Good morning, Family. As we continue our series about the body of Christ this morning, our scripture passages each give different metaphors to express what it means to be a part of Christ’s church. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul paints a picture of the functions within the body, making clear that everybody within the body is *somebody*. Each of us has a role to fulfill in the body of Christ. We are, each of us, part of what Christ died for! In Ephesians 2, Paul speaks to the privilege and position of the believer within the body of Christ (vs. 17-19). Paul moves in his discussion of the place or position of believer from the metaphor of kingdom to household to family and, then, to temple of God. Being part of the kingdom speaks to our unity as people in community—connected and with rights and privileges of serving under the King (v. 18).

Privilege within the Christian community, Paul would affirm, does not mean entitlement, but it does mean joy in service together. In verse 19 of Ephesians 2, Paul moves us to a deeper place, “ God’s household.” This language speaks to the intimacy and the depth of our relationship with God. Christians, we are children of the King, invited into the household of God. When we perceive and are directed by the depth of that familial relationship, our new understanding promotes within us a respect for and desire for a deep relationship in His household; that is, within His church. This position demands of us that we take on the responsibility to represent God well. Each member is responsible for the health and functions inside the household of God. See what Paul writes on responsibilities within the household of God, the church:

14 Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 if I am delayed, 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. 16 Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

He appeared in the flesh,

was vindicated by the Spirit,

was seen by angels,

was preached among the nations,

was believed on in the world,

was taken up in glory. (1 Timothy 3:14-16).

Further, in Romans 12:5, Paul tells believers that we are “parts” or “members of one another.” The strength of a building is determined by its foundation. For the community of believers, it is the grace that emanates from within, from our church; it is the *agape* factor. We serve and share and operate in love because we are members of God’s household. Being a member of His household means we have a place to belong, sharing in a spirit of generosity while nurturing each other in love. Paul defines this membership for us all:

10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. –Romans 12:10-26

John Stott calls this passage “Paul’s recipe for Love.” Stott writes that Paul names twelve ingredients that make up love for the church member:

1. Sincerity
2. Discernment
3. Affection
4. Honoring of others
5. Patience
6. Generosity
7. Enthusiasm
8. Hospitality
9. Kindness
10. Sympathy
11. Harmony
12. Humility

Speaking pragmatically, this all means that sharing burdens, blessings, experiences, and resources with one another results in strengthening the household. Simply put, these aspects of love played out in the church community mean stewarding generosity.

If we look to measuring the health of a church family, we must take stock of its attendance, its giving history, and its activities calendar. However, a more informed measure of church health might be a measure of the attributes of its members regarding these characteristics:

1. Spiritual growth
2. Relational discipleship
3. Community impact
4. Worship as a lifestyle
5. Small group/Bible study involvement
6. Prayer involvement (personal and corporate)
7. Baptisms
8. Importance of missions
9. Decisions of first-time commitment
10. Decisions of recommitment
11. Living of faith beyond Sunday morning
12. Growing volunteer base
13. Lived out mission statement
14. Hospitable
15. Thriving youth and children’s ministry
16. Heart toward service
17. Demographic diversity
18. Personal Bible study
19. Unwavering unity within the body
20. Intentional evangelism

Spiritually, these attributes exhibited toward one another in the community of believers means that we help make ourselves alive in His love together.

Listen, Family. In the New Testament, no synagogue, temple, chapel, tabernacle or building is ever referred to as the “church.” “Church” in the NT always refers to the Christian assembly. The Greek word *ecclesia* literally means “called out assembly.” The reference is to believers who are called to share in life with one another. The phrase “one another” comes from the Greek *allelon*, which simply means “each other.” This word denoting each other appears one hundred times in the NT. Fifty-nine of the appearances are specific commands that instruct believers how to (or how not to) relate to one another within God’s household. Do remember that our concern today is about position and privilege within God’s household, but it is also about each individual’s responsibility as a steward of God’s grace. Stewarding God’s grace is crucial in our spiritual formation. As Martin Lloyd Jones observes, “Christians have been given all the spiritual blessings in the Heavenly places and find their pinnacle in access to God Himself.” How, then, can we NOT share and live for one another?

Think about this: Much of understanding about the household of God we glean from the writings of Paul, an Apostle who began as a persecutor of the church. He knows in a profound way the impact of and the responsibility for stewarding church health. He understands the value of “one-another-ness” in the congregational life of the believers’ community. He encourages and chastens the nascent church communities to live in faith, obediently, actively, sacrificially, and disciplined in sharing within God’s household. And he reminds all that to do so glorified God. We are most like Jesus when we, in love and obedience, share our lives together, fervent in Spirit; as Paul writes: “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:9-11). “Fervor” comes from the Latin word *ferveres*, which means to “boil over.” In so many words, Paul instructs us to boil in the living water of Christ. To allow our lives, in shared generosity and community, impact the lives of others. But to do that—in order to steward well—the gifts, resources, and grace of God, one may have to put to death selfishness and pride. The believer may have to give up making excuses and stop compromising. Has God blessed you? Talk about His blessings! Serve in the confidence of grace. In God’s household, share in being members of one another. Maintain Jesus as our undisputed priority. All that we say and do within the household of God is marked by our union with Him. That should be what shapes our doctrine, our dying to self, the depth of our relationship with Him and others; that is what defines our position and our privilege within the body of Christ, God’s household.

Passages in support of this sermon:

Ephesians 2:19-22

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

I Corinthians 12:14-27

14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15 Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.