

Family Matters - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 5:1-2** (#536)

Introduction: Several times in **1 Timothy**, we've mentioned that Paul uses family language to describe the church. We saw examples of this in **chapter 2**, where Paul spoke to men and women, grounding his commands in the first family of Adam and Eve. It came up again in **chapter 3**, where the qualifications for an overseer and a deacon are related to how they manage their own family because that shows something about how they'll care for God's family. Later in that same chapter, Paul writes of "how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God..." In short, this idea of a spiritual family is all throughout the letter, and we'll see it again this week and next week.

As we begin **1 Timothy 5**, my point is this: whatever thoughts come to mind, whatever associations you have with this family imagery, you and I need to be challenged. If your picture is a positive one, then you need to see how what the Lord has blessed you with at home needs to be the pattern within the church. If your view is negative or confused, you need to see that the idea of a spiritual family given here can be the reality for you at church – and it should be, even if your own experience doesn't match up.

This morning, we'll see how Paul calls Timothy to relate to older men and women as well as younger men and women. His instructions, however, aren't just for pastors – instead, we'll learn something about how to respect one another and to bridge generational divides in a way that honors the Lord and spurs one another on toward faithfulness. In these days when generations are so separated, these two verses before us are the manna from heaven that we need to consume if we are to be found faithful. Let's see what this looks like together...

5:1 Several times in this letter, Paul has called Timothy in very strict terms to deal with those who mislead the church. He is to charge them to stop teaching heresy (**1:3**), to call them to no longer be obsessed with speculation (**1:4**), to “wage the good warfare” against such false teaching (**1:18**). Similar ideas appear again in **chapters 4, 5, and 6**. Paul’s language when it comes to those who teach false doctrine is strong – there is no waffling. Timothy’s response isn’t to coddle such people, but to see their priorities for the Gospel-threat that they truly are.

Yet, decisive strength isn’t the only way that Paul speaks. When it comes to the people of God – even when they are immature, wrong, and still in need of correction – Paul counsels Timothy to use a very different tack. The first verse in **chapter 5** is a perfect example of this different strategy...

Timothy’s attitude towards fellow Christians isn’t to be the sort of unbending brick wall that Paul counsels for those looking to undermine the Gospel. Instead, what we read is that encouragement is the proper attitude. That word “encourage” applies not only to those that Timothy is to treat as a father, but to the younger men, older women, and younger women as well. What does that look like?

First, it doesn’t mean that Timothy is never allowed to correct. Just a few verses ago at the end of **chapter 4**, Paul called Timothy to “command and teach these things,” and also to “let no one despise you for your youth.” Timothy is the pastor of the Ephesian church. To be faithful in that role, he is going to have to help people grow as disciples of Jesus, which includes correcting them when they are wrong. That’s not easy to do when you are caring for folks who could be your parents or grandparents. Neither is it easy when they could be your peers. I

certainly found myself in a similar situation when I was first hired here – and though I’ve lost quite a bit of hair and had some of what’s left turn gray, a number of you could still be my parents and grandparents. So what is to be done?

Many of us younger folks aren’t sure how to handle this situation. We live in a strange world where youth is prized, yet in the church we are called – as we should be – to respect our elders. What’s more, the stakes go even higher: scripturally, all people in the church are called to have a certain measure of respect and submission to their pastor. I can only begin to imagine how hard of a command that must be for some of you when I am the age of your children. It hasn’t always been easy, has it? Yet, by God’s grace, we’ve learned something of how things should go – and that something is based on what we see Paul teaching Timothy here.

Timothy’s attitude towards older men is not to primarily be one of rebuke, but encouragement. Both words involve correction, but only the second is appropriate for older “fathers” in the faith. Timothy’s attitude is to be winsome, respectful, honorable. It isn’t to try and just get along, but it is to speak with an attitude of humility. He is to persuade and to convince, not only to correct.

Too many young people lead with an attitude of all or nothing. We act like every issue is life and death and we are tempted to approach every disagreement as if it’s World War III. Let me encourage those of you who are younger: when it comes to folks older than you, lead with respect and humility. Often, you’ll be surprised at the hearing you receive. And for those older – especially you older men – when a younger person comes to you with this kind of honorable attitude, realize how hard it is for them to even speak up in the first place. Listen with the assumption that this younger person in the church has your best interests at heart.

Continuing in that vein, Timothy is to treat the younger men – those his age or younger – as brothers. Again, think of Paul’s ideal God-fearing family and you’ll get the right idea. Paul doesn’t mean that Timothy should have the sort of sibling rivalry that all too often characterizes our own reality. Instead, the idea remains one of respect: rather than looking down on those younger than him, Timothy is to extend the same courtesy to his fellow brothers as he is hoping that older folks in the church will extend to him.

Practically, this means that you and I should be careful that we don’t immediately dismiss those younger than us as not having anything worthwhile to say or consider. We need to be wary of that old phrase “children should be seen and not heard.” In a well-ordered family, all of the brothers care for and respect one another, and it needs to be that way among us at First E-Free.

As always, Jesus strikes the proper balance: note how patient He is with the disciples. How He gives of His time and attention sacrificially. Don’t miss Christ’s respect even for those genuine followers that He is correcting. Let your attitude be like His – not because you can be Jesus, but instead because His life and death and resurrection changes everything – including you! It gives you a confidence that has nothing to do with your age, it gives you a meaning and identity that isn’t built around your generation or gender. Instead, you are part of the family of God!

Of course, Christ is also well-known for the extravagant time, honor, and attention that He gives to ladies. Let’s turn there next...

5:2 The counterpart of Timothy’s attitude towards older and younger men is the parallel attitudes and actions that he is to have with older and younger women. Timothy is to show a similar kind of respect, care, kindness, and honor to the older and younger ladies in the church.

That’s an amazing thing for Paul to write, especially in a first-century world that valued men and women so differently. And what an amazing thing it would be for you and I, in a world and at a time so divided, so “at one another’s throats,” if we were to have men and women, boys and girls, treating one another in this way!

Timothy is to treat the older ladies in the church with the respect due to a mother – and we know from **2 Timothy 1** that Timothy had a wonderfully faithful example from his grandmother and mother. Just as he is to look for ways to encourage rather than brow-beat older men, so Timothy is to have the same attitude with the older women. Not to be patronizing or a doormat, but also not to be harsh or combative. His tools are persuasion, kindness, and a genuine care for others.

Similarly, Timothy is to extend that same kind of care – that same attitude – to the younger ladies of the church, though with one additional caveat. While he is to respect, honor, and look to encourage these sisters in Christ, Timothy is also to be wise. The temptations of lust and sex were no different then than they are now. Wisely, Paul calls Timothy to be holy. Even as he is to honor these ladies as sisters, he is to make sure that all his actions and words are aboveboard. That everything he does – and everything he refrains from doing – is marked by purity.

Dear church, could there be a more relevant command for us? We do not want our Gospel witness to be marked by scandal or accusation. So, just as we give attention

to treating one another, of whatever age, male and female, honor and respect as fellow image-bearers of God, let me also call us to a purity that our world knows little of. Paul's instructions here are customized to Timothy – he is a younger man, he needs to be careful with how he relates to the younger ladies. But the big picture of this applies to us all, doesn't it? Whatever your station in life: as an older man or woman, a younger man or woman, your actions and attitudes towards the opposite sex need to be marked by purity.

While this sermon isn't meant to focus only on purity, let me give a few applications as we close, since Paul himself took pains to be clear with Timothy. Are all your communications online above board? If your texts, emails, or Snapchat messages were made public, would you be proud or ashamed?

When you meet with somebody who isn't your spouse, are you intentional about making sure that you don't lead yourself into temptation? Do you take precautions to ensure that nobody could credibly accuse you of anything? Ladies, I want you to know that this is one reason why I won't meet with you alone: I want your and my reputation to be safeguarded and cared for well. For us all, you'll need to intentionally think through what strategies fit your own workplace or life situation.

Dear church: the point here isn't a throwback to Victorian times, nor is it to be prudish. Instead, our goal is to honor one another and to honor Jesus. He died so that our sins would be forgiven. The proper response to that sacrifice isn't to take it lightly, it isn't to be careless or flippant. Instead, it is to respond with gratefulness – a gratefulness that is shown in our very actions and words. And, practically, it is to respond as a multi-generational church that examples Christ in our relationships with one another. What is one way you can be intentional about that this week?