

CITY LIFE CHURCH
THE FAMILY OF GOD

12We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 15See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone... 25Brothers and sisters, pray for us. 26Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. 27I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. 28The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Intro

Good morning, my name is John Seago I serve as one of your elders here at City Life and if I haven't met you please come say hey on your way out after the service. I'd love to meet you.

Our passage this morning is about how God has designed the church as a family.

In Thessalonians, Paul keeps repeating sibling language, not saying 'fellow Christians, or fellow saints, but 'brothers and sisters.'

What we're doing as Christians here in church should be closer to family life than going to a concert, working for the same company, or even being members of the same fan club.

There is a deeper bond between us all, there is deeper meaning for us gathering today and multiple times throughout the week, and there's a higher obligation for us as a family.

Today, we see in 1 Thessalonians this vision for a peaceful family and guidelines for the family to flourish.

Recently, my six-year-old daughter had a school assignment to write out what the top three rules for her house were.

Now, this kind of thing is nerve-racking for a parent, because who knows what my daughter was going to tell the outside world about what happens behind closed doors, you know?

Sometimes things get crazy. Sometimes our dinners are interrupted by competing air-guitar solos between me and the kids... It just happens. So we were a little worried about what family secrets my daughter would reveal.

Here's what she came up with. (Show Picture)

Now, she is a first grader, so I'll translate a little.

Top one: Ask if you can play on tablet. – Yes, we limit their screen time.

Bottom one: Have to do what parents say. – Ok, I'd prefer she 'gets' to do what parents say, but pretty good.

Then the middle rule here: 'No jumping on the Bible.' – Now, sure me and my wife have probably had to tell our children this before, its entirely possible. But this is not something I would expect to make our top three rules of the house.

My wife and I set norms for the household, what time our children have to go to bed, what they can eat and when, how much screen time they can have during the week. And we have all these rules because at the end of the day we don't want our children to have any fun or a fulfilling childhood.

No. We have a structure and guidelines for our family because we want our house to be a place of peace, joy, love, where we all can flourish.

This is the vision we see that God has for the church as a family through the guidelines and instructions he gives us today to promote our flourishing and his glory.

Lets pray.

So our main points this morning: 1) Church designed as the household of God 2) Called to be a discerning Family 3) General house principles.

First, Church designed as the Household of God

The church acting like a family may not sound ideal.

We may not all have ideal family pictures to look back on for this metaphor, but we all long for a home of full acceptance and love. You want people who are looking out for your good, someone always on your team.

The philosopher George Santayana argued that the ideal society naturally grows from the family. He wrote, "The family is one of nature's masterpieces."

Well, it is a masterpiece but it didn't come by accident.

The Lord designed the family to be a place for human flourishing, but in our fallen world many homes reflect more of the brokenness of sin than the grace of a heavenly Father.

What you may not find in your childhood home, or your biological family, God is doing in the church, among his family.

God's vision for the church is one of peace, a place of identity and belonging.

How do you view what's going on this morning? Not an event, concert, weekly obligation, lecture to attend.

This is a family that should lead to us flourishing in Christ.

Clear authority structure

One of the ways God designed the church like a family is with a clear authority structure.

Verse 12-13 tells us to respect and love church leaders.

"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work."

This is an apt summary of what church leaders do, they labor among you, they lead you, and admonish you.

They are over you in the Lord.

When the early church was formed in Acts we see offices of elders and deacons designed to lead. Throughout scripture we see this instruction for elders to serve in "managing" or "shepherding" the local church and those in it.

Elders are to be the doctrinal and ethical guardians of the church.

To be clear, we're sinners just like you, brothers in Christ who need community and need God's grace through the church.

But "'As God's stewards, the elders have been entrusted with the responsibility and authority to manage the household of God" a serious undertaking for which they will be held accountable by their Master"

This is why Paul says church leaders are over you in the Lord – they are not the ultimate authority or above accountability, in fact we're accountable to you fellow saints, and held to a higher standard before God.

2. With this role comes the responsibility to admonish.

We're not lecturers to pass off information, but our call is to be tools of the Spirit to change lives, open eyes, and urge the church to run back to the Christ.

Think of the image of a shepherd, he directs the sheep away from danger, a perilous cliff. This image of redirecting is helpful, because as your elder, even here in a sermon, I am not supposed to be directing your attention to me, to my insight and advice, but redirecting you, imploring you to something better. The flawless and best shepherd Christ. Look there. Listen to him. Follow him.

So when we admonish or warn, it's not out of moral superiority, but out of concern.

When we warn our brothers in Christ to flee the idol of comfort that leads you to do bare minimum at home in parenting or serving your wife.

We can sit down to tell a sister that she has a greater worth and identity in Christ than to anxiously try to please her boss or impress her coworkers.

We warn both the destruction their idol will bring.

We tell them they have a better calling than self-centeredness or finding identity in reputation.

As Americans we don't like this. Being admonished or submitting, by nature we rebel against authority structures.

Submission is not a bad word. Even as an elder we have to submit to the authority of one another when working through disagreements or different perspectives.

I've had to submit to God by following the lead of the other elders when I thought I had a better strategy or approach to a trial in the church. The other elders had a peace about a plan and had concerns about my suggestions. I submitted to God but following their lead in this and the

Lord showed me afterward that it was my pride and how I was not loving the church well but insisting on my own way.

Our primary call is to submit to God and he has told us how to respond to leadership here in verse 12-13, "esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (v13).

This work is a labor. Your elders do toil for you. It takes time, energy, its emotionally draining. I'm not boasting, I'm speaking about the other three elders I've seen serve you well in and out of season.

As elders we're on the "front line" of our mission, leading you into battle. This is spiritual conflict, and the church needs men who will lay down their lives for the gospel, for the family, for the mission.

We're many times the first responders to spiritual warfare: crisis counseling, conflict resolution, the ministry of the word and prayer.

In 2 Cor Paul uses the image that the leaders have "opened wide our hearts for you" and tells the church to do the same for leadership.

As your elders we love you all. We pray for you regularly and systematically. We want to build you up that you flourish in Christ.

We may sometimes see the church sometimes: like a CEO who is head of company trying to make customers happy or pleased with a product.

Then if the church is not delivering, we'll go find a different brand.

The barista at this coffee shop is rude and always takes too long, I'm going to pick a better coffee spot. I'll take my business somewhere else.

This is not how we're to think of the church.

We're to be members of a family, not consumers of a product.

The goal of the family design is peace (v13b, 28)

He says at the end of verse 13, "Be at peace among yourselves"

All these instructions in this section are to promote peace.

There will not be peace if we view the church as a customer, or as a duty.

We'll see that the church cannot be a place of peace when we don't follow scripture's vision for us, when we come with self-centeredness, impatience, critical of others.

We're also supposed to have familial love and affection (v13a, 15, 26)

Remember, earlier Paul told the Thessalonians to strive for their love to abound more and more.

Verse 15 says "always seek to do good to one another and to everyone..."

In a very similar passage, in Romans 12, Paul writes,

"10 Love one another with brotherly affection.... 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

This is supposed to be the tone of our community. AND IT IS!

My family and I have experienced this with you CLC. Refreshing Neighborhood churches, lively lunches together on Sunday afternoons, City Group nights filled with joy and rich community it's hard to stop on time.

Praise the Lord he has blessed our family.

V26 - "Greet all God's people with a holy kiss."

I feel like a lot of you are were waiting for the application here.

For the Thessalonians, kissing was a sign of close familial relationship or reconciliation among former enemies in Greco-Roman world.

This was imbedded in a culture where there were racial tensions and taboos.

Paul is telling them to openly show they love one another in contradiction or against barriers of gender, race (Jew and Gentile) and social rank (slaves and free), which have been broken down by Christ's work that allows us to be adopted in to God's family."

The church should be the place where sexism, racism, and partiality are rebuked, cast out, are alien and don't fit.

We have the gospel foundation and biblical clarity to denounce unjust acts of racism like the shooting yesterday in Pittsburgh.

Anti-Semitism and White Supremacy are absolute contradictions of the gospel. Scripture says the mystery of the gospel is bringing enemies together into the Family of God.

Jews and Gentiles at the time that viewed each other as separate, as enemies, were both brought into the family of God to sit at the table together.

And whenever we return to racism we're rebuking that image and saying, 'No, there are two tables: Us and them.'

Church, it should break our hearts. In the church we should have affection for all Christians.

This affection for all Christians is a sign of diverse people groups in Christ celebrating this new spiritual family where all people are at peace with one another.

We don't have to kiss, but we do have to show affection. That could be in words of affirmation, encouragement, thankfulness, or other signs.

For me, I need to ask how do I communicate my affection: for some of you its hugging. To be clear, I'm not a hugger. I don't get it, but it tells Peter Craig (another elder in the church and a hugger) that I love him.

Just one of the ways I'm being called to die to myself and serve the church.

This love and affection is not conjured up by our will power. It flows from the overwhelming love of our heavenly father.

I come from a big family, eight children, and for Thanksgiving everyone flies in to my parents house where we set up multiple tables outside in my parents yard. Its in Texas, so the weather we're usually still wearing shorts. And all our family is there sharing a meal and at the head of the table is my Dad who is looking down the table just beaming. Such pride and joy in his children and more in his grandchildren. Now we're not perfect. This sibling is not talking to that sibling, these cousins are shooting spitwads at each other, our family is a bunch of sinners. Put my father is still proud, he still loves, he's still patient, and delights in his family.

Even more so our heavenly father. He's not blind, he knows our sin, he sees our petty fights, our jealousy and internal criticism of each other. Yet, he loves. He loves so much is died for those relational conflicts.

This is the gospel. He brought us into his family, but giving us faith to believe in Christ. We were on our own following our own desires, hopeless without a deep identity, without meaning, and separated from our own creator. Christ came into the world to sacrifice himself to reconcile us to our heavenly father who we ran away from in sin. We now sit at his table, feast on his grace, and belong in his family.

And he is still working through his Spirit to create more peace where there is discord and uses his word to instruct us of how to relate to one another.

That's what we see in this next passage.

Discerning Family

Verse 14 could look like a random list of instructions, but in reality, this calls us to discernment. We have to be sensitive enough to appropriately respond to our brothers and sisters given their specific situation and circumstance. (v14)

If someone is idle I am supposed to respond this way, if someone is fainthearted my response is different, or maybe they are weak and I need to respond accordingly.

We have to apply biblical knowledge, to figure out how we should respond in each situation.

There are many general biblical principles, but there are also times when one-size-fits-all response does not fit all circumstances.

Like buying a new tool then walking around the house looking for how to use it. No you don't need a power drill to wash dishes. Yes, I've seen the YouTube videos...but that's ridiculous.

We've all been there when you share about a circumstance about being stressed out, anxious and overwhelmed. Some just says, you should trust the Lord more. – Well, yes that's true, but applying the gospel is more specific and richer than that.

Sometimes anxiety is from fear of man – worried what reputation you'll have if you don't serve on every ministry team

Anxiety could be stemming from pride of thinking that the success of a project or my family all depends upon me being perfect.

We need Spirit-led discernment to live in the community of God. Paul alludes to this when he lays out different ways to respond to fellow Christians.

Admonish the idle (v14a)

This is an unfortunate translation, because it does not mean lazy.

The term "idle" here means undisciplined, insubordinate, disruptive.

Practically in our church, this will probably look like someone restlessly filling up their schedule.

Disordered priorities and undisciplined lifestyle.

If you see a fellow Christian disappear from church rhythms, consistently missing Sunday and City Group, prioritizing other activities above seeking God.

You are seeking their good when you ask the hard questions, challenging them to reprioritize church and their walk with Christ.

Encourage the fainthearted (v14b)

Those losing steam, become discouraged or timid in faith.

We need to look at how we love our fellow Christians in trials.

Its tempting to say don't bring your negative vibes over here. But we're called to weep with those who weep, come along side the down trodden, not to solve their problems, but to encourage them in Christ.

What is your response when someone in your City Group is dealing with a death, loneliness, or overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world?

Do you try to quarantine them, tell them you'll pray for them so they stop bugging you with their problems, or do you embrace them?

We're called to encourage them that the God of peace is near.

Help the weak (v14c)

Last instruction is to 'Help the Weak.'

This is those falling into sin, feel unable to walk in manner worthy of the Lord,

This could be morally or spiritually weak, but it could also be some physical weakness or incapacity: sick or financially struggling.

We're called to help those who have lost their job, just had a baby, or going through a tough season. This is spiritual and physically: praying and encouraging them but also setting up the meal train and offer babysit.

CLC you're already doing these ministries, lets pray for the Spirit to help us see more opportunity and abound more in this kind of discerning family life.

General house principles

We need discernment but there are also some universal guidelines in our passage that tell us to practice no matter what.

First we're told to 'Be patient with them all' (v14d)

No matter who we're dealing with, our relationships are supposed to be thoroughly seasoned with patience. – As thorough as __.

This is one concrete way that we can radically love others in the household of God.

This is a very practical way to be self-sacrificing.

1 Cor 13 that's lists the defining features of love. It's an ideal vision of godly, Christ-like love.

This long list of adjectives The very first word is patient. "Love is patient and kind, love does not envy or boast, it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Patience means setting aside my timeline or agenda for the good of someone else.

When someone is sharing with you their difficulties at work or complex family dynamics are you internally wanting them to speed it up? Want to jump to the point when you give them your answer or advice?

Maybe you need patience to keep loving someone, continuing to encourage them, keep helping them fight for faith. Patience when they just won't take your good advice!

Church, imagine, if God has shown patience with us, after a lifetime of repeated sin, the same foolish mistakes again and again, day in and day out... should we not also desire to show patience to our brothers and sisters in Christ? Sacrifice our time?

Always forgiving (v15a)

Paul writes in verse 15, "See that no one repays evil for evil,"

This implies we're being sinned against and letting it go.

We love others by always forgiving.

1 Peter 4:7 says "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."

Revenge is one of the most instinctive and natural sins, and one of the early appeals of Christianity in the ancient world was this radical forgiving ethic of verse 15.

"See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."

Instead of acting on personal rights, we're to act on sacrificial love.

Instead of running to court for payback and self-interest, running to serve and forgive.

Unforgiveness is like the dramatic soccer player, when he gets sinned against he flops around on the ground making much of the foul against him to try to get the other player in trouble. But Christ-like love is like the woman soccer player on US' team who in an international game was severely fouled, to the point where their head was bleeding, and she kept playing.

Always forgiving, love covers a multitude of sins.

Lastly, everyone is responsible for the peace of the household (v12a, 27)

Paul closes in V27 something we could overlook. He writes, "I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters."

This verse shows that Scripture and preaching is central to the mission of the local church.

But also this instruction shows that it is the responsibility of the whole family to strive for peace and love in the church.

There is a clear authority structure, but remember this is a family not a business where you have staff and customers.

We all are the body of Christ and called to build each other up.

He also said in V25 - Brothers and sisters, pray for us.

Following verse 17 where we we're told to pray without ceasing.

Praying for one another, not just in gratitude or for our personal needs, but supplication for one another.

This makes sense, we must plead that the Lord will create peace, help us forgive, encourage, and love another.

There is no other way it will happen The family cannot flourish on its own. We need God to do it.