



## **Glimpses of Godliness (Part 3) – Godliness and Family**

Beau Hughes – August 10, 2014

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If you have a Bible, take it and turn to 1 Timothy. It's a letter in the New Testament that our church has been studying the last couple of weeks, if you haven't been here. We're going to be in chapters 4-5 this morning. If you've been following along, you'll notice we're skipping chapter 3. Don't panic. We'll come back to it next week.

Chapters 4-5 are interesting, and there's a lot there for us, but essentially, what Paul is going to do in chapter 5 is address the two big problems that are going on in the church at Ephesus. I'm eager for us to look at that and to continue to draw out lessons and implications for our church as we begin this transition from a campus into a local church.

If you're new here, I just want to say hi and welcome you to our gathering this morning. My name is Beau Hughes. I'm one of our pastors and elders. I know many of you have transitioned into town over the last couple of weeks, so you have found your way here for one reason or another, and I'm glad you did.

I would love to meet you. I know you may have already filled out the guest card and plan on taking it by Connection Central, but if you have the time and the desire, after the service I'd love to connect with you and welcome you to our gathering and maybe even to the city of Denton. Let me pray, and then, if you're there in 1 Timothy 4, we'll jump in together.

Lord, we're hopeful about how you might speak to us now. We pray by your Spirit that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts in this time, Lord, would be pleasing to you, that you would reveal yourself. We pray with the psalmist, Lord, that you would teach us to do your will. Thank you that you have left us the Scripture and more so your Spirit to lead us into truth. Do that now we ask. In Christ's name, amen.

I don't know how your week was. I hope it was great. I got to go to Southern California this week, so I think mine was probably greater than most of yours. That's sort of a humble, or not so humble, brag. I got to go to the beach and to Disneyland. It's funny. You look around Disneyland and all of the parents are miserable. It's like, "Why are we here?" The kids are maybe having fun, maybe throwing a fit.

You know, you get off the ride, and then there's a gift shop after the ride, and it makes you just want to punch Walt Disney in the face. It's like, "Why did you do that? That's just merciless. We're already here." Anyway, I was in Southern California. It's amazing. It's a mysterious, beautiful place, and a place where everybody wants to stay young forever, or at least live longer.

Mark Twain once said the world would be a better place if we were all born at 80 and then we made our way to 18 years old. I thought, "Huh, I've never thought about that." I looked at my picture from my graduation when I was 18 and thought, "Nope, I'm glad we're going *this* way, the way God designed it, not *that* way." But it is funny. In California, everybody wants to go that way. In our culture at large, everybody is obsessed with staying young, living longer.

It's amazing, because earlier in the year I read an article that talked about a particular group of people in our nation who are living longer than other groups of people in our nation. That is, the Hispanic population. There was an article in the *Dallas Morning News* called "Decoding the Hispanic Paradox." The Hispanic paradox is the fact that Hispanics are living longer than other people groups in our nation, and researchers can't figure out why.

Let me quote from the article. It says, "In the face of higher rates of poverty and [unemployment], Hispanics live two and a half years longer than Anglos..." *Bam.* "...and in some states, nearly eight years longer than African-Americans. [...] Finding the key to the paradox could help us all live longer," which is what we all want. "But after nearly 30 years and hundreds of studies...scientists still haven't found the answer [to why this is happening]," which is why it's a paradox.

Yet in the studies, there is one theory that's emerging that this article pointed out. It says, "One theme pops up in many of these studies [again and again] but is often overlooked. [...] But if you read between the lines of the articles published in esteemed medical journals, [the theme is] there: love. [...] Most of the theories proposed to explain the paradox lead back to family—and, in essence, love. Family is a hugely important part of Hispanic culture and provides social support as well as distinct roles and duties to individuals."

In fact, John Ruiz, who's a professor at UNT (some of you may have taken him for class), has done a lot of the research and says, "The first thing you think of when you think of Hispanics is that we're a collectivistic culture... The importance of family is more pronounced among Hispanics than in individualistic societies." What Hispanics call this (at least what I've learned from the Hispanics in our congregation who I've been meeting with for well over a year now to learn about their culture) is *la familia*.

This is something that is a part of their culture and something that if we're not a part of Hispanic culture (which is most of us in this room, though increasingly not most of us in our nation) we could really learn a lot from. Those of us who are entrenched in our individualism could learn a lot from the Hispanic culture in this regard. Not for the purpose of living longer, but for the purpose, as we'll see this morning in 1 Timothy, of being more biblical.

Let me just ask you this question before we dive into the text: When you think of the word *family*, *la familia*, what comes to your mind? Do warm happy memories flood your heart when you think of family? Is family a good thing in your mind? Maybe for some of you family is the opposite of that. It's a bitter thing because of your wounds, because of your history, because of the lack of care in your family. The family unit for you, the idea and concept of a family, is not positive.

For others of you it's just a theory because you grew up without a family. You've never known what a family is. You've heard about it, so it's this kind of fairy tale-type of reality that you think, "Man, that would be good. At the very least it's mysterious and I'd like to experience it." But all of us have a concept of family, and it's important that we understand how we view the concept of family, because, first, it shapes our lives. Non-Christian, Christian, all of us are shaped by our concept of what family is.

If we think family is a bad thing, if we associate it with negative thoughts, it's going to shape us one way. If we associate it with good things, we're going to be shaped a different way. All of us are shaped by family. Then more so, it's important for us to have awareness of what we think of when we think of family because it also shapes our Christianity. It shapes our understanding of who we are as Christians and as the people of God.

One of the most consistent images used by God throughout the entire Scripture to express and identify who the church is is the idea and the image of a family. Now there are many images that are

in the Bible of what the church is. There's an image of the body. The church is a body. The church is a bride. The church is a flock, like a flock of sheep. The church is a nation. It's a temple. It's a vine. On and on we could go. There are all of these different images, and we shouldn't highlight one to the neglect of the others, because then we miss the fullness and totality of who God says the church is.

At the same time, if we were going to single one out, maybe one of the most primary ones we could or should single out, as my ecclesiology professor said in seminary, is the image and concept of the church as a family. Perhaps this is one of the primary images God uses all through the Scripture: that we're a family. Even as we've studied 1 Timothy, we've already talked about that. Paul said in 1 Timothy 3 that we're to be, as the church, the household of the living God. That's who we are. We're a household of God's children.

Becoming a Christian means you are necessarily now part of a spiritual family called the church. You can choose to push against that and say, "I'm not going to be part of a church. I don't like the church. I love God; I don't like the church." It doesn't matter. If you're a Christian, you're part of the family. You're a member of the church.

Whether you're obeying God's command to be part of a local church or not, you're still part of it. It's a package deal. You get one, you get the other. When God saves us, he saves us into a family. We become brothers and sisters with our common Father and Lord and God. That's just the reality. Now we don't become just a big happy family. The church is not a perfect family. We don't stop sinning once we become Christians and become the church.

It's not like, "Oh finally, the family I was looking for. They never fight or grumble or complain. They totally get along. It's just perpetual bliss of us floating together with the cherubim." That's not what it's like, but it *is* family nonetheless. It's important that we understand that and, again, that we understand how we view family, because we take that into the family of God. We take that into the church.

What Paul is going to say in 1 Timothy is that there is a lot of instruction we should heed as we consider how it looks for us to operate within this new family that as Christians we've been brought into. So even just to pause and ask...*Do you consider the church your family if you're a Christian?* If you're not a Christian, obviously you don't, and that's fine. I'm just glad you're here. But if you're a Christian, do you consider the church your family, and how does that affect your Christian life?

So let's look at this text, 1 Timothy, starting at chapter 4, verse 12. Paul is writing to Timothy, and he's saying some really specific things to Timothy about what he's to be doing in the church, repeating in more detail much of what we've covered in the previous two weeks. Let's pick it up in verse 12, where he says to Timothy, **"Let no one despise you for your youth..."** He's a young man in his thirties, leading a church that has people who are above him in age.

**"...but set the believers [in Ephesus] an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."**

Again, Paul is summarizing, or re-summarizing, what he left Timothy in Ephesus to do, which are these things. He's to be laboring in these things and doing these things. Yet after giving these instructions, Paul transitions the letter back into more instructions for how to work this out in the life of the church. What he's going to do is shift his focus a bit by highlighting for Timothy, and the church that's listening in to this letter he wrote, how to treat different types of people in the church. That's what he's going to do in verse 1 of chapter 5.

I want you to notice two things as we read verse 1. First, that there are different types of people in the church at Ephesus. Paul assumes there are to be different types of people in that church and, I would say, in all churches, to the degree God blesses them with different types of people. Paul just assumes this, and he wants Timothy to be mindful of it. Paul doesn't sweep the differences we have under the rug. He doesn't act like we're all the same.

He actually brings light to our differences, which I know some of us don't like. We just want everybody to be thought of the same. It's sort of like we want to be color blind and age blind and gender blind. Paul doesn't do that. He's not going to give that to us. He's going to say, "There are real differences in the church, and I'm going to call it out and point it out, and I'm actually going to tell you, Timothy, to treat people differently, to some extent, based on those differences."

The second thing he says is that those particular differences he should treat people differently about are along at least the lines of age and gender. In doing so, Paul doesn't just say there are differences; he actually affirms the differences, especially the differences of age and gender in the

church. That is really interesting, because we live in a culture that is really confused about both age and gender and how we should treat each other in response to that.

I don't have time to go into it today, but our culture (hopefully you know this) is increasingly seeing gender as something other than the good and godly gift it is in God's design of the world. People are confused about gender. They see it not as something to be celebrated in God's design and creativity, but it is something that is to be looked upon in a way that is less than that.

If you struggle with your gender identity, I'm so glad you're here, and I hope you don't feel discouraged or singled out. I just want you to know there are a lot of people who struggle with that, and we'd love to have that conversation and walk with you about why God designing gender is not just something that's random, but it's actually a good thing we need to embrace and affirm together as good.

Our culture is not only confused about gender; it's also confused about how we should treat people of different ages. In the centuries past... We've sort of lost this cultural reality of honoring those who are older than us and before us in age. If you didn't know this, in the West, we're a culture that is extremely child-centric. If you didn't know that...surprise! We're child-centric. That makes us unique in history and currently in cultures around the world.

Most cultures are adult-centered, and particularly centered around adults who are elderly, who are older, where the culture shows them deference and honor. What we've done in the West is sort of inverted that. We've flipped that on its head. Rather than respecting old age and wisdom, Americans idolize youthfulness and childhood, which is getting back into what Mark Twain once said about wishing we could be 18 perpetually. That's the ideal in our culture.

The simple instructions Paul is going to give in one verse of this letter are profoundly important, and they speak to all sorts of different things in the reality of the church. Let's look at it. This is what he says as he's encouraging Timothy how to treat people and serve people differently in the church, especially based on their age and even their sex: **"Do not rebuke an older man..."**

We're to treat older men in a way where we're not rebuking them. It doesn't mean we don't correct older men in the church. It doesn't mean Timothy couldn't go to someone who was older than him and instruct him in the faith, but it did mean he couldn't come to him and belligerently or

condescendingly treat him in a way that demeaned this man, and especially this man's place in the culture, because he was an older man.

He says, "**Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father...**" We're to approach older men as fathers in the church. Even if there's conflict, even if there are things you're needing to confront them about, you do that in a way that's honorable to them because they're older than you. It's actually a biblical prescription for saying, "Yes, sir." You're like, "Where's that in the book?" Well, here it is, to some extent.

Now you can abuse that, and that *has* been abused, but the reality, especially for those of us who are youthful, is we need to hear this. We don't just get to walk up to Grandpappy and give him a good game and act like that's normal because that's how we treat our peers, which is what we do, hopefully not in this setting, but maybe. The fact is we honor people based on their age in the church. That's part of how we live together as a family. We treat the older men as fathers.

Then he goes on and says, "[But encourage] **younger men as brothers...**" It's not like we get to treat the older ones respectfully and then be condescending to those who are younger. It's not either/or. It's not, "Hey, honor these; dishonor these." There's no chronological snobbery. There's no chronological condescension. He's saying, "Then admonish the younger men, your peers and those younger than you. Encourage them as brothers in Christ." These are your brothers.

Then he gets into the women and says, "[Encourage] **older women as mothers...**" I love this. In Romans 16, Paul even calls one of the ladies of the church in Rome one of his mothers. He calls her his "mother in the faith," which I just love. He's honoring these dear women in the church. Then he says, "[Treat] **younger women as sisters, in all purity.**" Again, this was something that was going on, and is still going on in many churches today, where the pastors are treating them less than sisters and in impurity.

They're actually taking advantage of weak-willed women and using them to get all sorts of things out of them. He's saying, "Don't do this." I love the language. Don't miss the big-picture language: fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters. This is the way the church treats each other: like family, because that's what we are in Christ. That's what God has brought us into through the death and resurrection of his Son, those of us who have put our faith in him.

This one verse is really simple, but can you imagine how this one verse, if it had been obeyed in the

church of Ephesus, could have changed what was going on in the church, all of the problems we talked about last week? Think about that. Do you think if they had obeyed this verse that the problems we discussed last week, the elders taking advantage of their sisters...? That wouldn't happen if they were obeying this one verse.

Do you think the women in the church would have been seducing their brothers and their fathers if they were thinking of it like that? Do you think the brothers would have come into the gathering and fought among each other? No, if we're living like this, if we're treating each other like brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, a lot of this tension, a lot of this impropriety, goes away by God's grace and through the power of his Spirit.

Obedience to this one sentence, this one verse in the letter, could have drastically changed things in Ephesus, and what I would submit is it could also change things here. It could also change things among us. I think part of what we're left to think about is...*How would us considering one another truly as family change our church?* How would it change the dynamics of this gathering, of how you think about your Home Group?

How would this change your sense of responsibility to one another if we really saw each other as brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers? How would it change the way we speak to each other? How would it change the way we pray for each other? It might even mean we *start* praying for each other because we're family. How would it change the way we approach confession, the way we approach accountability, the way we approach correcting one another, serving one another? On and on you could go.

Treating each other as family, living like the family we really are, being who God has brought us into a family to be, would change drastically who we are. This is important, especially as we move forward to becoming a church; that God would knit us together in ever deeper ways and make us a family that does this, that considers each other family and lives like it, treats each other like it, speaks like it, prays like it. On and on we can go.

God intends for this church to be a loving, caring family. What I love is he shifts and says it's a family, though, that particularly cares for the most vulnerable among them. That's what he slides into in verse 3. He changes the subject and addresses one of the big problems going on in Ephesus, which was the young widows in the church creating chaos. Let's look at this.

Verse 3: "**Honor widows who are truly widows.**" I know you're thinking, "Wow, that was the verse I came to service to hear and talk about today. That was on the forefront of my mind. I was reading and praying this week, and I thought, 'How can we as a church and me personally honor widows who are truly widows?' That's so relevant." It *is* relevant. What he's saying is we're a family, but we're a family whose backbone is love, and we especially love and care for those who are vulnerable. Widows are vulnerable.

It's amazing that Scripture has so much to say about widows. In fact, Scripture has such a high view of them. It honors them in such a way that most cultures don't. In a lot of cultures still today, a woman's significance is totally, entirely wrapped up in her husband, so when her husband dies, so does her social significance. The culture just begins to disregard them, and that's a lot of what happened in the first century.

When Paul is talking about widows, he's saying, "No, no, no. They're valuable, and they're to be honored and loved and served regardless of if they have a husband or not, because they're important to God and they're important within the church family." He's honoring widows. The Scripture honors widows and orphans and aliens (*aliens* being those who are without husband or parents or home). They're valued for who they are in themselves, and they deserve special honor in the church. They deserve special protection and special care among the church family.

God is described as a father to the fatherless, which is good news, especially to those of us who are fatherless. It's good news that he could be a father to you. He's also described as a defender of the widows. God defends widows. It's written of him that he defends their cause. This is the kind of God he is. He says over and over again in the Scriptures, "Don't take advantage of the orphan or widow. If you take advantage of the orphan and widow and they pray to me, I will hear their cry, and I will be provoked in anger." So don't do that.

Widows, the vulnerable, the orphan, the alien... These people within the people of God are high on God's priority list, so God intends for them to be high on the priority list of the church. This is displayed all throughout the Scripture. You even see in the Old Testament that judges or magistrates who withheld justice from widows were judged harshly by God.

You hear God saying to the farmers and those who were working the fields, "Hey listen. Take a tithe of what you get and give it to the widows. Give it to the orphans. Leave some things in the field for

them to come through and take from, because they have no provision. You provide for them from the abundance of what I've given you."

Then you get into the New Testament, and Jesus picks up this theme and runs with it. Jesus talks again and again about widows. He raises the widow of Nain's son. He talks about the persistent widow in one of his parables, just being in this honorable position where she's coming before the Lord.

Then even on the cross, Jesus provides for his widowed mother. He looks at the apostle John and says, "This is now your mother. And Mother, this is now your son." Even hanging on the cross, Jesus displays the significance of caring for widows who are part of the people of God by caring for his own mother who was a widow. In God's priority among the family, we're to care for those who are vulnerable.

Paul is going to say some pretty specific things to the specific widows in Ephesus, but before we get into that, I think the principle we can draw is if we're a family with a backbone of love for one another, knitted together by our care and our grace and the way we serve and treat each other rightly before the Lord, the particular groups we need to always be mindful of are the vulnerable groups.

Here it's talking about widows, but orphans also fit in that category biblically. You think about other groups that are more vulnerable in our society today. You think about the elderly we've already talked about and will talk about again. You think about single mothers and single fathers in the church. You think about the mentally ill. According to the people I've talked to around our city, the primary issue nobody has a grasp on in our city and county and maybe even nation is how to care for the mentally ill.

You think about the socially challenged. You think about abuse victims, the poor, all of these people. These are vulnerable groups of people. God says as we live together as a family, we treat each other as mothers and sisters and fathers and brothers, but then we also care for those who are vulnerable. We honor the widows.

Then in verse 4 he says, "**But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.**" He gets more specific now and says we need to honor the widows,

but if a widow has a child or a grandchild who can care for them, let those children or grandchildren care for them first, so as not to burden the church. The church is going to be caring for those who are left all alone.

Again, as such a young congregation, I think this is somewhere for us to camp out for a minute. What he's saying to those of us who are Christian is that, as Christians, we take care of those who are in our biological family who are vulnerable. Before we take that to the church, in our own family, in our own resources, out of our own provision, we take care of those who are in our family. It's amazing that he says this.

Again, this is something that in Western culture we've moved away from gradually. I'm speaking generally, but if you look at Eastern cultures, this reality he just talked about in verse 4 is the norm, even in China. In China they actually established and created a law, the law of elderly rights. What this law states is that adult children should care for their parents. If they don't come to visit them regularly, it's against the law, and there are consequences. You can either be fined or put in jail if you're not caring for your elderly family.

Now I'm not saying that's the way we need to go. My point is it's a priority in that culture, such a priority they codified into law that you need to care for your mom and dad and grandparents. That's an amazing thing to me, because, again, I live in a Western culture that is not that. There's not the collectivism Ruiz was talking about from the Hispanic culture.

You think about Korea. It's the same thing. They throw these big bashes honoring those who are older in the community. You think about even Latin cultures and Mediterranean cultures, where it's normal for people to live with more than one generation in the same house together, which serves the purpose of keeping the family together so they can care for each other and continue to be interdependent and even allow those who are more elderly to continue to play a role and be responsible in family life.

As white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, this is not the ideal we grasp onto. This is not something we would be rushing to codify into law because we feel so strongly about it. In fact, this was illustrated for me. We were having a discussion among our elders and deacons about race and how we can continue to display the glory of God by being a church that has a lot of different colors of skin and a lot of different cultures coming together as one, that that's powerful.

For the majority culture, a first step in that is realizing what is normal to our culture is actually cultural. White people think that's just normal. Well, no, that's actually what white people do, but we don't know that because we're only around white people. We're totally not aware we have a culture. I'm laughing because I'm looking at some of my friends in here who are not white, and you know what I'm talking about. We have a culture. I'm glad some people have tried to bring it out, like the website and book, "Stuff White People Like."

We were having this discussion, so one of our white elders (it's good to have non-white elders and deacons; it's so helpful on so many levels) asked one of our non-white leaders, "So give me an example." They were really wanting to learn. "Tell me an example of something that in your mind and from your culture is totally a white thing, generally speaking." He said, "Okay, nursing homes."

Just like it did here, it got awkward, and there was conviction. You were like, "That's not the first thing that would have come to my mind. Maybe skiing, or something like that. I don't know. But nursing homes?" The point this non-white person was making was that in their culture, to put your parents in a nursing home...not all the time, but generally speaking...would be a point of shame, because it would mean you were delegating the care of the most honored in your community to someone else.

That's what Paul is talking about. This conversation is not about whether British culture or Mediterranean culture is better. It's what's a biblical culture, and a biblical culture, a biblical family, is a family that cares for each other, cares for those who are most vulnerable, but even more particularly, before we take it to the church, we care for those in our biological families who need care.

As the younger generation, we need to learn this. We need to learn this is not something that's cultural in terms of just geopolitical countries; it's something that's biblical. It's a command God has given us, and it's right here in 1 Timothy, chapter 5, verse 4, if you need to come back to it. So that's what Paul is getting at. Look at verse 5: "**She who is truly a widow...**" Now he's going to delineate between who the true widows and the false widows are in the church, which, again, is a problem.

He says, "**She who is truly a widow, left all alone...**" She doesn't have grandchildren or children to take care of her, like he just said in verse 4. "**...has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day...**" I love that description. That's the description of what

a true widow is like: a woman who honors the Lord and puts her hope in God. She labors in prayer night and day, like Anna did in the temple that Luke talks about.

Then Paul contrasts this widow, the true widow, and gives a glimpse of what's on his mind. He says, "**...but she who is self-indulgent...**" A different type of woman, a different type of widow. "**...is dead even while she lives.**" That's one of those sentences you have to reread. That's really not what I want to be. I don't want to be dead even while I live, whether I'm a widow or not. You can have a posture in your heart and in your life where even though you're alive, you're really dead in God's mind.

That's what Paul is talking about, that that's going on with some widows. They're self-indulgent. They're not true widows. In verse 7 Paul says, "**Command these things as well, so that [the church, the widows] may be without reproach.**" Again, part of his problem is the way some of these false widows, these younger widows, in the church were acting was bringing disrepute upon the church.

In verse 8 he comes back and says, "**But if anyone does not provide for his relatives...**" Like he has already said. "**...and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**" This isn't Christian name calling; this is pretty straight-forward. He's saying, "Listen, even pagans care for those in their family who need care. If you're not doing that as a Christian, you're denying what you say about your faith, and you're also not even acting to the standard of non-Christians." That's not an encouraging word he gives to those people.

Then in verse 9 he gets back to it. He says, "**Let a widow be enrolled...**" This is back to the true widows. "**...if she is not less than sixty years of age...**" That was sort of the older age marker in that culture, and even the marker where these widows were probably prone not to get remarried. "**...having been the wife of one husband...**" So she's faithful in her marriage. "**...and having a reputation for good works...**" This is truly a widow we need to take care of.

"**...if she has brought up children...**" He gives these examples of good works. "**...has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.**" Paul is sort of digging in here. Then he says again in verse 11, "**But refuse to enroll younger widows...**" Which is the problem in Ephesus, these younger widows. We talked about this last week. They were being led away by the false teaching in a way that was more pronounced than the other groups of the church. That's what was going on in the church.

He's addressing this group of women. He says, "**But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ...**" Paul is not just in a bad mood. He's saying, "Refuse to enroll them because their passions are drawing them away from Christ." This is what's going on among this group because of the false teaching. The implication of that is they desire to marry "**...and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.**"

It's like, "Okay, wait a minute. Is Paul against women getting married? Is that what he's saying here? That seems like what he just said." Well, Paul is against women getting married if it causes them to abandon their faith like these women are. Paul is against women getting married if it's a relationship that's simply rooted in and enslaved to their sinful passions. Paul is against women getting married if they're marrying non-Christians and being drawn away from their first love, their former faith.

That's exactly what he says is happening in Ephesus. So yes, he is against marriage in that case (which is the very same thing he says in 1 Corinthians 7, which we don't have time to get into), but he's not against marriage generally. He's against marriage that's being determined by passions that are ungodly, even so ungodly they're enslaving these women to such a degree they're willing to marry non-Christians.

Single women, I love you. I'm trying to speak here as a brother to his sister. There's a word in here for you. I know some of you want to get married. You want to get married really badly, and that's a good thing. It's a godly thing for you to want to get married. Some of you don't want to get married. Some of you do. But it's not a good thing when it enslaves you. It's not a good thing when your good desires to get married become controlling desires and lead you into sin.

So just pray on that and think about that, because that's what Paul is warning here. That's what he's saying is happening, that these younger widows are not really widows. You shouldn't enroll them, because their sinful desires are leading them into ungodly marriages. Beyond leading them into ungodly marriages, it's also leading them to be idlers. Look at verse 13: "**...going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.**"

Now remember, the churches are meeting in house to house, so they're going into these different gatherings, or just going into these different houses generally speaking, and they're talking about things they ought not to. They're perhaps promoting the false teaching of the church. They're

creating chaos, the type of chaos we read about in 1 Timothy 2. Paul is saying, "Not only are their passions enslaving them and leading them into ungodly marriages, but they're also leading them into ungodly talk and ungodly relationships and just an ungodly behavior and lifestyle."

Here's what Paul says. He gives really practical advice in verse 14. He says, "**So I would have younger widows marry** [not be enrolled and taken care of by the church or their family], **bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.**" Again, our cultural sensibilities have to work a little bit to get through what he's saying here. He's not trying to walk into these women's personal lives and say, "This is what the Lord says for all women everywhere, all the time."

He's giving practical advice, saying, "Listen, if you want to get married that badly, if you're even willing to marry a non-Christian, if you're so enslaved to your desires for that, get married to a godly guy. If you have that much time on your hands that you're going from house to house, you're idle, you're a busybody, you're gossiping, get married to a godly guy and have some kids, because then you'll have plenty on your hands to do."

You won't have a bunch of idle time to sit around if you have a bunch of babies crawling around yelling at you, throwing stuff, being sweet and cuddly, and all of those things that if you don't have children you won't mostly see. It's really practical. It's common sense advice. He's saying this is what this group should do to keep from ungodliness. His urgency is because there's already slander going on in the church. The adversary is already slandering them.

He says in verse 15, "**For some have already strayed after Satan.**" This isn't some high-minded, ivory tower, let me talk about... This is Paul being very practical with this specific group of women he has on his mind and saying, "This is what they should do. Otherwise, they're going to continue to be led astray." He's pastoring them. It's really beautiful what he's doing here, if you can glimpse it.

Then he ends in verse 16 the way he began this whole passage on widows. He says, "**If any believing woman...**" It's interesting that he talks to the women here. I don't know why he does that or what's going on. He says, "**If any believing woman has relatives who are widows...**" I would say the same goes for men, but apparently there were women he wanted to write this to. He says, "Let that woman care for those people."

Let the women care for their own relatives. Let the men in the church care for their own relatives before the church does that. Why? **"Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows."** Again, backing out of the passage. We've dug into the weeds, sort of getting back over. The church is to be a family, knit together in our love for one another, because God has brought us to the table as his sons and daughters.

We're to be a family that is always mindful of the seat at the table we have prepared for those who are vulnerable, to serve them, to care for them, to be on guard against what could cause dismay and destruction in their lives. That's what I'm wanting us to take out of this: we are a family that particularly is mindful of the most vulnerable within our family, and even outside of our family where God gives us opportunities.

Landing the plane here, one of the most demoralizing realities of this generation is the "familylessness" of this generation, the fatherlessness of this generation, the motherlessness of this generation. In the next few weeks, thousands of 18-year-olds are going to make their way into our town. Some of you are part of that group. Thousands. They're going to make their way into our neighborhoods. They're going to make their way into these gatherings. They're going to make their way, Lord willing, into our Home Groups and our dinner tables.

Let me read you a couple of statistics, and let it burden you in a good way. Let it break your heart and also give you a glimpse of the opportunity we have as we strive to live like a family that cares for all people, but especially the most vulnerable. Approximately one-third of these thousands of people who are going to transition into town grew up without a father. One-third.

It's not just single mothers. There are a lot of single fathers. There are a lot of kids who grew up without mothers. Motherlessness has gone from 400,000 in 1970 to 2.5 million single fathers now. So who's showing up in our neighborhoods, on the campuses, both TWU and UNT, and, God willing, here and in our lives in the weeks ahead are fundamentally those who need a family, those who, even more than needing a family, need the God and Father of our family to be their God and Father.

One of the most difficult things about this and one of the hurdles we have is if you have had a bad experience with family, this picture of God's church being a family is not beautiful to you. It's not compelling to you. It's not attractive to you, because family in and of itself as a concept is not attractive. Maybe that's you this morning. If you grew up without a dad, if you grew up without a mom, if you don't have a family, I want you to know this family God is talking about here, this family

God has established for those who put their faith in Christ, is unlike any earthly family you've ever imagined.

It's not perfect. We'll never be perfect. But it's a family whose father is God and whose brothers and sisters are the men and women in this gathering. God is inviting you into that. Maybe that's even why you're here this morning, because God wants to heal you of some of those wounds you have and you live out of. He wants to heal you of those and draw you to himself and, therefore, into his family.

Interestingly enough, I think it's just as difficult, if not more so, for Christians who have had a good family to view the church as their family. If you've had a good family, what do you need the church family for? If you have all this care and provision and good that came from here (that was me; this is my story), well, this is where you're going to camp out, so you're going to view the church as something less than what it is, something less than your family. When you do that, you start viewing the church as sort of an add-on to your life.

One of the most difficult challenges, especially for those of us who have good families, is to envelop our family in the life of the church family and to truly allow the church to be your family as well. This is why even Jesus' statements, you know, where his mom and his brothers and sisters showed up one time... They were in a gathering, and they said, "Hey, Jesus, your mom is here," and he said, "Who's my mom? Who are my brothers and sisters? It's these people around the campfire." That's jarring to us.

It's like, "Whoa, is he hating on his mom? Is that valid grounds for me to treat my mom...?" No, it's not. He's not saying something negative about his family. What he's doing is highlighting the significance of the family of God. It's not either/or. Again, we struggle to envelop our families in the life of the church family. That's why we don't feel responsibility for the church. That's why we stay consumers. That's why we don't take ownership.

We do that in our biological family, but not in the family that has been prepared for us before the foundations of the world, that Christ has died for us to be part of. Church, this family we're to be is a family unlike any other. It's a family that's not based on the blood in our veins. It's a family that is based on the blood that came out of the veins of Jesus Christ as he hung on the cross and was crucified for our sins. The family of the church is a family that none of us were born into, which levels the playing field.

None of us were a part of this family. We didn't come into the world a part of this family. We came into this world, spiritually speaking, orphans, rebels, alienated from God. Yet what Scripture says, what Paul actually wrote in a different place in the Scripture, is that God sent Jesus, and Jesus, through dying for our sins and our rebellion to God, the Father of this family, has made a way for us to be qualified in the inheritance of God's children.

That word *qualified* in Colossians means he fit us into his family when we were outcasts through the death of his Son, and he has transferred us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son, where now God is our Father, Jesus is our elder Brother, and even us together here are siblings.

As we move ahead into becoming a local church, may God continue to knit us together into this type of family, where the backbone of our life together is love, a sacrificial, servant-hearted, humble love, where we care for each other and treat each other as God says we ought, especially those who are most vulnerable among us, that we always have a seat at the table, that we're prepared and waiting for them to be invited in.

Even as we come to the Lord's Supper, we get to remember all of these things. We get to remember that's exactly what God has done for us. All of us were strangers, all of us were aliens, and through this broken body and this shed blood, he brought us into his family. That's crazy good news. I would just say if you're not a part of God's family, if God is not your Father, if Jesus is not your Savior, make him that today. Look to him for that today, and he'll bring you into the family.

Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you for your love for us, for your grace to us. Lord, I do pray you would teach us how to live in these ways. Jesus said the gospel of grace will be made visible when we love each other like a family. So teach us to do that and teach us, most of all, by your own example of how you've done that. Greater love has no man than this, that he would lay down his life for his brother. Jesus, you have laid down your life for us, your brothers and sisters. We come to remember that now and honor that. We bless you. In Christ's name, amen.