

Our Christian Family

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11-26-06

Introduction.

- A. Last Sunday evening was marked by a number of unusual events. Before services, John announced that Pete and Jill Eskra, faithful Christians from the Joliet area, wished to place membership with this local church. He also said that Lorie Hamon, a sister who had been previously out of duty, desired to be restored to fellowship and also begin work with this congregation. Finally, after services, Jeanette Van Dyke was baptized into Christ, and as a consequence of that, also became affiliated with this church.
- B. These three ways, transfer of membership, restoration, and baptism, are the only three ways I can think of that a person can become a member of this congregation, and we had an example of all three in one evening, which I thought was pretty cool. It seemed appropriate to me, then, to preach a sermon on the responsibilities that these new members have to the rest of us, as well as the responsibilities we have to them.
- C. As I considered this idea, though, I soon realized that there is no difference. New member or older member, every saint has a duty to his brethren in Christ that is at the heart of Christianity. Even the Lord's Supper, which we've focused on so much today, is just as much a sharing with other Christians as it is a sharing with God. We can't get our service to God right unless we get our service to each other right. Because these relationships are so important, let's look this morning at our responsibilities to our Christian family.

I. Set a Good Example.

- A. The first of these responsibilities that we have to the Christians with whom we worship is to set a good example. Consider Paul's admonition to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12. Even though Timothy was still what the Ephesians would consider a young man, he still had a sacred obligation to show them what was right by doing what was right, and this isn't just a preacher thing. God expects all of us to show godliness in our lives.
- B. This is always important, but it is especially important at a time like this. We have just had four Christians added to our number, and it's just the nature of things that they're going to be looking to those of us who have been here longer for guidance and for strength. We need to show them by our lives that we are genuinely committed to serving God, because even one hypocrite in this congregation can do these new members terrible damage. What will Pete and Jill and Lorie think if they hear us teach the love and peace of Jesus Christ, yet learn from after-services conversations that this is a church racked by gossip and bitterness? What will Jeanette think if, now that she's looking at us as a fellow Christian, she sees that she already does a better job of living her faith than we do? We need to teach what's right by doing what's right.
- C. However, even new members have a responsibility to set a good example too. When Christians look around at our country today, we see a lot of evil and not much good. This pessimistic picture can lead us to despair, a despair that Satan quickly exploits to make us useless for God's work. But do you know what happens when we see new people dedicating their lives to God? It gives us the opposite impression. It proves to us that the gospel still has power to save souls today, and every time we see Jeanette or Lorie, or even Pete and Jill, living righteous lives and seeking the kingdom of God, that renews our desire to serve Him. Let's all be examples.

II. Encourage One Another.

- A. However, this edifying process is also something we need to carry out with words as well as deeds. We need to encourage one another. This is the point of Hebrews 10:24-25. One of the things I like to talk about is how we need to move beyond a checklist view of serving God, and this is a passage where we need to get the checklist version out of our minds. If we're determined to be lazy, useless, checklist Christians, here's how we read this passage. We think, "If I stop coming to services, I'm going to get the elders on my case, and that's unpleasant, so instead, I'm going to come once every couple of weeks, and that's good enough."
- B. The problem, friends, is that if we just show up every couple weeks, don't sing, don't participate, don't talk to anybody, and generally act like we were attending our own funerals, we aren't fulfilling God's command any more than if we didn't come at all. We're here for a reason, folks. God doesn't want passive pew-warmers. He wants active encouragers. We encourage our brethren through our heartfelt singing. We encourage our brethren by doing our part in the services. We even encourage our brethren just by making it clear that we're glad to see them and glad they came to be a part of the worship. All of us need to encourage.

III. Submit to One Another.

- A. The Bible also requires us as Christians to submit to one another. Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 5:18, 21. Part of the way that we show that we are filled with the Spirit is by submitting. Very often, we talk about the submission of the saint to the elder, or of the wife to the husband, but submission, in one form or another, is actually a duty that every Christian owes to every other Christian. All of us are familiar with strife in the Lord's

church. This is my simple solution to the problem, except really it's God's solution to the problem. Every single incident of church trouble is caused either by someone not submitting to God or, more commonly, by someone not submitting to another Christian. If we learn submission, we will never have church problems.

- B. If that's our intent, we can learn all we need to know about submission from the example of Jesus. He was perfect. He was sinless. He had it all, yet He left it all to come to earth to die for us undeserving sinners. This wasn't because Jesus enjoyed the thought of crucifixion. It was because He loved us so much, because He was so concerned for our good, that He put our lives ahead of His life. Brethren, when we consider what Jesus surrendered for us, doesn't it make all of our petty grievances and squabbles just look pathetic?
- C. We think a brother has said something mean to us, and where Jesus was willing to give up His life, we won't give up our pride. We get bitter about that comment, and we can hold it against our brother until we die. Jesus said to the Father, "Not My will, but Your will," but when the elders make a judgment that we don't like, too often, we don't just accept it and move on. Instead, we too often wage a guerrilla campaign of whispering and grumbling against God's leaders that can last for years. Brethren, if we act like that, we need a heart transplant. We need to remove the heart of sin that is poisoning our lives, and we need to replace it with the heart of Jesus. Let's submit to one another in the cause of Christ.

IV. Work.

- A. Finally, though, we have a responsibility in this congregation to work. This is not a do-nothing church. This is not a watch-other-people church. This is a working church, and everyone who is a member of this church needs to work. All of us need to be contributing to the work of this church as the pillar and support of the truth. All of us have gifts that the Lord has given us, and He expects all of us, even new Christians, to be productive in His service. For those of you who are new to the work here, now is the time for you to be evaluating yourself and figuring out what you can do. Do you have family and friends who are lost that you can try to bring to the Lord? Do you have time you can spend with the members of this congregation who need help and attention? Do you have abilities that you can use in teaching Bible classes or helping with the assembly? Perhaps most importantly, if you don't have the ability to do what you want to yet, what do you need to do to get there? How can you grow in your service to God? These are questions we all should ask.
- B. There's an excellent reason why all of us need to devote ourselves to the Lord's work. Paul explains in Galatians 6:7-9. What we sow, through our actions in this life, is what we will reap in the next life. If we sow to the flesh, by concerning ourselves with the things of the world, we will have no reward with God. By contrast, if we sow to the Spirit, we will reap everlasting life. God promises us, that as long as we continue to work for Him and do His will, we will reap what He has promised.

Conclusion. If you want to become part of this Christian family, come to the Father today.