

“Family Rules”

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Ephesians 4:22-5:2

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In the last decade or so there has been a bit of a trend of people posting their ‘Family Rules’ in the house. This is one example:

FAMILY RULES
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WORK HARD BE KIND
ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH
SAY PLEASE & THANK YOU **SHARE**
LOVE ONE ANOTHER
DO YOUR BEST **TRY NEW THINGS**
FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS
KEEP YOUR PROMISES
ALWAYS SAY I LOVE YOU **LAUGH OFTEN**
MAKE GOOD CHOICES
THINK OF OTHERS

Do you have something like that up at your house? We don’t. We have unwritten rules, but no written rules.

We do have a family motto which we borrowed from the U.S. Marines: ***Improvise. Adapt. Overcome.***

So when little Maisie, as she did the other day, wakes up before everyone else and decides she wants scrambled eggs and decides to do it herself — using every egg and making a pretty significant mess in the process — I can’t fault her; because she’s followed the family motto! No one was available to help; so she found a way!

The scripture we read today contains some family rules — rules for

the Christian family. At the heart of these ‘rules’ or ways of living with each other is the sense that because we are followers of Jesus, because we have been loved by Jesus, our lives should be different. We should be transformed. Because something has changed inside, how we live on the outside should change too. We are very big on being inclusive and letting people know that whoever you are and wherever you come from, you belong. ‘God loves you just the way you are’ is a very important and very true saying. But it’s also true that God wants to transform us more and more into the people we were created to be.

This is not about following rules so that you ‘look’ like a Christian. If anything, we become more honest and open about our brokenness and flaws in the process. Change: From the inside to the outside — from the root to the fruit. So instead of thinking of it as adding heaps of rules to your life, it’s a little bit more like stripping away the stuff that has built up that doesn’t belong.

25 or 30 years ago, there was a group of people, led by Edith Pankhurst, who got themselves T-shirts and called themselves ***The Wall Street Strippers!*** They stripped the wood in the entire downstairs of the church. (Prior to that the wood was that very dark, almost black, stain that you see in the balcony pews.) This was an enormous labour of love and the result was incredible — the sanctuary became far more beautiful. When you strip wood, you reveal its true beauty — you can see the grain in the wood.

Living by the rules of the Christian family reveals more of our inner beauty.

Clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

I want to point out that these rules for living together do not avoid conflict. The writer, the apostle Paul, acknowledges that there will be conflict, there will even be anger. Being in real community, being a family together is hard work. People sometimes think that the church is supposed to be this place where peace, love and eternal grooviness perpetually exists — but I can tell you that ain't the case!

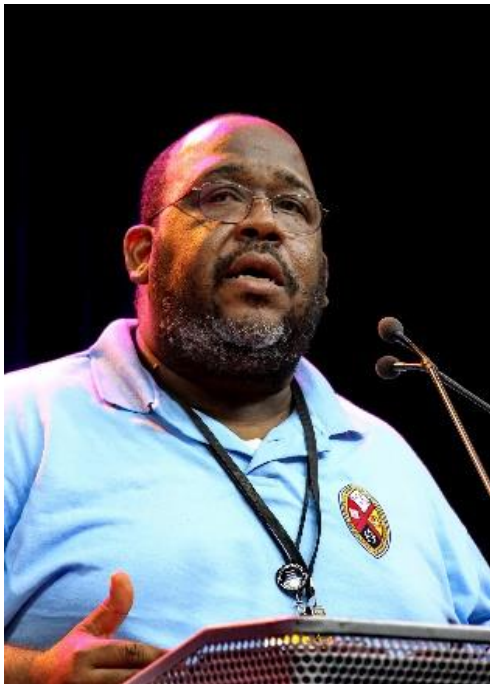
In fact, because people care so deeply, sometimes it seems the conflicts are hotter than you would find in other organizations. What is Paul's advice? Deal with your conflict. Speak the truth to each other. Some of you perhaps have heard that saying "*Do not let the sun go down on your anger*", which comes from this text.

Sometimes that is given in marriage prep seminars as advice that you have to deal with your all your arguments before you go to bed at night. If you ask me, that is not great advice. In fact, I would argue that often arguments are settled much more effectively after a good night's sleep. I

don't think Paul means that literally. What he means is "deal with your arguments".

Instead of dealing with our differences and disagreements, people naturally like to avoid and bury them and pretend they aren't there. I think sometimes Christians are the worst for this. But burying anger and resentment does not make it go away — it makes it grow. And then it comes out in unexpected ways, when some small unrelated thing comes up — and you find yourself overreacting to a comment or situation, totally out of proportion to the situation. It's usually because our blood sugar is low or we are tired or not feeling great, or there is some hurt or resentment from the past that we have not dealt with, and somehow there is a thread that connects those situations. If you overreact, step back and ask yourself if this offence reminds you of a hurt from the past.

As many of you know, a couple of weeks ago I attended the national gathering of the United Church of Canada which takes place every 3 years. (Not every minister goes, and this was only the 2nd time I've been to a General Council in my 19 years of ministry). It was a week-long event which is a combination of business, worship, education and conversation. Because I am the president of the Bay of Quinte Conference which hosted the meeting alongside the All Native Circle Conference in Oshawa, I was pretty involved in a number of ways. I want to tell you about the most powerful experience that took place.



good. It was a powerful talk.

It happened on the last day and near the end of the last day. Paul Douglas Walfall was one of the speakers. He spoke as an Intercultural Observer. He gave a powerful talk (<https://youtu.be/y25Y3K2chtk> (starts at 38:20)) where he spoke his truth about wanting the church to recognize its own racism. In love and in truth, he basically told the court that when it comes to really welcoming all people and allowing all—particularly racialized—people to be full, valued, respected contributing members of the church — that we are good at *talking the talk but not walking the walk*. He pointed to a number of examples around the wider church and at the General Council itself. He was

After he sat down, the agenda moved back to the business. Then, abruptly, two young commissioners to the General Council went to the Point of Order microphone (which interrupts the proceedings) and indicated they were upset that we had returned to business so quickly after Paul's talk. They felt it deserved a response. They then presented a motion that the General Council ask their racialized siblings for forgiveness, and that business processes and procedures be "transformed" from this point forward.

The Moderator Jordan Cantwell then called on White commissioners to give racialized members of council an opportunity at the microphone. That's when the lines of people formed up behind the three microphones on the gymnasium floor where the meeting was held. For two hours we listened as person after person came to the mic to share a personal painful story of how they had been hurt by racism in the church.

One black woman spoke of being turned down by a congregation for a ministry position because, they said, they "*just weren't ready to have a female minister.*" *They then promptly hired a female minister... a white female minister!* It was real and truthful, story after story. It took courage for those who came to the mic to share their stories, and many commented on how afraid they were to speak.

We honoured the stories. The last person got up when it was far past our dinner time ... we didn't leave for dinner until something like 7:30 or 8:00 p.m.

It came to an end in a beautiful way, when a native elder, Lorna Standingready, got up and offered a prayer for healing for the church. It seemed to me very fitting that a native elder, especially her, because Lorna is a survivor of Residential Schools, would lead us in that prayer.



Afterwards the Moderator, the Right Rev. Jordan Cantwell, thanked all those who offered their stories, saying, “[You] have honoured us, challenged us, extending in doing that a hand of friendship ... to us. I want to say thank you for your vulnerability, for your challenge, for showing us how to be the church in a different way. You have given us a gift; we as a church need to understand how to open up that gift fully. We're not going to get there tonight or tomorrow.”

It was not easy to listen to, and the Moderator was right in saying that we weren't going to heal all the hurt that night. But listening to those stories was the first step in forgiveness and in real relationship.

What truth do *you* need to speak? What offence or hurt do you need to bring out and heal from and forgive? This might be done on your own, but you might need a counsellor or someone like myself to help you through it.

This fall we will be again running *The Book of Forgiving Course*. Written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, this was the method that the Truth and Reconciliation was based on, and it's very effective at helping with our personal pain. Desmond Tutu talks about the four steps: 1. Telling your story 2. Naming the hurt 3. Offering forgiveness and 4. Renewing or releasing the relationship.

This is not easy ... but if done in love, it is tremendously healing — healing to the individual who has been hurt, healing to the offender, and healing to the community.

Love for God, love for other people and love for ourselves is at the heart of these rules. Sometimes loving one another means doing the hard work of telling our truth and stripping away the resentments and bitterness that have built up over a lifetime.

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35