

If you are sometimes on the edge about whether to send a child to children's church – not based on whether they can last the length of the sermon, but based on content – then this could be a day to let them go. So with that...

The title of this morning's message is "All In the Family: Power, Sex and Money, Pt. 1," and today we are going to look at the first two of those: Power and Sex.

I know from speaking with many of you that we have quite a few people here at Hope who are from, or in, what our culture calls "blended families." Some of us have lost a spouse and remarried, or we have gone through a divorce or are children of divorce. Our brother and friend Jeff Kadlec – Jeff married a woman last weekend, Lori, who has two children from a previous marriage. And when we as adults bring a family into another family, or as children when we are suddenly coming into contact with sisters and brothers overnight, there are all kinds of new dynamics. You have to get used to a new household with new people with new wants and desires, and you quickly discover each other's likes and dislikes. It is very difficult to bring everyone together without simply imposing one person's perspective on another. I've seen some families thrive with fun and mutual support, and others collapse under the weight of tensions and difficulties.

The bible is not silent about this if you think of the early church exactly this way – as an extended family. Think of it this way: Acts chapter 2 is a kind of wedding day. Not only has God in his son sent his bridegroom to his people, but God also pours out his spirit in a wonderful celebration of the covenant fulfilled. In Christ, God has saved his people, and now he clothes them with his gracious, cleansing Spirit.

But remember, this. This is one massive blended family being created! Remember that at this wedding of God and his people, you had Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome. Now you could say – these are just the faithful Jewish diaspora – the Jews living outside of Palestine – come home. It's simply a homecoming. But Acts 2 says that both Jews and proselytes were there. Gentiles who were converting were there.

And like any wedding day, extraordinary things happen. You know, at Jeff's wedding, people who barely knew one another danced with new relatives from the other side of the family, to celebrate. Well at the Pentecost wedding, you had folks who were from all over the known world having all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. It was extraordinary. A Great and gracious blended family.

As NT Wright will say, this wasn't some kind of early church experiment that didn't work, and that is why we don't see it repeated in any of Paul's letters. But instead, it was God's grace poured out at this wedding that would set the tone for how this blended, growing and extended family would get along.

Here in 1st Timothy, with the wedding of God to Jew and Gentile firmly established, Paul gives Timothy some basics on how we – you and me – how we are all to get along in this new family that is going to expand, day after day.

Let's read just the first two verses of chapter 5:

1 Timothy 5:1-2

¹ Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. (ESV)

We are going to tackle just these two verses this week – these very basic instructions – not just because I think we need them so badly (I do!), but because they grow out of what is one of Paul's most central theological concerns: We – the church – are the renewed family of God. In Jesus and in his Spirit, we **MUST** reflect this central fact, or our witness to the world is destroyed. If we don't care for and love one another in the way that the scriptures lay out, then our blended family might be just as disastrous as some of the other blended families you've known!

It's very simple. Paul calls the church a family. It's *not* an institution. And he's **NOT** just talking to husbands and wives and the parents of children here, *but every single person in the church*. And if we do this – if these are the lenses by which we look at one another – then the church will be a beacon to the world for a new world order. And that new world order we call the church. So this morning we want to look at

- Power in the Church family
- Sex in the church family

So first, power in the church.

You'll remember that two weeks ago, in chapter 4, we looked at v. 12, where Paul told Timothy, "Let no one despise you for your youth." Important words! Because some of the senior members of the church there in Ephesus had sinned against their own consciences and made a shipwreck of their faith – men like Hymenaeus who had preached that the resurrection of all had already happened, effectively tossing out the gospel. But not only that, they looked down on Timothy as an inexperienced lightweight. In fact it was a pretty disastrous situation. Turn over to 2 Timothy 3 for a moment:

2 Timothy 3:1-9

³ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. **Avoid such people.**

6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

You see. The stuff of "the last days" was already happening. Men were creeping around, deceiving – in particular deceiving women – to get what they really wanted from them, and women complying because they, too, were led by their passions.

It sounds like a bad workplace, more than it does a church. But there it was. And this meant that the ministry of this church – the early church – had become increasingly misshapen. It was losing its center. The main things – gospel and mission – were already becoming marginalized. As we'll see next week, even good things – like the care of widows – were becoming the main things, instead of the "first things" of the gospel.

So Timothy had to step up and say some hard things. A rebuke was required. And it's this passage that tells us how to relate to each other in any and all situations. The direction Paul gives is, *this is a family*. The church is a family. A covenant family. Yes there are unique families – men and women marry and have children. But ultimately, our primary calling – hear this – is your calling into the body of Christ. This is the family that will go on forever when there are no more men and women given away in marriage.

So Paul says, since the church as THE family is the ultimate reality, treat the church as a family *now*. You see what he's doing. He saying to Timothy, "You don't expect everyone to simply react to you and your position. No, YOU make the adjustment. The change in this church starts with *your* heart and how *you* treat them."

Once in a while someone will ask me how to find a church. And I give them the classical answer – the classic answer that states the marks of the church are those of Word, Sacrament and Discipline. Now most folks are not surprised by the first two. You should try to find a good church that treats the Bible as if it is the very word of God and prays the word. It should also be a church that takes baptism and the Lord's Supper seriously. But discipline? Why that? And the reason is, discipline is something that families do.

When you go to the supermarket and a child acts out, you don't go over and discipline that child. If you did, they may call store security. On you! But in the church, it should not be a surprise you when someone else in the congregation disciplines your own child before you can get there. Why?

Because we are a family in a way that shoppers at a grocery store or other moms and dads at a soccer game are not.

Ah! But HOW to do discipline, right? The reason that discipline, socially, is almost never done any more, the reason that people can be removed from their home for doing parental discipline, the reason we abhor doing corporate discipline, is *the problem of power*.

Discipline is a dirty word because of the problem of power. Power can be abused. And everyone knows it. The bible knows it. We have to mention often the church or those in our families had abused their power. And it's especially crushing when this abuse happens in our under the name of God, when really, it was done in the name of a sinner or in self-glory. Power and discipline – when used in anger – will merely hurt, and not correct. And the purpose of discipline – at least *biblical* discipline – is correction, and not pain.

So what is Timothy to do? There are all these false teachers in the church – people ARE being hurt. Paul tells Timothy that as a result of these teachers, people are making a "shipwreck of their faith" and he tells Timothy in chapter 1, v. 18, to "wage the good warfare." That sounds violent! How will he do it?

Here, Paul says, you do it the same way you do it in your home. You do it as a family.

If Timothy is going to correct an older man, then he is not to undo him or bring him down, like some do to those near retirement in the workplace – this is not a corporate competition! No, rather than rebuke him, you treat him like he is your own father. You encourage him. The word there is "parakálei" – where the word "paraklete" comes from, which describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's in the present imperative, which means it's an ongoing act of coming alongside the person. To exhort, to comfort, to be there for the person.

And you know, what is happening when the Holy Spirit does that? The Almighty God, in His Spirit, is coming alongside the weak. And the lonely. And those in need. Yes, sometimes in need of discipline. But he does it for the sake of *saving* and *correction*. The Spirit doesn't use his power to crush or hurt, but to lift up, love and comfort. That is what Timothy – and we – are to mirror.

When you look at relationships in the church through the lens of family – the new and ongoing and eternal family that God is creating – then the power you have goes to serve and lift up, rather than to crush and bring down. Power is transformed within the family of the church, so that when you are with younger men, you treat them not with disdain, but like your own brother.

There is no better place to see this than in this marvelous transition that happens in the gospels. Early in his ministry – with his family at the door claiming he is mentally incompetent – Jesus doesn't so much reject his earthly family as he states his true priority – the ongoing, eternal, messianic family of faith. The disciples don't necessarily understand this – and it can sound hard to us the first time we hear that passage. But after the resurrection, in John 20, Jesus will call his disciples brothers. And everyone understands it.

And this takes us to our next and last point: Because this imperative to not rebuke, but encourage – as you can see – also applies not only to older and younger men, but to younger women too. It's a delicate thing, but Timothy is called to come alongside the younger women, too. With absolute purity! But to come alongside. That may seem impossible. But it is the call of the gospel, and the power of God to enable us to do this.

Marva Dawn, a Lutheran evangelical author and musician, has written a book called *Sexual Character*. And when you first hear that title, most of us, with our modern American ears in a sex-saturated culture, imagine that a Christian book with *that* title is primarily if not exclusively about keeping ourselves from sexual immorality. And there is some of that in the book. But her focus in *Sexual Character* is actually on the *positive* ways that men should relate to women, and that women should relate to men. The book understands and in no way dismisses the negative. When you combine – even in Christian communities – the power of remaining sin, the enticement of our culture, and the working of the kingdom of darkness, you have a web of forces that have tripped up many, many people.

But we will fail to be a family – and we will actually sin – if we focus only on purity and abstaining from sexual immorality, because we will fail to treat the opposite sex as our brothers or our sisters in Christ, respectively. You see, there is this clear, positive admonition to engage our brothers and sisters, as well as a negative prohibition. And they have an equal emphasis. "*Encourage ... younger women as sisters, in all purity.*" He doesn't tell Timothy to stay away from them – it's hard to encourage anybody without getting within close range – but to do it in *all purity*.

In fact, and I know this will sound provocative, but I think it is true. So let me say it as a pastor about pastor-types – but you'll know if this applies to you – that if your only way to avoid impurity with the opposite sex is to stay away from them, then you have confirmation that you are viewing that gender only AS sexual objects. In other words, there are men who look at every other woman besides their wife, mother, or daughters as people who have the potential to destroy them or bring them down. And they simply stay away. This is an unbiblical "boundaries" view of gender. I've seen men use this as an excuse not to help or minister to women, and I suspect it happens the other way around as well.

But you see, when Paul says to flee – to put off – sexual immorality, he also tells us to *put on* Christ-likeness.

Look, it's easier to see these issues when you take the sex out of it. Think of stealing. We'll talk more about this next week in Pt. 2 where money comes up. Paul says to those who steal, "Stop stealing!" But he also says, "work with your hands so that you may live ... dependent on no one," and have enough to give to those in need. So you see, part of the correction to the sin of stealing is working and being generous in our giving to others. And think about that! There are all sorts of people who say they steal so they don't have to work, right? But the kingdom of God is an upside down – or maybe right-side up – world. The bible says the *cure* for stealing is working and giving away.

And it's the same here. A part of dealing with sexual sin is, yes, putting off sexual immorality. But it also means putting on – that is starting – to treat women in the church *as sisters* in a family. To love them and honor them and care for them. You have to remember that in Paul's day, they didn't have a term for middle age. So that when Paul says "younger women," he simply means women who are younger than the older women, or those women who are simply younger than Timothy.

So Paul is saying to Timothy, "You can actually, positively, move toward women in the church, in appropriate and loving ways, and the way to do this is to think of them as family. Saying "no" to impurity means also to think of them as they truly are: to say "yes" to them as your sister – or brother – in Christ.

This sounds, I'm sure, like we're only talking to men. But women have viewed men with a kind of lust as well. Some women want men to be their saviors – life is worth it without one. Or others have abstained from male friendships because you assume they are only out for one thing. And some of them are! So treat those guys – the ones in the church – like they are your brother and hit 'em upside the head if you have to!

Friends, to the extent that we as the body of Christ minister to one another, we better start seeing each other as brothers and sisters in a family. Our family. YOUR family. You really see the person when you see them as a family member, because that means living with them.

This is hard, because the church has so often adopted it as biblical the notion that men and women cannot be friends.

But we must not believe the lie of our culture which says that any closeness cross-gender ends up in the bedroom. That is not the biblical picture of treating younger women as sisters. There *are* places for *appropriate* cross-gender relationships. You see, respectful family treatment *promotes* purity. That is the necessary wisdom of this passage – purity. To think of our sisters or brothers as sisters or brothers should be a major deterrent to seeing them as sex objects. Affection can occur, without it being sexual.

This is precisely the picture of Jesus' relationships with Mary and Martha. He went to their homes, presumably fairly often, for food and for fellowship. He entered into serious and deep theological dialogue with them – and this is amazing because of who he is – but *he respected them as equals*. The male-female distinctions in the household of God are beautiful and to be enjoyed. With all purity.

You know, as I think back on my time with my family over the holidays, I kissed or hugged all of my relatives. And really, there should be more kissing and hugging in this church! Paul uses kisses himself to greet his brothers and sisters, right? But they *are* holy kisses. He does it wisely. He treats the brothers AND the sisters in *all purity*. Peter says in 1st Peter 1:22 that we are to "love one another deeply and from a pure heart." He doesn't qualify it by saying, "Men love men this way, and women love women that way." No, it's to everyone – love one another deeply and as people in one household.

Now we do have to figure out what this look likes for it to be positive. This is a little hard to do because of the culture and our sinful hearts. But Jesus had in-depth relationships with his followers, many of whom were women.

Look. If I see one of the single guys in the congregation – you know who you are – and you put your arm around a girl... one of our elders might just come by and say, "What are you doing? That's not your wife! Are you going to marry her?" Now the culture says that's intrusive.

But is that an okay question to ask in the church? Yes! Because that elder is like – what does the passage say? – *your father!* And he wants to know what that arm means. So address the elder like your father and tell him why!

I can't give you a list of dos or don'ts anymore than I can give you an exact list of what you can do on the Sabbath. It's a heart thing, right? But here is what we can say here. If you are treating a brother as a brother, or a sister as a sister, you'll be interested in their walk with God. You'll seek their advice like you would a sibling. You'll be encouraging about the facts of their lives, and not simply look to seek your own fulfillment. This is just basic gospel thinking, right! Just as Jesus gave up his life for you to save you, and didn't think of himself, so will you in your relationships in his body, the church!

And let's say this again. There are people here who have had difficult and painful and hurtful relationships with people of the opposite gender in the past. Relationships that have not been honoring to God. And you know, when power and sex come together, bad – very bad – things can happen. That's one of the many great things about the church – even if your family by birth isn't that great, your family by new birth can be! But here is the point: The way that we Christians care for and respect and honor those of the opposite sex here at Hope Presbyterian can go a long way in helping to heal hurts from the past. To fail to do this in the church – to love and come alongside those of the opposite sex, because we ARE a church – can do more damage to someone than if it happened by someone else in the culture. Paul says here that we are to treat our family with absolute purity. Not relative purity. Not almost purity. But purity that is absolute. The church should be the safest place on earth for women. So brothers, act like brothers! Those are your sisters.

We have a special calling, brothers and sisters! It's not enough to say, "Oh you know men, they're full of lust." It's not enough to say, "I know myself, and I am full of lust." No, we have to say, "Lord, make me more like you." I know that the culture puts all kinds of pressure to move each and every friendship in that direction. And because of that, we have to be careful. So what do you do?

Brothers... ask a brother! Sisters... ask a sister! Christians, ask Jesus Christ to give you a heart to honors those of the opposite sex in a way that honors God.

You might not want to start today. It might not be wise to just start kissing and hugging each other and calling each other brother and sister. This should be a matter of prayer. But it IS a matter of the word. Encourage one another as brothers, and sisters and fathers and mothers in the Lord, in all purity.

Let's pray.