**Family and church family** 1/9/24 dkm

Read: Genesis 2, 1Timothy 5

Text: 1Timothy 5:1-8

Psalms:

God created the family. He created the family when he created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. God created human beings in his own image, both male and female. He blessed them saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ (Gen 1:27,28). In the second chapter of the Bible, we read in more detail how God made man and woman, and brought them together in marriage in order to fulfil this command to multiply and manage his creation. A man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife in a holy union we call marriage. This is a family, a man united to his wife and bearing children. This is the basic unit of society as ordained by God.

In chapter 3 of Genesis, we read of how sin entered the world and corrupted everything that God made good. Man’s relationship to God himself was corrupted or broken. Human relationships, including marriage, were corrupted by sin that infected the heart of Adam and Eve, and every one of their descendants. Sin came from, and continues to be, rebellion against God and rebellion against what God made good.

Have you noticed how such rebellion continues today? Sinful people keep attacking the truths of Genesis 1 and 2. The truth that God created the heavens and the earth was attacked by man making other gods and saying these created and control the world. Modern man, led by Charles Darwin, made the god called ‘evolution’. Since 1859 the theory of evolution has been used to explain the origin of the world and all creatures. According to this theory, we were not created by God but evolved from monkeys over millions of years.

We referred to marriage and family as a creation ordinance, but before coming to this we have the seventh-day ordinance in Genesis 2:3: ‘God rested from all his work on the seventh day and made it holy’. Sinful man, rejecting all that God made good, rejects this ordinance. It was back in 1617 that the king of England issued the ‘Book of Sports’, declaring what sports were permissible on the Sabbath day. This book was burned by order of the Parliament in 1643, but disregard for God’s holy day continues, along with disregard for God as creator.

Creation itself, the Sabbath day, and the family have been attacked in our day. In 1975 the civil law made divorce much easier, leading to many breaking their marriage vows. At the same time marriage itself was becoming unpopular, with men and women becoming ‘partners’ for a time. God’s creation ordinance for marriage and family is widely abandoned. Today we see further attack upon God’s creation, with calls to reject the categories of male and female that God created and calls to redefine the family. We have seen attempts by communists and others at raising children in institutions rather than families. Are we becoming too eager to remove old people from families and from society? What next of God’s good creation ordinances will sinners attack?

**1.Family**

Our focus today is on the family, and on fathers if you like. I am not a big fan of Father’s Day; I once gave a gift to my mother on Mother’s Day and she said, ‘I don’t want anything, just your love and obedience every day’. Speaking of family being redefined in our society, we see single mothers applauded and rewarded. Some actually want to raise a family alone! I recently heard that husbands and fathers may soon be put in prison if the ‘partner’ says she does not consent to his behaviour. There are abusive husbands and fathers no doubt, but many are being sidelined and even prevented from fulfilling their God-given role in the family.

Men have a specific role in the family according to the Bible. We must encourage and allow men to fulfil their role in the family. We all have God-given roles in the family. ‘Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church’ (Eph 5:25). ‘Wives submit to your own husband in the Lord’ (Eph 5:22). ‘Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right’ (Eph 6:1). Husband, wife and child, all have God-given roles in the family- so simple but so very hard to do! But note each is ‘in the Lord’. The family is God’s design for us, and he will enable us to fulfil his purpose if we listen to him and prayerfully accept his help.

Children are born in sin of course and must be taught to obey their parents. Father and mother are also born in sin but by God’s grace can be born again of the Spirit of God and have God’s Spirit to help them. They also have God’s word, where we find God’s commands and the wisdom of God. Love, submit, and obey, in the Lord. You can understand what these words mean, and do them, when you trust and obey God and his word here in the Bible.

The apostle Paul left a young believer called Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus in AD 62-63. He was probably in his late thirties but had been with Paul for some time and had been ‘ordained’ by the ‘laying on of the hands of the eldership’ (4:14). Paul gave Timothy advice on various things as he preached and ministered in this church. He had to counter false teachers, men promoting ‘fables’ and ascetic activities such a forbidding people to marry. He was to elect elders and deacons as office-bearers in the church and to ensure orderly and acceptable worship. Prayers were to be made for all men by men in the church; ‘Let women learn in silence with all submission’ (2:11). The church is not an institution in which we make the rules. It is an organism or a body, with Christ as the head.

The church is like a family, as we will see shortly. It is a family of families. The church does not replace the family but supports the biological family as ordained by God. Here in chapter 5 Paul addresses the matter of widows in the church. You may recall that the church in Jerusalem had many widows who were in need of help from the church (Acts 6:1). But before the church was to accept responsibility for a widow, the family and or relatives must help them, according to the apostle. He writes of honouring or recognising widows who are real widows (5:3).

The widow’s immediate family, her children or grandchildren, must be the first to help her (5:4). Most widows are older women with grown up children. These children are reminded that their mother had given them birth and raised them until they became independent adults. Some children become too independent and fail to care for a widowed mother or elderly parents. Children are commanded to, ‘Honour your father and your mother’ in the fifth commandment. There is no time limit on this command. Honour means to obey your parents, and also assist them when they need help. Even when you marry and have your own family you must continue to honour and assist your parents.

Paul speaks of repaying parents, and showing piety at home (5:4). Jesus condemned those showing public piety or religiosity by giving to the church money that should have been used to help parents (Mk 7:11). Piety means more than giving money, of course. James speaks of visiting widows in their trouble (Ja 1:27). Many widows and elderly folk are living lonely lives even though they have children and grandchildren. It was reported that in Japan thousands are dying in their own homes with some not being found for weeks. They may not have had children, but how shameful and unacceptable to God if they did! (5:4). Not many Japanese are Christians but still it is shameful.

We are reminded of yet another attack upon God’s creation commands, that of bearing children. While some cannot have children, others say they ‘cannot afford children’. Their focus is on themselves and their career; they give no thought to their parents or to the burden they will be upon the church or society when they are old.

In verse 8 Paul seems to go further than immediate family to other relatives, and condemns in the strongest terms those who do not provide for their own family or blood relatives. Such people have ‘denied the faith’ or ‘are worse than an unbeliever’ (5:8). Here is a warning to all of us who have elderly or other needy ones in our family. If we are believers let us be showing our faith with works of kindness. Let us be fulfilling our God-given duties towards our own biological family.

It is hard to imagine men or women failing to look after their own children, although this is becoming all too common. Not just abusive fathers but absentee fathers are endangering the lives of many children in our society. Increasingly, welfare agencies are being called upon to help. In a similar way, absentee children are endangering or degrading the lives of many elderly folk in our society.

**2.Church family**

The church of which Christ is head is referred to as the ‘household of God’ (Eph 2:19). Those who repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are born again into the kingdom of God; they become fellow citizens or saints in this kingdom. We are all related to one another through Jesus Christ, our saviour and Lord. Note that there is only one Christ, and only one kingdom and one true but invisible church. In this letter to Timothy the apostle alludes to this church or spiritual family here at the start of chapter 5 where he refers to older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, ‘with all purity’ (5:2). He is telling Timothy the minister how to relate to members of the church.

The church of God includes men and women of all ages; it is a family of families. Not many institutions or clubs are so inclusive; indeed, not all religions are so inclusive. Older men are to be respected, as in many societies, but they are not beyond admonishing or exhortation (5:1). We are all open to temptation and sin no matter what our age. In the church we are to ‘bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ’ (Eph 6:2). I had reason to tell my father he should not marry an unbeliever - this was some years after my mother died. Even older men or women can be tempted in this way (cf. 5:11,12).

Timothy was to regard younger men as brothers, brothers in the Lord. While ‘brother’ is a common designation in some circles, I like to keep this term for my blood brothers and my brothers ‘in the blood of Christ’. Similarly, the term ‘sister’. Paul adds the words, ‘with all purity’, knowing that a young man like Timothy, and ministers in general, could have impure thoughts towards sisters in Christ. Lady missionaries often faced sexual harassment when travelling alone on trains in India. A lady I knew would confront such a man saying, ‘Would you treat your sister like this!’

Being a family of families, the church has the responsibility to care for widows and others in need in the congregation. Immediate family has primary responsibility but anyone who is left alone and without family help should be cared for by the church- if she trusts in God and is a person of prayer (5:5). The church at that time did not have many rich members so funds were limited. Note that in Greek and Roman society there was no government welfare so a woman without a husband could quickly become destitute. Widows in India often turn to begging. But the Jews, and later the church, were taught to care for widows and the fatherless because God cares for such people (Ps 68:5, 146:9, Acts 6:1).

We still have this mandate today even though the state, for better or worse, has many welfare programs; it is for worse when the immediate family and the church shirk their responsibility because of state welfare. We conclude by saying again, it is not only money that widows and the fatherless need. They need love, love that we as members of the church know from and in the Lord Jesus Christ, love that we are to show towards one another and indeed all people as we preach and live out the glorious gospel of grace.