

Especially to the Household of Faith

As we come to the beginning of a new year, it is common for sermons to focus on resolutions, self-examination, and repentance. A new calendar seems to invite fresh starts and renewed commitments. Those themes are great, but I would like to focus on a challenge to us as a family.

Rather than focusing only on what we need to fix or improve individually, I want us to give renewed attention to who we are together as a church. The New Testament repeatedly speaks of the church not merely as an organization, but as a family. It is a household bound by shared life in Christ. We have looked at this before in other messages, so the idea is not new to us. Yet, familiar truths often need to be emphasized again because they are easily taken for granted.

As we step into a new year, my prayer is that we would grow in our appreciation of one another, especially within the household of faith. For so many, church becomes a service we attend or a box we check off. I would like to look below the surface about what it means to belong and to bear one another's burdens.

Gal 6:2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

We are stewards of the church as a family. That deserves renewed reflection as we begin this new year together.

1. Especially to the Household of Faith

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In Galatians 6, Paul started with writing about a believer's personal responsibility before God, but he then expanded on that to our relationship with each other as a church family.

Gal 6:9-10 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore

opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Paul identified the church as a household.

Paul similarly expressed the significance of this when he wrote about the pastor's office. A pastor has to understand the principle of family so that he can apply that to the church:

1Tim 3:4-5 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

There was a popular Christian song that spoke of how the world will know we are Christians by our love [Peter Scholtes] I think the author was sort of aiming for love in the church family, but the lyrics fell a little short. He wrote "And they'll know we are Christians by our love." More specifically, what Christ was teaching was that the world would know that we are His disciples by our love *toward each other* as members of a family.

John 13:35 By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

2. God Has Tempered the Body Together -

God has tempered the body together. Just as steel is heated and hammered to strengthen, or temper, it, we are strengthened and bonded together by the stresses of spiritual service and struggle.

Prov 27:17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

1Thess 5:11, 14 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*.

In order to sharpen one another, churches and other social situations do not succeed because they are filled with people living in an echo chamber. Echo chambers do not sharpen ideas. They slowly degrade them. Just as an echo loses detail each time it is repeated, thinking in an echo chamber becomes compressed. People begin speaking in shorthand. They assume shared meanings rather than explaining them. Nuances are dropped because “everyone already knows” them. Over time, ideas are reduced to slogans. Conclusions are remembered without their reasons. Beliefs are affirmed more by familiarity than by understanding. What appears to be unity is often only repetition, and what sounded strong at first gradually becomes weak and thin.

In the church, we are blessed *not* by people just parroting each other. The strong *and* the weak are a blessing to *each other* by ministering not only *together*, but also by ministering *to each other*.

1Cor 12:7-26 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

...

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ.

...

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

...

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23 And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness.

24 For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked:

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

In nature, some of the most resilient systems are built not on sameness, but on mutual dependence. This kind of relationship is called *symbiosis*, a shared life in which distinct organisms flourish through dependence on one another. Bees and flowering plants offer a clear example: bees gather nectar and pollen for nourishment, while plants are pollinated in the process and are able to reproduce. Neither is exploiting the other; each does what it is designed to do, and life flourishes because both participate.

Likewise, coral reefs depend on an unseen partnership. A certain kind of algae lives within coral tissue, producing

energy through photosynthesis. The coral provides protection, structure, and the carbon dioxide the algae need. Remove either partner, and the reef weakens or dies. Lichens take this even further. A lichen is not merely cooperation, but a fused life of fungus and algae forming a new, stable organism that neither could sustain on its own. Strength and survival emerge not from independence, but from shared life.

A church reflects this same principle. Strong and weak members are not liabilities to one another, but necessary companions. The weak more obviously need the strong for guidance, stability, protection, and instruction. Yet the strong also need the weak, though this is less apparent. Without the presence of those who struggle, mature believers can become calloused, overly intellectual, or detached from the real burdens people carry. Without weaker believers, strong believers can talk about truth without ever having to practice patience, compassion, or humility.

As the strong minister to the weak, they often discover something else as well: doctrines they assumed were firm can turn out to be fragile. In the effort to explain truth simply and carefully, hidden assumptions surface. Careless shortcuts are exposed and the strong are forced to examine whether they truly understand what they believe or have merely learned how to repeat it.

This principle is recognized even outside theology. Physicist Richard Feynman was not only known for his discoveries. He was also known for his clarity as a teacher. He insisted that real understanding shows itself in simple explanation. He taught that if an idea cannot be explained plainly, without hiding behind technical language, then the speaker has not yet grasped it fully. Complexity can impress, but simplicity tests comprehension. In the church, the presence of weaker believers performs this same service. It requires the strong to slow down, clarify, and discover whether their understanding is truly rooted or merely assumed.

Just as nature shows that flourishing

depends on mutual care rather than uniform strength, the body of Christ is healthiest when strength serves weakness—and weakness keeps strength human.

3. Obligations -

There are obligations in the church family. Civilization, itself, is not upheld merely by laws and institutions, but by the quiet network of social obligations embraced by individuals. These obligations, both formal and informal, form the invisible moral infrastructure of society. They are expressed in simple courtesies such as responding to invitations, honoring commitments, attending gatherings, and showing respect to family, coworkers, and authorities. When honored, they help bind communities together. When neglected, they erode trust and fracture the bonds that hold civilized life in place.

At the heart of this idea lies a simple truth: we owe something to one another. A society, or a church, where each person lives solely for himself, acknowledging no obligations beyond his own convenience, cannot remain civil. It quickly becomes coarse, distrustful, and combative. Courtesy, kindness, duty, and mutual regard are not mere niceties. They are the oil that keeps the machinery of the church operating smoothly. When a member ignores these commands, he becomes sand in the gears which calls for action in church discipline.

Rom 12:10 *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;*

Paul took the idea of obligations very seriously.

Rom 1:14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

He not only preached the importance of love, he considered it an *obligation*.

We *owe* love to each other.

Rom 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

Those who reject these obligations in pursuit of self-pleasing freedom rarely find the liberation they seek. In refusing to honor others, they often become isolated themselves. When a person treats invitations as burdens, relationships as optional, and courtesy as needless, they discover they are left outside the circle of trust and community. At first they feel independent, but later, they end up alone. Then, they wonder why they are alone!

Worse still, a life built only on obligation to self breeds entitlement. When every decision is measured by personal comfort and benefit, one soon assumes that others owe him what he never felt obliged to give. Attention, respect, sympathy, and opportunity are sacrificed. Such a mindset corrodes gratitude and inflates expectation, producing individuals who demand honor but offer none.

Church etiquette, at its best, serves as a reflection of deeper Christian ethics rather than a mere set of formalities. When you rise for Scripture reading, bow in prayer, or refrain from disruptive behavior – these are not arbitrary customs but outward signs of inward reverence. These practices embody ethical principles such as humility before God, love for neighbor, and honor toward sacred things. Even common church phrases like “God bless you” or to say “thank you” by the older expression “much obliged” reveal ethical underpinnings. We are not obliged simply in the sense of being thankful, but of recognizing a moral debt, a duty of gratitude and reciprocity. In Christian theology, to be “obliged” is to be bound by love, by grace received, and by responsibility to serve others.

Phil 2:1-5 If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any

comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

3 *Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

...

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

The etiquette of the church, from dress and demeanor to speech and seating, ought to mirror the ethics of the Gospel: that we owe one another honor, patience, and charity. We do this not because of tradition alone, but because of a moral obligation rooted in the character of Christ as we let His mind be in us.

Ultimately, obligation is not a burden but a blessing. It gives life structure, meaning, and dignity. Our relationships are strengthened when we show up not only physically, but emotionally, socially, and ethically. Our church will flourish when we honor others above self. Faith, family, work, and civic life thrive when men and women understand that we are not islands but members one of another.

When we fulfill our social obligations, we affirm a deeper moral reality: Life is not about serving ourselves, but serving others. In doing so, we become spiritually mature and fulfilled. That's why using JOY as an acronym is so meaningful: Jesus, Others, Yourself. Put Jesus first, others next, and yourself last.

Nowhere does the principle of social obligation seem more vital, and more neglected, than within the church. Scripture describes believers as members of a body, living stones fitly framed together, and a family of faith. Yet many today approach church not as a spiritual household to which they owe loyalty, but as a convenience or personal resource to be used when desired. To them, church

attendance is merely about what they “get out of it.” But Biblical Christianity teaches that belonging to a church is not merely for receiving blessings. It is a God-given duty to give, to serve, to build up others, and to be present for the sake of the whole body.

Ecc 4:9-12 Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that is* alone when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up.

...

12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

When Christians lack a sense of duty to their church family, the church weakens. Fellowship erodes and ministries stagnate. The next generation learns that faith is optional and community is disposable. Churches do not decline because doctrine changes first. They decline because *commitment* dies first. A church cannot function on spectators. It needs servants. It cannot thrive on occasional attendance. It requires steadfast and faithful participation. It cannot grow where convenience rules. It prospers only where conviction, *obligation*, and love bind the hearts of believers together in shared spiritual labor.

In church life, attending faithfully is not simply a matter of personal spiritual nourishment, though that is essential. It is also an act of love toward others. When we gather, we encourage the weary, bear one another’s burdens, lift our voices together in worship, and strengthen the resolve of those facing trials. Every service we skip without good cause leaves a pew empty that could have encouraged another believer. Every ministry opportunity ignored and every Sunday sacrificed for leisure subtly tells others that the body of Christ is secondary and self is supreme. Church

life is communal; neglect of it harms not only ourselves, but our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Acts 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Those who think they can thrive spiritually while living independently of the church deceive themselves.

Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

The command is two-fold: gather, and encourage. You cannot fulfill the second unless you obey the first. The church is not a religious convenience. It is a sacred commitment. To treat the gathering lightly is to disregard the very structure God ordained for Christian maturity and witness.

The local church is God's ordained means for discipleship, accountability, worship, mutual care, and Gospel mission. It is where we learn humility by serving, patience by bearing with others, charity by giving, and steadfastness by remaining. The Christian who refuses obligation to church family quickly becomes spiritually isolated and relationally malnourished. Just as a body part cannot thrive detached from the body, so a believer cannot flourish apart from the church. In a fire, the glowing coals work together to keep the fire going. When you take one of the coals out and lay it aside, it quickly turns dark and cold. We are on fire with the Lord when we work together. Duty to the church is not legalism; it is loyalty. It is not bondage; it is belonging.

Everything we have spoken about today, the household of faith, shared life, mutual care, and belonging, begins with one essential truth: you must first belong to Christ. The church is a family, but it is

not entered by attendance, tradition, or effort. It is entered by grace through faith. Christ gave Himself for sinners, not so we could improve ourselves, but so we could be forgiven, reconciled to God, and made new. If you are here today without that assurance, if you know about Christ but have never trusted Him for eternal salvation, I want to invite you to come. Not to a system, not to a set of obligations, but to a Savior who loved you and gave Himself for you. He is ready to receive you today and you can be joined to a family with all that entails.

This message has not been about earning God's favor, but about living out the grace we have already received. If you belong to Christ, then you belong to His people. And belonging carries responsibility. Perhaps God has spoken to you about faithfulness, about presence, about commitment, about serving others rather than self. Perhaps you have grown distant, comfortable, or independent in ways that weaken both you and the church family. This is a good time starting the new year to renew not just personal devotion, but covenant loyalty to the household of faith. Not out of guilt, but out of love.

If God has stirred your heart, whether toward salvation, restoration, reconciliation, or renewed commitment, this invitation is for you. Come and pray. Come and respond to what the Lord has shown you. The church is not a place for perfect people, but for redeemed people learning to walk together. The church is not a museum for saints, it is a hospital for sinners.

The household of faith grows strong when Christ is honored, when grace is embraced, and when God's people respond willingly to His call.

Gal 6:2

1. Especially to the Household of Faith - Gal 6:9-10, 1Tim 3:4-5, John 13:35
2. God Has Tempered the Body Together - Prov 27:17, 1Thess 5:11,, 1Cor 12:7-26
3. Obligations - Rom 12:10, 1:14, 13:8, Phil 2:1-5, Ecc 4:9-12, Acts 2:42, Heb 10:25