



Let's Get Ready to Rapture

First Thessalonians 2:7-12

"Hello Mother, Hello Father"

The 'traditional family' is already (statistically, at least) a thing of the past.

Listen to these observations derived from the 2010 census:

- Married couples represented just 48 percent of American households in 2010, far below the 78 percent of households occupied by married couples in 1950.
- Just a fifth of households were traditional families - married couples with children - down from about a quarter a decade ago, and from 43 percent in 1950, as the iconic image of the American family continues to break apart.
- In all, 41 states showed declines in traditional households of married couples with children.
- The biggest change for the decade was the jump in households headed by women without husbands - up by 18 percent in the decade.
- The next largest rise was in households whose occupants were not a family - up by about 16 percent.

How important is a 'traditional family?' Let's look just at a few facts about fatherless homes.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24 million children in America - one out of three - live in biological father-absent homes.

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes (US Dept. Of Health/Census) - 5 times the average.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes - 32 times the average.
- 85% of all children who show behavior disorders come from fatherless homes - 20 times the average. (Center for Disease Control).
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes - 9 times the average. (National Principals Association Report).

The 'traditional family' is important to our text in First Thessalonians. Paul assumes that his readers - both then and throughout history - will value the traditional family enough for him to describe his care for them like that of a mother and a father working together to raise their kids.

When Paul uses the illustration of the parent – whether the mother or the father – it is not to command authority over them or demand respect from them. It is the qualities of being a mother or a father that he applies to his ministry among believers.

You see the qualities of a mother in verses seven and eight:

1 Thessalonians 2:7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

"Gentle" is not a word we normally associate with leadership but it is a mark of spiritual strength.

- Jesus described Himself as gentle (Matthew 11:29).
- Gentleness is listed among the qualities of Christian maturity in the pastoral epistles.

It means *mild* and *kind* and indicates that there is nothing harsh or heavy-handed in your dealings.

I'm always stunned by how frightened some folks are to come talk to me. Then I find out that they had a terrible experience with a previous pastor.

I had an experience like that myself a few years ago. Two families were in a dispute and a pretty well-known Christian leader was asked to mediate. I was asked to accompany the family from our fellowship. The meeting was a nightmare. It was worse than anything I'd ever experienced in the business world. I wasn't allowed to comment at all; there was no mediation, only accusation with threats. It was heavy-handed and manipulative. It made me sick. It was anything but "gentle."

You are to be as gentle among believers as a "nursing mother" is to "her own children." She "cherishes" them. Here's a question for all of us. Do we treat annoying people the way we treat our infant children when they wake us up every few hours wanting to be fed?

A nursing mom has "an affectionate longing" for her baby. She not only has a duty to feed her baby, she desires to do so. She's not working for wages. Her baby is "dear" to her and she sacrifices her own life for it.

The particular application of this illustration is captured by the word "impart." The mother literally imparts her own life to her baby as she takes-in food, transforms food, and transfers food.

Gentleness and affection among believers begins, then, with **taking in** food. Your food is, of course, God's Word – the Bible. But it's not enough to simply take in good food; you also need to avoid bad food. When you are nursing you are careful what you eat... What medicines you take... What you drink...

You and I fail in our responsibilities as nursing moms if we take in things that could be harmful to other believers. We should be just as careful as we would if we were nursing a baby.

Gentleness and affection among believers is furthered as you **transform** food. You take in food, then your body digests it so it can be used to further your life. God's Word is food that needs to be digested to further your spiritual life. The result is a constant spiritual transformation of your thinking that affects your living.

Gentleness and affection among believers is furthered as you **transfer** food. Food produces energy to accomplish work. God's Word gives you energy to accomplish His spiritual work. Get busy for God! You don't want to have spiritual indigestion.

In verses nine, ten, and eleven the illustration changes to that of the other parent – the father. Again I want to remind you that Paul is not using this illustration to command authority or to demand respect. It is the qualities of being a father he wants to apply to

your life among believers. Those qualities can be seen in the father's work, walk, and words.

The **work** of a father:

1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

"Laboring day and night" refer to Paul and his companions working to support themselves so as not to be a burden to the new believers. He wanted them to know that the Gospel was a gift to them and that, though costly, it was free.

"Laboring day and night" also describes the father who works hard to maintain his household.

A mother protects; a father provides. We have coined the term "deadbeat dad" to describe a father who refuses to support his children. We don't want to be deadbeat spiritual fathers by expecting other believers to do the work of the ministry.

When we use the phrase, "the work of the ministry," we mean the church but not just the church.

As to the church, we have been called-out by God to meet together. Meeting together dictates certain work that needs to be done to facilitate the worship of God and the teaching of His Word. All of us have some part to play in that work.

The work of the ministry is also everywhere God has scattered us in the world. People tell me all the time that God needs Christians in their particular field of employment, and that's true. But He

needs them to be Christians - to bring Christ to their workplace somehow.

And by 'somehow' I mean you should push right up against the limits, if there are any.

The **walk** of a father:

1 Thessalonians 2:10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;

"Devoutly" describes your motives. You're doing it all for The Lord; everything as unto The Lord.

"Justly" describes your public duties toward others, to treat them honestly, fairly, and without favoritism.

"Blamelessly" means no charge against you can stick. It is the result of being devout and just.

Fathers ought to live so that they are good examples to their children. Your kids may not always follow your good example; but you should not give them a bad example to follow. The same holds in the spiritual realm. We saw in our last study the importance and power of personal example. A bad spiritual example can cause harm.

The **words** of a father:

1 Thessalonians 2:11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,

"Exhorted" means *to come alongside to encourage*. It has to do with focusing on the proper behavior. You are to encourage believers to do the right thing – just as a father would encourage his son or daughter to do the right thing.

"Comforted" is similar to exhorted except it has the further meaning of inspiring your children. It's not enough to tell your kids what's right and wrong. You need to inspire them that what is right is also good for them and will result in blessing. You are to comfort other believers by inspiring them to continue what is good, to look forward to the blessings to come at the end of their life's course.

"Charged" means to witness or testify from your own experiences. We joke about telling kids what went on "back in my days..." But that's the idea.

You can only exhort and comfort to the extent that the things you share are real to you; that they 'work' for you. Christianity cannot be theoretical.

1Thessalonians 2:12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

"Walk" means *walking around* and refers to your everyday conduct. "Worthy" means weight, as in a measurement of value, like the carat weight of a precious gemstone.

You are to walk around everyday with a weight that is appropriate to your value as a child of God. You might even ask yourself of your desires and decisions, "Is it worthy?"

"Calls you into His own kingdom and glory" looks forward to the Second Coming of Jesus. He will return to this earth and establish upon it a real kingdom that He will rule from Jerusalem for one thousand years.

If you're someone who reads Bible commentaries, and you get one on First Thessalonians, you'll see that the scholars get sidetracked in this section in verse seven, over the particular word translated "gentle." Some manuscripts read "gentle" while others read "babies." It's because the word for "gentle" is *ēpioi* while the word for "babies" is *nēpioi* - one letter being the difference. Most prefer "gentle" due to the context. So do I... But let's consider if Paul meant "babies."

If it's "babies" we could say that Paul considered he and his companions "babies" and "mothers" and "fathers." It sounds like a strange mixed metaphor but I kind of like what he was getting at.

At any moment I might need to treat a person like the mother described in these verses. Or like the father described in these verses.

At another moment, I might need them to treat me like the "baby."

All the time we are to be the family of God - we might say the traditional church family - in caring for one another.