

## **The Church (4)** **Love for the Local Church**

### **Introduction:**

The Holy Scriptures tell us that one of the characteristics of every human being is that he loves his own self. Yes, he loves other things also, but he naturally loves himself supremely. Paul expressed this in a negative way, “No one ever hated his own flesh” (Eph. 5:29). Man is concerned primarily with his own interests, his own wellbeing, his own prosperity, his own good health. When he marries, however, his interests and affections expand. He will love his wife in addition to himself, or at least he should do so. And if and when he becomes a Christian, he will also show forth his love for the Lord. And if he is taught rightly and thinking rightly, that Christian will also come to love the Lord’s church, for his Lord loves His church, for we read, “the Lord loved His church and gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25). This is the matter I would like us to consider today, that as Christians, *we should have a great love for the local church of Jesus Christ*, for our Lord Jesus loves His church and has given Himself for her.

Let us begin with our consideration of Ephesians 5:22 through 33. Here we read the Apostle Paul’s instruction to husbands and wives on how they should regard one another and how they should treat one another. In order to illustrate to husbands and wives the kind and degree of love that they should have one for the other, the apostle drew upon the example the love of the Lord Jesus for His church.

<sup>22</sup>Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. <sup>24</sup>Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*, <sup>26</sup>that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup>that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup>So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup>For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, *just as the Lord does the church*. <sup>30</sup>For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. <sup>31</sup>“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup>This is a great mystery, *but I speak concerning Christ and the church*. <sup>33</sup>Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph. 5:22-33)

When the Apostle Paul desired to express the kind of love that a husband should have for his wife, he felt that if he associated the husband to the Lord Jesus and the husband’s wife to the church, which is the bride of Christ, that he would be able to express just how fervent and faithful the husband should be toward his wife. Paul set forth the truth that Jesus Christ loved His church. Paul’s doctrine of the relationship of Jesus Christ to His church, provided instruction for husbands and wives and how they were to relate with one another. Paul’s concern was to write about husbands and wives, but he was also raising their understanding about our Lord and His relationship to His church. This is stated clearly in verse 32, “*I speak concerning Christ and the church.*”

Christians are to develop in their thinking and their affections a high regard for the church of Jesus Christ. The church is not merely a place we come to hear the Bible taught and proclaimed. The church is a singular entity; it has a singular, collective identity and personality, of which we as members are a part. We should have a high regard for the church of Jesus Christ.

Now Paul’s words probably speak of the love of the Lord Jesus for His church in its universal manifestation. All of the Lord’s people that He has and will redeem through history are members of His

**universal church.** Christ gave Himself to die upon the cross in order to redeem His church unto Himself. The church is His bride. And when the entire church gathers together on the last day, the day of the resurrection, the church will be presented to Him as a chaste bride and they will then celebrate their marriage. There will be a great banquet, which is known as the marriage supper of the Lamb. We read of this in Revelation 19.

<sup>6</sup>And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! <sup>7</sup>Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." <sup>8</sup>And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

<sup>9</sup>Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." <sup>10</sup>And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev. 19:6-10)

But in Ephesians 5, although the apostle was probably speaking of the church in its universal sense, what is true of the church universal is also true of the church local. The local church of Jesus Christ should regard itself as the bride of Jesus Christ, for the local church is a visible manifestation of the universal church. In fact, it is true that the only way we can know something experientially of the universal church is the manner in which the reality and nature of the universal church is displayed for us in the local church.

This dynamic is true with other metaphors that represent the universal church. For example, a common metaphor for the church is that it is the body of Christ. Paul sets forth the universal church as the body of Christ. We read this in Ephesians 1:15ff.

<sup>15</sup>Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup>do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: <sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, <sup>18</sup>the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power <sup>20</sup>which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. <sup>22</sup>And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to **the church**, <sup>23</sup>**which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.** (Eph. 1:15-23)

Many would argue that the universal church is also in view in Paul's extended description of the church as the body of Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 12.

<sup>12</sup>For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup>For by (better trans.--in) one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. <sup>14</sup>For in fact the body is not one member but many.

<sup>15</sup>If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? <sup>18</sup>But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. <sup>19</sup>And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

<sup>20</sup>But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup>And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." <sup>22</sup>No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. <sup>23</sup>And those members of the body which

we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, <sup>24</sup>but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, <sup>25</sup>that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now again, many, if not most, assume this is speaking of the universal church as the body of Jesus Christ, the instrument through which the Lord accomplishes His work in His world. But actually, the passage is speaking of a local church as the body of Jesus Christ. That this is so is seen clearly in the following paragraph of 1 Corinthians 12:27-31.

<sup>27</sup>***Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*** <sup>28</sup>And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. <sup>29</sup>Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? <sup>30</sup>Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup>But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Paul did not write, “Now we are the body of Christ”, as if he were including himself and all believers in the universal church. Paul used the second person plural pronoun, “you”, speaking directly to the local church located in Corinth. He was saying to that local church, “***Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.***” The Apostle Paul declared that the local church at Corinth was the body of Christ, and the members of that church were as members of Christ’s spiritual body, all necessary, all functioning together to carry out the work of Christ in the city. The First Baptist Church of Leominster is the body of Jesus Christ and members of this church are to be functioning members that work together for the cause of Jesus Christ. This is true of all true local churches of Jesus Christ.

This principle is the same with all of the metaphors of the church. What is true of the universal church is true of the local church. And again, the local church is the only visible manifestation of the spiritual reality of the universal church that you will see this side of eternity. Is the universal church ***the bride*** of Christ? So is the local church. Is the universal church ***the body*** of Jesus Christ? So is the local church. Is the universal church ***the temple of God*** in which God dwells? So is the local church a visible manifestation of His temple. Is the universal church ***the flock of the Lord’s sheep***? So is the local church the Lord’s flock of His sheep. Is the universal church ***the family of God***? So is the local church the family of God. And, similarly, is the universal church ***the house of God***? So is the local church the house of God.

The reason that we need to emphasize this truth that the local church is the expression and manifestation of the universal church, is so that we have the same high regard for the local church that we may purport to have for the universal church. I say this for I have found it a common attitude and opinion of Christians to claim that they love, or have a high regard for, the universal church, but they have no high regard for the local church. In fact, many who claim to be Christian have quite a low view of the local church. And often they will justify their low opinion of the local church by claiming they have a high regard for the universal church and of their position and role in it. They are deceiving themselves that they love the church. If you do not love the Lord’s local church, you have no true love for the universal church. The Apostle John expressed this same principle this way:

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20)

We might say similarly,

“If someone says, ‘I love the universal church,’ and hates the local church, he is a liar; for he who does not love his church which he has seen, how can he love the universal church he has not seen?”

But we would also say that love for the local church is an acquired affection. It is a manifestation of growth in God's grace, of progress in one's sanctification, that love for the local church increases in the heart of the Christian over time. Yes, here or there we may find someone rather young in whom the Lord has placed a great love for His local church. But it is not that common. Timothy was such a young man. The Apostle Paul wrote to the local church at Philippi these words on behalf of his friend and fellow worker:

<sup>17</sup>Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. <sup>18</sup>For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me. <sup>19</sup>But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. <sup>20</sup>*For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.* <sup>21</sup>*For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.* (Phi. 2:17-19)

Paul first expressed his willingness, even his own happiness, if in his service for this church the result would be the sacrificing of his own life on their behalf. Paul loved this church. Then he declared that he was sending Timothy to serve among them. Paul chose Timothy because of the love that Timothy had for the local church.

Paul had confidence in Timothy's genuine and sincere love for the brethren. Again, verse 20 reads, "For I have no one likeminded, who will sincerely care for your state." Timothy had a quality about him that commended him as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. He loved the people of God in the local church and was principally motivated by his genuine concern for their spiritual well-being. Paul said, "I have no one *likeminded*." Paul was concerned for the churches and Christians under his care. Timothy was "likeminded", for he, too, was deeply concerned for the same churches and people. Timothy's very nature, his life's concern, his motivation in life, his way of thinking, was all for the well-being of God's people in the local church. But what a rare quality this was of the believers of Paul's acquaintance! Paul wrote, "I have *no one* likeminded, who will sincerely care for your state." This quality in Christians was sorely lacking among Christians then; it is now also.

If you desire to be used of God and blessed of God in your walk with God, become deeply interested and concerned for the spiritual well-being of God's people in your local church. If you love God, if you love God's Son, Jesus Christ, with a great love, the way in which you manifest that love is through genuine interest, concern, and desire to assist the people of God in their spiritual lives. Do you remember what our Lord told Peter after His resurrection? We read in **John 21**:

<sup>15</sup>So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

<sup>16</sup>He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

<sup>17</sup>He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?"

And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

If you love God, be about the business of caring for the spiritual well-being of His people. Paul said, "I have no one likeminded." May the Lord give us many in our church who are likeminded.

When King David wanted to show forth his appreciation and love for his friend Jonathan, who had died in battle, he made this request: "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Sam. 9:1). The response came, "There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet." Then we read, "Then King David sent and brought him." He then said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually." Similarly, if you love your Lord,

find one of His children, a Christian, and help him on his way. Perhaps you will find one whose “hands which hang down” and who can barely walk, spiritually speaking, because of his “feeble knees” (Cf. Heb. 12:12). Find the one who is spiritually “lame” and support him on his journey. When the Lord sees you doing this to one of His children, He regards you as having done it unto Him.

In verse 21 we see why more Christians are not as Timothy, who naturally and sincerely care for others about them. “For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.” Selfishness is a spiritual problem that must be squeezed out of us. Unless the Lord works grace in us, we will tend to be selfish creatures. “For all seek their own.” Even when we come to church, is it not generally foremost on our minds, “What’s in it for me and mine?” If we were thinking rightly, we would be coming to church with this thought, “Whom am I going to see this morning to whom I can speak and encourage in the Lord?” Are we even attentive to what may be burdening our brothers or sisters about us?

Moreover, when most people assess a church or a church service, they make their judgment based upon the question, “What, if anything, did I or mine derive or benefit from church today?” But if we were truly spiritual, thinking according to the will of our Savior, we might rather be asking, “Did the church itself benefit from today’s gathering together and hearing the Word of God? And if the church did benefit, then I should be well-pleased, for that is my primary concern, for I know that this is my Lord’s primary concern.”

Now notice what Paul wrote, “For all seek their own, *not the things which are of Christ Jesus.*” What he was saying is that the “things of Jesus Christ” is to be as one *who will sincerely care for the condition of other Christians.*” This is our responsibility and our privilege. This is our Lord’s concern; this is to be our concern if we are thinking rightly.

Paul gave testimony of Timothy’s experience and demonstrated faithfulness. Verse 22 reads, “But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.” Here was a man who had demonstrated faithfulness in the ministry. These people had known Timothy. They had observed him. He had been tried and found to be faithful. He had Paul as a mentor. Paul could commend Timothy as a faithful and competent minister of Christ. He could write, “Therefore I hope to send him at once.” Paul desired and hoped to come soon to them, but in the meantime, he would send Timothy in his place. May the Lord help each of us, so that we could be commended to others as being profitable to them in the Lord’s work and service. May our Lord produce in us the heart of Paul and the heart of Timothy, that we, too, would “sincerely care” for the state of the local church.

Now let us turn our attention to our text of Ephesians 5:22-33 to consider what we may learn of our Lord and His relationship to His church.

## **I. The teaching (doctrines) of the passage**

### **A. What Christ *is* to the church**

1. **Christ is *the Head of the church* (5:23).** Christ is the head, that is, the Leader or Lord of the Church. The Father entrusted Him with this responsibility, the Father having commissioned Him to lead and guide her in all ways. And the Lord Jesus is suited in every way to be the head of the church.

But more specifically, in what way is Christ the head of the church?

**a. Christ is the *federal head of the church.*** What does this mean? Jesus Christ is head in that He represents and acts on behalf of His people.

Adam was the federal head of the entire human race. As Adam went, so did all of his posterity. Adam sinned; in Adam, all sinned. Adam died due to sin, and because all were in Adam when he sinned, all died in him. Death came upon all humanity because all humanity sinned collectively when Adam our representative, our federal head, incurred the penalty for sin.

In the same way Jesus Christ is the federal head to the church. He is the head of all the redeemed of all ages. What happened to Christ, happened to all people over which He is head. When Christ died, believers died with Him. When Christ arose, all believers rose with Him. When Christ ascended and was

enthroned in heaven, all believers ascended with Him and were seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Because Jesus Christ is the federal head to the church, our place with Him in eternity is secure.

**b. Christ is the *organic* head of the church.** He is a head to the church like our heads are to our bodies. From Him we derive our life. We are members of His body, His arms legs, His eyes and His ears, functioning together as He works through us. This does not mean, of course, that the church has become Christ Himself; that is mystical nonsense. But the metaphor does reveal that our life and our functioning together are derived from our head. Another metaphor that carries a similar idea to this is that the Lord is the true vine and we are the branches (cf. John 15). It means that one life exists between us, that being His life that flows through us. There is one Spirit dwelling in us and in Him. We have a common life and that life is derived from Him.

**c. Christ is the *ruling* head of the church.** Clearly Paul had this idea also in mind in this context. We know this in the instruction that he gave to wives to render obedience to their husbands. The Lord Jesus is head of the church in that He is her leader and ruler. Christ governs His church for her well-being. As her head, He protects her, He provides for her, and He enriches her with gifts and honor. He is the head of the church.

**2. Christ is the *Savior* of the body (5:23).** Not only is Christ the head of the church, but He is the Savior of the church. This suggests the church was in a condition from which she needed rescue. One from which she could not deliver herself. Christ is her Savior, saving her from her sin and ruin.

But one cannot speak of Christ as Savior apart from the saving work that He does. So let us not only consider what He *is* to the church, let us see...

## **B. What Christ *does* for the church**

**1. Christ *loved* the church (5:25).** Christ loved the church supremely. God has a love for His chosen people that is special and unique. He has a love for His church that unbelievers, those who are outside Jesus Christ, will never know. John described this love of Jesus for His people in John 13:1,

When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

One once described this love of Christ for His own:

Christ is love itself; He is full of kindness and benevolence. In that sense, He loves all mankind; but that cannot be the meaning of the text, for it would be a very strange kind of exhortation to the husband if that were the case. No, the husband's love to his spouse is something special and particular; and it stands quite alone, and all by itself. He will be kind and benevolent and generous towards all others, but that love which he lavishes upon his wife he must give to nobody else in the world. It is certainly so with our blessed Lord. Free and rich and overflowing in lovingkindness, yet He made a special choice of His people or ever the earth was; and having chosen because of His love, He loves because of His choice, and that love is a peculiar, special, remarkable, pre-eminent love such as He bestows upon none else of all the human race. (Charles H. Spurgeon)

We see secondly, that His love for the church was manifest in that...

**2. Christ *gave Himself* for her (5:25).** Christ loved His church more than He loved His own life. He sacrificed Himself for her wellbeing. He so loved her that He redeemed her. He purchased her; "He has purchased" His church "with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). He purchased her with His own life so that He might cleanse her with His Word. Christ in securing the justification of His own, thereby enabled the process of sanctifying her to become all that she was not so as to become all that He would have her be.

Jesus Christ gave Himself so as to make her into something she was not when He first died for her. He gave Himself so...

**a. "...that He might sanctify and cleanse her."** She was unsanctified, that is, she was "unclean" and unfit for coming into the presence of God. God is infinitely pure; that is, He is holy. The church--all those destined to be the church--was unclean, unholy. Christ gave Himself for her that she might be rendered clean of all her pollution, of all her filthiness.

The means that our Lord uses His Word to cleanse His church. Verse 26 reads, "That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of the water by the word." The Word of God, the Holy Bible, is the means that God uses to cleanse His church. In John 17:7 we read of Jesus' prayer to His Father, "Father, sanctify them with Thy truth; Thy Word is truth." God uses the reading, preaching, and teaching of the Bible to cleanse His church of her sin and to prepare her to be a glorious bride presentable to her groom when He comes for her. This is suggested in the next clause, verse 27.

**b. "...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."** This is the description of a bride; the church is the bride of Christ. Elsewhere she is declared to be such; here, she is described as such. One commentator, **Charles Hodge**, made several points respecting these statements of Paul:

This is designed to teach,

(1) That it is an object of a peculiar and exclusive love. As the love that a bridegroom has for his bride is such as He has for no one else; so the love that Christ has for His church is such as He has for no other order of creatures in the universe, however exalted.

(2) As the bride belongs exclusively to her husband, so the church belongs exclusively to Christ. It sustains a relation to Him, which it sustains to no other being, and in which no other participates.

(3) This relation is not only peculiar and exclusive, but the union between Christ and His church is more intimate than any which subsists between Him and any other order of creatures. We are flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone.

(4) The church is the special object of the delight to Christ. It is said of Zion, "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isa. 62:5). He is to present it to Himself as His own peculiar joy. Such being the destiny of the church, the proximate end of Christ's death was to purify, adorn, and render it glorious, that it might be prepared to sit with Him on His throne. She is to be a bride adorned for her husband. These are not imaginations, nor exaggerations, nor empty figures; but simple, scriptural, sanctifying, and saving truths.<sup>1</sup>

**c. "...but that she should be holy and without blemish."** This looks forward to the final presentation of the church glorified. One day all the people of God will stand as a beautiful bride, all prepared for her presentation to her groom in all her glory. This is Christ's intention. This is the nature of Christ's current work among His people. He is preparing her for her presentation to Himself.

**3. The Lord nourishes and cherishes her (5:29).** Christ naturally cares for His church as a man naturally cares for his own body. He dotes over His people. He is concerned for His church; His affection is for her. He seeks to convey His tender love for her.

Consider this, therefore, Christians. The Lord Jesus takes great pleasure in us. He delights in our fellowship with Him. He enjoys your communion with Him. He came into the world to redeem you. He did whatever was necessary to secure your everlasting happiness.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition on Ephesians*.

### C. What the church is to Christ

**1. The church is *subject to Christ in everything (5:24)*.** The church looks to Jesus Christ as her Lord. She looks to Him for guidance. She looks to fulfil His desires. She desires to do His will.

**2. The members of the church are the *members of His body, of His flesh and His bones (5:30)*.** This is a very difficult verse. It has been described by one as “one of the most difficult passages of the Bible” (Charles Hodge). Although there have been a number of interpretations given, probably what Paul was alluding to was the life that we derive from the body of Christ. The analogy may be of Adam and Eve. Paul uses similar language to that in Genesis. Eve was formed from a rib taken from the side of Adam. She is described by Adam in this way, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23). In the same way that Eve derived her physical life from the body of Adam, so we derive our spiritual life from the body of Christ. Because He lives, we live.

Admittedly, to speak of how we are in union with Christ and the way we derive life from Him is a *mysterious truth* that is difficult to fathom. Paul himself concludes this section with the words of verse 32, “This is a *great mystery*, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

## II. Application of the passage

### A. Do we love the church as Christ loved the church?

The church of Jesus Christ is an easy target to shoot at. She is imperfect in so many ways. She still has many flaws and wrinkles. She is not yet without spot and without blemish. She is not yet presentable as a bride should be on her wedding day. She is a work in progress. But Christ loves her even now, as should we. How can some say that they love Jesus Christ, and not love the church that He loves?

Sometimes we sing a hymn in our church that expresses our love for the church. It reads this way:

I love Thy Church, O God!  
Her walls before Thee stand,  
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,  
And graven on Thy hand.

For her my tears shall fall;  
For her my prayers ascend;  
To her my cares and toils be given,  
Till toils and cares shall end.

Beyond my highest joy  
I prize her heavenly ways,  
Her sweet communion, solemn vows,  
Her hymns of love and praise.

Do we desire for the church what Jesus Christ Himself desires for her? Do we long to see her to be admired, respected, and praised? Do we long for her purity? Do we desire her maturity? Are these pressing concerns of our hearts? Do we even pray that these things that are so important to our Lord be realized in His churches?

### B. Do we give ourselves to the church as Christ gives Himself to her?

Are we committed to achieve for the church that which Christ has given His very life to obtain? He serves His church continuously to make her into all that she could and will be? Are we fellow-workers of



Jesus Christ seeking through concrete practical ways to see His desires for her realized? Paul loved the church. 2 Timothy 2:10 reads, “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” We serve our Lord Jesus by serving one another within the church. We are to seek to accomplish in the church the same goals that our Lord has purposed to do for His people.

I would venture to say that there are few within the churches that have the concerns that Christ has for His church. Some would even oppose this work that Christ is conducting. They resist conforming the church to His Word and will, “for that is not how we have always done it.” They resist the purifying of the church by not endorsing, or even opposing efforts to discipline church members who not simply fail (we all fail), but refuse to depart from sin and refuse to be a part of the ongoing life of the church.

The point we are making is this. We see in our passage certain ideals and goals to which Christ has given Himself respecting His church. We should seek to identify these and then purpose in whatever and in as many ways as we can to see these realized within our own body. Does our Lord desire to see our church pure and holy? Then let us strive to be so. Does Christ desire His church to be responsive to Him as a bride is to her husband? Then let us do so. In every way let us give ourselves to the church as Christ gave Himself for the church.

**C. Do we see ourselves as members of “the church”, a single entity for which and to which Christ gives Himself?**

One of our weaknesses as American Christians is our individualism. We tend to see ourselves as individual Christians only. We tend only to view ourselves as individual Christians to the exclusion of our identity as a corporate body. We come “to church” but do we think of ourselves and identify ourselves as “the church”? Do we view our individual selves as we are in truth, individual parts of a whole, and dependent on the others of us in order to function properly before God? Or do we see ourselves only in terms of individual Christians? No, rather, we tend to see the church as only a place “I go to worship”, rather than the church as a single body of believers through which Christ manifests His life. The New Testament does not present a Christian living in isolation of other believers. Christians are to be in churches.

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Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

(Eph 3:20f)

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