

Dr. David A. deSilva, Cultural World of the New Testament, Session 6, Reading 1 Peter Attuned to Kinship and Family, Podcast Audio Summary

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All right, welcome to another deep dive. This time we're heading back to the Roman Empire. We're going to be looking at how the earliest Christians saw themselves, like as a family.

And we're going to focus on the book of First Peter for this. Fascinating book. It is.

And we've got some great academic sources to help us unpack it all. So yeah, get ready for some surprises, I think. Yeah.

You know, what's really interesting to me is this family idea. It wasn't just like a metaphor or something. It really, really shaped how these early Christians acted, like both within their communities and out there in the Roman world.

It's true. I was reading about how even slaves, like, you know, they were at the bottom of the social ladder back then. They became almost like ideal figures in 1 Peter.

How does that even... It's wild, right? It shows you how this whole family thing just turned everything upside down. And it all begins with this idea of second begetting. Okay.

So break that down for me, second begetting. It's like more than just saying you believe in Jesus, right? Right. It's like, think of it like being born all over again into a whole new family, like your old identity, your family line, where you stood in society.

None of that matters anymore. When you accept the gospel, it's like you're reborn into this family. And God's the father figure.

So you're trading in your old family for a brand new one. What's the appeal? I mean, what did they gain by joining this new family? Oh, tons of benefits. First Peter talks about this inheritance you get that can't be destroyed, you know, eternal life, even sharing in God's glory.

These early Christians were being offered something way bigger than anything their old family ties could give them. It's like hitting the jackpot, an inheritance that never runs out. Yeah.

But there must have been some strings attached, right? Like responsibilities that came with being part of this new family. For sure. You've got to act as if you belong to God's family now.

First Peter's big on becoming holy, like reflecting God's character and how you live. Makes sense. You wouldn't want to disgrace your new family, especially when it's God's family.

But how did this family idea change how they treated each other? It totally revolutionized their relationships. Like, there's this key concept. It's called Philadelphia, usually translated as brotherly love, but... Wait, hold up.

Is Philadelphia just about like warm, fuzzy feelings for your fellow Christians? There's got to be more to it. Oh yeah, way more. It's love, but with action, with obligation.

It's about the duties you have to your siblings, that level of commitment, like real responsibility. Okay, I'm intrigued. So how did this Philadelphia thing actually play out in their daily lives? What does First Peter say about that? Well, for example, it says it's super important to cover each other's sins.

Like if another Christian messes up, hurts you, you're supposed to forgive them and just move on. Totally different from how they treat someone outside their new family. It's like that saying, blood is thicker than water, right? You're more likely to put up with stuff from your siblings and forgive them.

Exactly. And it goes beyond that. First Peter talks a lot about unity, sympathy, and this is important: hospitality.

Okay, hospitality. What was so special about how these early Christians welcomed others? Think of their homes like the first churches. Hospitality wasn't just being polite.

It was how this new family survived, how it grew. The world out there was hostile, and Christianity offered this safe haven, a place to be accepted, find support. It's like finding that place where you truly belong.

But things must have gotten complicated when entire households converted, right? Oh, definitely. What happens when the wife's Christian, but the husband isn't? Or Christian slaves owned by pagan masters? First Peter tackles all that head-on with these things scholars call household codes. Household codes.

Now that sounds interesting. Tell me more. Where do these codes show up in First Peter? They're like instructions for wives, husbands, slaves, you know, how to act within their households.

But they get this distinct Christian twist. Okay, I'm hooked. What kind of advice does First Peter give to wives, especially those married to non-Christian husbands? On the surface, it seems traditional.

Wives, submit to your husbands, but there's this strategic element to it, especially for those with non-Christian husbands. It's like submission is presented as this way to maybe win them over to the faith. So these women were expected to live their faith so strongly that their husbands would be drawn to it.

That took guts, especially in Roman society. Absolutely. Actions speak louder than words, right? But here's the thing.

First Peter knows there are limits to this submission thing. So they weren't supposed to just blindly obey their husbands no matter what. What were the lines they couldn't cross? Idolatry.

That was the big one. Christian wives absolutely were not supposed to participate in pagan rituals, even if their husbands were the ones leading them. Wow.

To refuse to worship your husband's gods. That must have been incredibly risky. Talk about a social slap in the face.

You got it. We have writings from back then, like Plutarch. He said a wife shouldn't even have different gods than her husband.

Can you imagine the tension? My mind is blown. The pressure these women faced. Such a quiet act of defiance, but so brave.

Right. Challenging the power structure in this subtle but profound way. Putting faith above what society expected, even if it meant risking their safety.

Okay, so we've talked about wives. What about the husbands? Did they get off easy when it came to this new family way of life? Not at all. Our great first Peter's got instructions for them too.

But there's this common translation error that trips people up. Ooh, a translation debate. I love it.

What's the real deal with the instructions for husbands? A lot of translations say husbands should honor their wives because they're the weaker vessel. But the original Greek doesn't quite say that. Okay, spill the tea.

What's the real reason husbands should honor their wives? It's because they're fellow heirs of this grace of life thing. In other words, equal standing before God. Wow, that changes everything.

It's not about strength or weakness. It's about seeing each other as equally valued in this new family. You got it.

And it ties right back to that Philadelphia concept, right? Even in marriage, that sibling-like equality under God, it shines through. So wives, husbands, check those boxes. Now let's get to the surprising part: the slaves.

What's their role in this whole family picture, according to first Peter? This is where it gets radical. Remember, slaves were at the very bottom rung of society. But in first Peter, guess what? They're the model for all Christians.

Wait, hold on. Seriously. Slaves.

Yeah. The example for everyone else. How does that even work? It's all about how they deal with suffering.

First Peter tells them, submit to your masters, even the bad ones. But then it says, disobey if your conscience tells you to, especially when it comes to idolatry. So it's like, submit, but also disobey.

How are they supposed to juggle that in real life? It's about understanding that their ultimate loyalty is to God, not to whoever their master is. First Peter actually gives slaves agency. And get this: it judges the masters based on how they treat their slaves.

Flips the script completely. That's mind-blowing for that time. It's like saying, yeah, you're a slave in the bottom of the heap, but you still got to stand up for what's right, even if it means defying your master.

Exactly. And that's a powerful example for all Christians, right? No matter our social standing, First Peter suggests that suffering for doing right, for saying true to God, that's a badge of honor. It's a tough idea, but powerful.

Makes you wonder how these early Christians managed to live out this whole new family thing in a world that just didn't get it. That's a great question. And one we'll keep digging into as we keep exploring the world of First Peter.

Man, it's amazing how First Peter uses this whole family thing to like totally reshape how early Christians related to each other. It wasn't just a warm, fuzzy feeling. It actually changed how they saw themselves, how they saw the world.

It really did. You know, when you think about how rigid Roman society was with all its hierarchies, it's incredible that this idea took root at all. It makes me wonder: how would this radical kinship thing play out today? Like we all belong to different kinds of families, right? Our actual families, our churches, work, even friend groups.

Could we apply these same ideas there? It's a good question. Imagine like a workplace where everyone embraced this radical kinship idea. Instead of all the competition and backstabbing, people actually cared about each other.

They'd help each other out, celebrate each other's wins, and offer support when things get tough. That sounds like a dream job. Everyone working together toward the common goal.

Instead of just looking out for themselves, I bet it would even change how people deal with conflict. Exactly. Think about it.

Instead of letting disagreements fester and turn into resentment, they'd try to forgive and reconcile, just like you would with a sibling who wronged you. Right. It's not about ignoring bad behavior or letting people take advantage.

It's about approaching those tough situations with grace, trying to understand, with the goal of actually fixing the relationship. It's like when you have a fight with a family member and you try to patch things up. Exactly.

That's what makes this radical kinship so powerful. It's rooted in this deep, unshakable bond that helps you navigate those bumps in the road that you're bound to hit in any close relationship. And let's not forget about hospitality.

Oh yeah. We talked before about how important hospitality was to the early church. It wasn't just about manners or social customs, though, was it? Not at all.

In 1 Peter, hospitality is this core expression of how this new family was supposed to function. It was about creating a truly welcoming space, where people felt safe, supported, truly seen. They embraced people from all walks of life, often those who were marginalized, pushed aside by society.

That's a really important point. It wasn't just about welcoming those who were like them. It was about reaching out to people who were different, who needed a place to belong.

That's pretty countercultural even today. It is. And it's something we can all aim for, whether it's in our churches, workplaces, or just our neighborhoods.

It can be as simple as inviting someone new into your group of friends, really listening to someone who's struggling, or just sharing a meal together. It's easy to dismiss those little acts of kindness, but they can have such a big impact. Creating a culture of belonging, of caring for each other.

It all starts with those small choices, those everyday interactions. That's it. And what's so striking is that this isn't just some nice-sounding theory.

This is how those early Christians actually lived. They faced persecution, hardship, pressure from all sides, and still they clung to this radical way of life. It's inspiring, really, to see how they lived out their beliefs in the face of so much opposition.

It speaks volumes about the power of those beliefs and the strength of their community. It reminds us that living out this radical kinship won't be easy. There will always be challenges, conflicts to navigate.

But this model of relating to each other offers us a way forward, a way to face those difficulties with resilience, with grace. And that's what makes studying First Peter so fascinating. Even after thousands of years, it speaks to this very human desire to connect, to belong.

It challenges us to rethink how we approach relationships and to embrace this deeper sense of kinship. You've touched on something really crucial there. The Roman Empire was a place of division, of rigid social structures.

And in the midst of that, these early Christians were trying to create something entirely different, a community founded on love, equality, mutual support. It's almost like they were building a new society within the old one, where things like social status and wealth weren't as important as this shared commitment to this new family. Exactly.

And in doing so, they were challenging the very core of the Roman world. Their way of life was so different from the self-serving ambition and competition that was everywhere in Roman culture. It takes real guts to live out those beliefs in that kind of environment.

But it wasn't just about what they did, was it? There had to be a change happening on the inside too, right? You're right. This radical kinship wasn't just about changing your actions. It was about a deep internal shift in perspective.

They were learning to see the world through the lens of this new family identity, challenging their own ingrained ideas about social hierarchy and power. It sounds like a complete paradigm shift. You're not defined by your social status, your wealth, or your accomplishments anymore.

Instead, your main identity is as a member of this new family, united by your shared faith and commitment to one another. Exactly. That's what set their community apart.

They were living out a set of values that were completely at odds with the norms of their society. Which brings up a question that's been on my mind as we've been talking. We've seen how First Peter paints this vivid picture of radical kinship.

But how did it actually work in practice? I mean, there must have been tensions and challenges as they tried to live out these ideals in a world that often pushed back against them. That's a great question. And it's one we'll dig into as we continue to explore the world of First Peter.

You know, this whole idea of the early church as this, like, radical family, it's really something. Makes you think, that's for sure. Yeah, it really does.

And it's not just some feel-good message either. First Peter, it's a call to action. Like, it's telling us to live out our faith in a way that challenges the world's norms.

We've been talking about how even slaves, who were seen as the lowest of the low back then, are held up as examples in First Peter. What was it about their faith that made it so remarkable? I think it's the way the gospel turns things upside down. You know, seeing every person as inherently valuable, worthy- it doesn't matter their social status, background, anything.

It's like First Peter saying, the world might see some people as disposable, but to God, they're precious. Our brothers and sisters. That's a good way to put it.

And that idea has implications for how we treat each other, how we build communities, how we interact with the world. It's huge. So if we're trying to apply this radical kinship to our lives today, where do we even start? It seems like a big, I don't know, a big undertaking.

Well, I think the first step is just awareness, recognizing that this radical kinship thing, it's at the core of the Christian faith, not some optional extra. It's part of who we are, how we should live. So taking small steps, practical things in our daily lives, treating each other with respect and kindness, being there for each other, creating spaces where people feel like they belong.

It's not about being perfect, right? It's about progress, messing up, getting back up, and just trying over and over to put this love into action. And we can't do it alone, can we? We need each other to encourage each other, challenge each other, keep each other accountable. Totally.

And ultimately, it all comes back to the source of this radical love, God. That connection is what gives us the grace, the strength to live this countercultural life. You can't really love your neighbor unless you get how deeply God loves you.

That's profound. As we wrap up this deep dive into First Peter, I want to leave you with one last question to think about. Imagine if your community, your church, workplace, family, wherever, imagine if they really embraced this radical kinship.

How would things change? Your relationships, your choices, what you prioritize? Big question, but worth pondering. Goes right to the heart of what we've been talking about, doesn't it? Finding unexpected wisdom in these old texts and figuring out how it applies to our lives today. It's been a pleasure joining you for this one.

And thank you for joining us on the Deep Dive. We'll see you next time.