

## ***The Family of God***

## **Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 3:15**

Today we consider the Family of God. Two Bible verses command our attention this morning: Galatians 6:10 -- *Therefore, as we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.* 1 Timothy 3:15 – *I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.*

**New Testament Descriptors of the Church.** The Church is the only organized entity that Jesus left on this earth to represent Him and the only strategy of sharing Good News about how to get to heaven. Any Christian who wants to be on the cutting edge of what God is doing in the world today must be involved in and connected to a local New Testament church. Several words in the New Testament describe the church:

1. **The Church is a Flock led by Shepherds.** This descriptor is Jesus’ favorite designation of the Church. In John 10:14, Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”* The implication is that the church resembles a flock of sheep who follow a shepherd. In I Peter 5:4, Peter identified Jesus the Chief Shepherd, so we ultimately follow Him because it’s His church and He’s head over His church. However, individual shepherds are called and assigned to lead His flock. The word translated *Pastor* is the Greek word for *shepherd* – not a coincidence.

2. **The Church is a Fellowship fused by Unity.** Acts 2:42 defined the first Christians as believers who *“devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship.”* *Koinonia* -- *to have in common*, which implies that the priority of the church is unity. Because Jesus Christ is Head over His church, anything or anyone causing disunity or divisiveness in a church is not pleasing to the Head.

3. **The Church is a Body organized by Spiritual Gifts.** In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul discussed the analogy between a human body and the church as a body. A human body is an organism in which a person lives and exists. The church is people through whom Christ works – a spiritual organization synergized by the spiritual gifts of individual members.

4. **The Church is the Bride of Christ bonded by Love.** In Revelation 19:7, the Apostle John described a scene in heaven: *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.”* A bride is a woman to whom a man commits himself. So the church is people to whom Christ is committed, and love forges the bond of that commitment. Paul affirmed in Ephesians 5 that Christ *loved* the church and gave *Himself* for her.

5. **The Church is a Family forged by Relationships.** This descriptor is my favorite designation of the church. In 1 Timothy 3:15 and Galatians 6:10, Paul expressed the church as God’s household – the household of faith. A family is a group of closely related individuals who nurture and care for one another. So the church is people whom Christ nurtures, which implies that the church is to be structured on the basis of relationships, and not rules.

In a dispatch written after one of his great naval victories, Lord Nelson ascribed his victory to his *“happy privilege to command a band of brothers.”* Unless the church is a band of brothers and sisters in Christ, it is not a church at all. First Baptist Lafayette, you are a fellowship fused by unity. You are a body, composed of individual members, organized for efficiency by spiritual gifts. You are a flock, led by shepherds and served by deacons. You are the Bride of Christ, waiting for your Bridegroom. And you are a family -- a band of Christian brothers and sisters.

**Since the Church is a FAMILY, what kind of family ought you to be?**

1. **A CHURCH OUGHT TO BE A HAPPY FAMILY.** God designed the church to be happy place, not a sad place. Psalm 122:1 says, *“I rejoiced when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’”* We often call the church to which we belong – our church home.

Above all else, a home ought to be a place where the family members enjoy being together, working together, existing together – a happy place. Far too many families in our society are dysfunctional, but the church ought to be a place of happy function. What produces happiness in a family? What produces happiness in the Family of God?

#### **Four ingredients of family happiness:**

**A. Discipline makes a happy family.** Without discipline, chaos erupts. Without levels of authority, confusion rules the day. If family members disregard the family rules and standards of behavior, a process of correction must be enforced. I remember the day I got tired of the family rules. I was about seven or eight years old. I don't recall any one rule that pushed me to the edge of frustration, but I just got tired of being told what to do, so I took a towel, gathered a few clothes and special things, tied them up in a bundle, and announced that I was leaving home. My mother was in the kitchen cooking supper. My dad was seated at the table reading the newspaper. My mother was surprised: "*Where are you going? How will you get there? Are you taking anything to eat?*" My dad only said, "*If you would have let me know, I could have helped you pack.*" In anger, I stomped out of the house, slid through the back fence, and headed across the back pasture and into the woods. Not far into the woods, I came to the banks of the Choupique bayou, and realized that I had no way of crossing. I'd have to go right or left, follow the bayou until I came to the next road. I was already tired, so found a stump and just sat there – I had to think. The longer I sat there, the hotter and hungrier I got. I was mad, but I also thought of what a fool I'd been. I had nowhere to go, no place to sleep, and nothing to eat. So, finally I decided there was nothing to do but go back home. When I walked into the front door, my mom and dad and sister were just finishing supper. The nerve of them to eat without me! I slowly sat down at the kitchen table and as my mom fixed me a plate, my said, "*How far did you get?*" I told him about my short journey. Then he said something that I've never forgotten. "*We missed you when you were gone and we're glad you're back. But I just want you to know that we didn't change the rules when you were gone.*" I learned that day that discipline and submission to authority would always be a part of life. We all must submit to some authority. In the church, there are levels of authority. We can either discipline ourselves and realize that it can never always be *our way*, or we can refuse to submit to authority and learn the hard way. The most frustrated Christians are those who are unwilling to submit to authority, and who are always trying to be in charge of the family.

**B. Responsibility makes a happy family.** In every family, there are chores to be done, tasks to be accomplished, and obligations to be fulfilled. If everyone manages their responsibility, then there harmony and happiness exist. It's the same in the church family. There's too much to do for just a few to be involved. God has placed into His family all the talent, skill, and giftedness needed to accomplish all the functions of the church. The key is faithfulness. During these days and months of pastoral transition, could I just challenge all of you to be faithful and responsible. Some things aren't going to get done unless you do them.

**C. Respect makes a happy family.** For happiness to exist, a family must respect each other. The same is true in the church family. Can a home be a happy place if people are not welcome — if people don't speak to one another — if people show disrespect to one another? It's a sad day when the church family is a place of conflict, strife, grumbling, and complaining. That's out of place in the family of God. We can disagree without being disagreeable. We can share convictions without becoming defensive. We can serve God without complaining and grumbling. Let's me ask you, would you like God to sit in on every conversation you have? Guess what, He does.

**D. Encouragement makes a happy family.** Some things a family can do without -- but encouragement is not one of them. Encouragement is the one ingredient that holds a family together. Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote: *There are two kinds of people on earth today, Just two kinds of people, no more, I say. Not the good and the bad, for 'tis well understood that the good are half-bad and the bad are half-good. No! The two kinds of people on earth I mean are the people who lift and the people who lean. Are you a lifter or a leaner?*

2. **A Church ought to be a Healthy Family.** Last Sunday we discussed the 10 vital signs of a healthy church, concluding that church health produces church growth. The church must be a place where every believer can grow to full potential.

A. **The PURPOSE of the Church is not to just increase the family, but also to mature the family.** Ephesians 4:13 defines this maturity process — “*until we all...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*” A favorite pastime of sinners outside the Church is to call the sinners inside the Church *hypocrites*. The word originated in the field of drama in the days when one person played several parts in a play. The performer wore a different mask for each character portrayed. In one scene he might be the bad guy. In the next he might be the hero. He simply put on a different mask for each character. Such a person was called a hypocrite. The word had a good meaning at first, but gradually it came to describe a person who was two-faced, one who was play-acting or pretending to be spiritual. I am sure there are hypocrites in the church. Billy Sunday said, “*You can find anything in the average church today from a hummingbird to a turkey buzzard.*” I’m sure he was right. But not all who fail to live up to their profession of faith are hypocrites. Many are just weak and immature Christians. Critics fail to realize that in a large and growing family, there are people at various ages and stages of maturity. Infants don’t act like children, children don’t act like teenagers, teenagers don’t act like adults. The truth is, a part of the purpose of a family is to help each person grow from their present level of maturity to a level of full potential. In a family, we all must help each other grow up. As the family of God, the church functions in same way. In the church there are different levels of maturity. Some have recently been born again -- infants in the faith. Others are spiritual adolescents. And others are spiritually mature.

B. **The POWER of the church is found in response to both the Holy Spirit and to One Another.** God has indwelt and empowered the church with His Spirit for the purpose of producing unity and leadership and counsel. The Holy Spirit is our Guide, our Comforter, and our Counselor. It’s time for us to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit instead of our own desires and preferences. Power in the church is resident also in how we treat One Another. I looked up every time the New Testament tells us how to respond to one another. Here are just some of them: ENCOURAGE one another — LOVE one another — DEPEND ON one another — BE DEVOTED TO one another — HONOR one another — REJOICE WITH one another — WEEP WITH one another — BE OF THE SAME MIND TOWARD one another — NOT JUDGE one another — ACCEPT one another — INSTRUCT one another — CARE FOR one another — SERVE one another — BE KIND TO one another — FORGIVE one another — BE TENDERHEARTED TOWARD one another — SUBMIT TO one another — STIMULATE one another — SHOW HOSPITALITY TO one another — MINISTER GIFTS TO one another — BE HUMBLE TO one another — NOT SPEAK EVIL AGAINST one another — NOT GRUMBLE AGAINST one another — CONFESS OUR FAULTS TO one another — PRAY FOR one another — NOT BE PUFFED UP AGAINST one another — BEAR BURDENS FOR one another.

### **Lifting the Load.**

Herman Ostrey of Bruno, Nebraska, faced a seemingly impossible task. He needed to relocate his barn 100 feet from where it now stood. How would he do that without tearing it down and rebuilding it? His neighbors heard about his dilemma and volunteered to pick it up and move it! They used hydraulic jacks to get the barn off the ground. Then 328 of them put their hands under the edge of the barn and they moved it 100 feet to the new location. Each one only carried about 50 pounds.

The church is a flock, a fellowship, a body, a bride, and a family. God intends for His family to be happy and healthy. The health and happiness of the church depends on every one of us lifting our part of the load. God help us to be the family of God – happy, healthy, lifting the load together.