of people in a different light. I already gave you the hint of it when I said there's age differences and there are sex or gender differences.

So you have two axes now, right? Going on here, and he just treats them, he just clumps them together. Of course you are, because you are more than just one thing or one description of what you are or one relationship. You are young or you are old, related to other people at different times in your life.

And you are a male and a female. Of course, that's a constant in your life. This is about natural relationships.

He's using the natural relationship as a way of describing a metaphor, therefore it's not one-to-one, of your relationship with one another in the body of Christ, the local church. Treat one another as though you were part of the family, your own family. So by age, being united to Christ does not mean children should be treated as adults.

Sometimes that happens. I don't think they do it for that reason. There's other reasons.

But they don't get adult benefits. Some churches do that, not many. They do child communion.

They're like, well, they're members of the Church of Christ and therefore all differences of age are meaningless now. No, no, not at all. The supernatural relationship that we have in Christ Jesus and with one another, by supernatural I don't mean we have miracles every day, but I mean that which we have through the Holy Spirit, in contrast to what? The natural relationships that we have with one another.

Even if we weren't Christians, we would have these relationships and ought to have them because they're required by God in His Word and instilled in us by nature, by His creation. We love one another, we take care of one another and our families and our friends and the like. Supernatural is built upon it, does not destroy it.

And that means the gender as well. The sex differences. People like to use Galatians.

In the passes there, that says there's neither slave nor free, Greek nor Jew, male nor female. Really? There's no males and females? Sorry, you're all androgynous. Nobody believes that, but they like to use that, unfortunately, as an excuse to bring in, oh, well, this is providential, feminism to the church, our conference.

They bring feminism in the church in the guise of saying, you men, stop being manly because there's neither male nor female in the church. I've literally read those things. You're like, what? You don't believe that? You just conveniently believe that because you're bringing in a false practice.

You want women in office. It's one of the more practical reasons. There's other things that brings in error, unfortunately.

This means men should be more gentle towards what? The gentle sex. We don't use that phrase very often anymore. It's okay for most men to smack jovially on the back with a good joke, but don't do that with a woman.

I'm not going to go into all the details why that's the case. The obvious thing is because men are literally stronger and they must get used to using their body and be okay with being hit and hurt because at the end of the day, most of civilization for a long time has dealt with war and dangers and men must be what? Tough. And this is our way of being tough.

Emotionally, by making jokes and making fun of one another and physically, by literally hitting one another. As simple as that. Nothing more complicated than that.

It's not toxic masculinity. It's practical ways, means, causes, and occasions that cultures have developed for thousands of years in which it makes a man tough. That's all there is to it.

And we don't like that because we're run by feminists, basically. A way of excusing and making exalting women, unfortunately, in a wrong way instead of the right biblical way. Matthew Henry, therefore, describes it here, the last phrase here, with all purity.

If Timothy so mortified a man to this world and to the flesh and the lust of it, such a godly man, is his point, so mortified. He's mortified with respect to the world. His flesh is under control to a large degree.

If he has such a need of this caution, how much more do we have it? We meaning who? Oh, that's right, men. With respect to women. I don't think I need to go into much detail than that.

Hence, the Billy Graham rule, or what was mockingly called during the 2015 election, 16 election, the Pence rule. It was just Billy Graham. And before him, it's the Paul rule.

Which is, men ought not to be hanging out with other men's wives, or other women in general. That's all there is to it. And we don't like that today because we have lots of predators who want to use feminism to their advantage to get more victims.

Let's put it that way. And women are told this is okay. And it's not.

And again, it's run across in the church. It's been a problem. People make excuses.

The Bible tells us, people in the church, reformed churches, have mocked the Billy Graham rule. As an offense towards women. That's where we are.

And that's one reason why I'm spending a little more time on such verses as this. Because you will run across it. You're going to see it, unfortunately.

I hope not. But I think it's going to happen. So, if age and gender differences make no difference, then this text makes no difference.

It makes no sense. But it's based upon common natural distinctions of age and sex. And applied to the spiritual situation we have with one another.

Who rebukes? Timothy is called to rebuke as a church leader, of course. He has a special duty to rebuke. But he's not the only one with that duty.

Church pastors, ruling elders and the like, are not the only ones who are called to rebuke. In fact, we all are. We forget about this.

Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, Jesus says. And if you repent, forgive him.

That's all of our responsibility. You would do that in a family relationship? If your siblings know this right off the bat, right? We all know the siblings are on top of it. The older one's like, what do you think you're doing? Mom would be after you in a heartbeat if you kept that up.

And the same thing in the church. Although, don't do it with that kind of attitude. But the same thing in the church.

In the church relationship that we have with one another. So, the admonition here, although explicitly and directly given to Timothy, is still for us, not to have sharp rebukes, not to quickly and readily go to this kind of barking approach to things, but rather turn it around in a little different direction to exhort people to flee from sin, that particular problem that they have. But there can be a time for rebuke, as Jesus uses that word rebuke there in Luke.

Now, the rebuking here in Galatians 6.1, for example, is tempered. Brethren, if a man has overtaken any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a man in a spirit of gentleness. Consider yourself, lest you also be tempted.

Therefore, this exhortation, or this mild rebuke, the idea here in Timothy, should be with a spirit of gentleness, your own spirit of gentleness, of humility. And the goal, it's not to hammer someone over the head, but to restore them. It's not for petty revenge, but you want to bring them back into fullness of the fellowship of the body of Christ, and especially towards God.

And with clarity, of course, he doesn't say that here, but it's implied, not with vague accusations or concerns. But it should be very clear, something that's concretely wrong, and therefore there should be a concrete way to restore or fix the problem, or that is, of course, repent of it. And sparingly, you don't just keep going after someone all the time.

Rebuking here, again, through exhortations, that is to correct in a more positive way, less barbs, more warnings, and the like. But then there is, of course, a time to be more strong and clear in our rebukes. Brothers and sisters, let us continue to pray for one another, that we would all follow the example of Timothy here, who is called to treat one another with respect to our age and our gender, in terms of exhortation and rebuke, but, of course, on the flip side, encouragement.

That they want to hear something good from you, that you are blessed by them, for example, if that's the case, and not just about rebuke. If it's the negative, it's also the positive when we read a command of God. The positive would be to rejoice, to celebrate, to thank them, perhaps, for being here.

You're here at church every week, you always have a smile on your face, you're always here helping, or something like that. And that encourages me, because I struggle. Whatever the case is, brothers and sisters, by God's Spirit upon us, let us renew our commitment to one another by His Word, the truth therein here, that we are brothers and sisters in the Lord, that we are young and old with respect to our spiritual walk, to be sure, and that we are walking this path together.

Let us pray. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, strengthen us and guide us again in the new, we pray, and towards the truth that we are the family of God, and that rebuke has its place, that is admonitions and warnings and concerns, God, for one another. May we do these things, Lord, not with an eagerness to assert our authority, but rather, Lord, through gentleness and humility, as implied here for Timothy, that he ought to exhort them.

May we have this proper relationship, God, and a desire to grow as the body of Christ in the spiritual truth, we pray. Amen.