

November 20, 2005 by Steve Brandon



# Do You Love The Church?

## Ephesians 5:25-27

1. Love Sacrifices (verse 25).
2. Love Purifies (verse 26).
3. Love Cherishes (verse 27).

I want to begin this morning by reading to you from a book entitled, "Stop Dating the Church" written by Joshua Harris. This book is subtitled, "Fall in Love with the Family of God." This book begins with the following story, ...

Jack and Grace met through a mutual friend. From day one they seemed to be the perfect match. Grace was everything Jack had always wanted. She was beautiful, outgoing, and caring--always there when Jack needed her. For the first five months they were inseparable. Jack could hardly think of anything but Grace. He didn't need to look further, he told friends. "She's the one."

Now almost three years have passed. Jack still enjoys the comfort and familiarity of being with Grace, but the spark is gone. Grace's flaws seem more obvious. He's not sure he finds her as attractive as he once did. And he's beginning to resent all the time she wants to spend with him.

One night, when she asks if they can define the nature of their relationship, Jack blows up. "We're together, aren't we?" he asks angrily. "Why isn't that enough for you?"

Obviously, Jack isn't ready for commitment. And it's unclear if he ever will be. ...

Have you ever been in a relationship like this? I'm writing this book because I believe God has something better for you. He wants you in a relationship defined by both passion and commitment. But before you can take hold of this wonderful plan, you need to know something about this couple. There are millions of Jacks walking around today. And Grace isn't a girl. Grace is a church" (pp. 11-12). [\[1\]](#)

This morning, I want to ask you one question: "Do You Love the Church?" This is the title of my message. And this is the question that I want for you to answer for yourself: "Do You Love the Church?" For some of you, this may seem like a strange question. This may be the first time that you have ever thought about this question in your life. You may have always seen the church as some activity that you do each Sunday morning. You may have always seen the church as a place to be involved. You may have always seen the church as a place, where there are many good activities in which you can participate. But, you may have never considered having a love relationship with the church.

Perhaps this question that I asked you comes as foreign as the question: "Do you love your local gas station?" You drive up to the gas station and get out of your car. You fill up your car with gas. You clean the windshields. You pay what you owe, and then you go on your merry way, satisfied that your car will run for the next week or so. "But," you say, "I certainly don't love the gas station." Many people are involved in church in much the same way. Every week (or so), you come to church and fill up with some good worship experience and a good sermon. You confess your sins, and feel a sense of cleanness in your soul. You pay your dues into the offering box. You go on your way, satisfied that you have been helped in your walk with Christ for the next week (or so). But, regarding a love for the church, there is none.

This morning, I'm not even asking you whether or not you are involved in the activities of the church. I'm asking something deeper than that. You may be very involved with the activities of the church, and still not love the church. I'm asking you about your affections. I'm asking you about your emotions and your desires and your commitment. "Do You Love the Church?"

Over the next few weeks on Sunday mornings, I will be directing your attention to the church of Jesus Christ. Each week, I will ask you an applicational question about church. This week, the question is simple: "Do You Love the Church?" This question is so crucial, that we are going to pass out this little book that I quoted at the beginning of my message (Stop Dating the Church, by Joshua Harris). Someone in the church has graciously purchased a copy of this book for every family. I would like to challenge you to read this book. This isn't just for moms and for dads. This is for those of you in high school and in junior high as well. It's not difficult to read. It's only a small book. It's simple and straightforward with plenty of illustrations to make his point clear. As you read this book, I want for you to ask yourself the question, "Do I Love the Church?"

Down through church history, there have been many who have loved the church. Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathon Edwards, wrote those great lyrics, ...

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 giv'n, till toils and cares shall end.

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

Those are words of a person in love with the church of Jesus Christ. Timothy Dwight expressed his love in words. He says, "I love Thy Church O God!" He speaks of how much he loves the church: "Beyond my highest joy, I prize her heav'nly ways." He also expressed his love in actions. He tells of falling tears. He tells of ascending prayers. He tells of care and concern. He tells of being faithful to labor and toil until the end of time. Timothy Dwight loved the church.

I read this week of one of the church reformers, whose name was Menno Simons. His followers became known as the Mennonites. He labored long and hard through his years for the church. On his deathbed, he said that "nothing on earth was as precious to him as the church". [\[2\]](#) Menno Simons loved the church.

This past week, I listened to a message that John MacArthur preached entitled, "Why I Love the Church." In that message, he gave several reasons why he loves the church. He spoke of the promise of Christ to build the church. The church will be triumphant, because Jesus has promised to build it. He spoke of the high cost in purchasing the church. It cost Jesus His own blood. He spoke of the way that the church is the only earthly expression of heaven. Where else on the planet do you have the redeemed of the Lord worshipping Christ? It is in the church! John MacArthur loves the church.

I could easily preach a message like that. I love the church of Jesus Christ. My heart as a pastor of Rock Valley Bible Church is to see all of you come to love the church of Jesus Christ as well. This is the purpose of my message this morning. But as much as I love the church, as much as John MacArthur loves the church, as much as Menno Simons loved the church, as much as Timothy Dwight loved the church, ... there is none who loved the church as much as Jesus Christ!

Please open your Bibles to Ephesians 5. We are going to look at three verses, 25 through 27. This passage of Scripture gives as clear an expression of the love that Jesus had for the church as is found anywhere in the Bible. In the context of this passage, Paul is obviously speaking about husbands loving their wives. But, in communicating how a husband ought to love his wife, Paul describes the love that Jesus has for His church. The love of Christ for the church sets the standard for a man's love for his wife. My message today is dealing with the church, not with marriages. I'll save that message for another day. As you read from Ephesians 5:25-27, I want for you to focus your attention upon how Christ has loved the church.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

In verse 25, you see the simple expression of Christ's love for the church. Paul writes, "Christ loved the church." Now, let me ask you, "If something is precious in the heart of Jesus, ought it not to be precious in your heart as well?" As believers in Christ, we are called to love the things that Jesus loves. In verse 23, we read that Christ is the head of the church. This means that the church is to be subject to Christ in all things. This goes far beyond externals. It deals with the heart as well. It means that the church is to gladly submit to the Lord in all things. The only way to fulfill the true intention of this verse is to so love Jesus, that His affections become your affections. You love what He loves. Your life is gladly lived in subjection to Jesus, because you are doing what you love. To love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength means that you love Him. It means that you love everything about Him. It means that you love the things that He loves. It means that you seek "to be pleasing to Him" (2 Cor. 5:9).

There ought to be nothing that He loves that you don't love. There ought to be nothing that He hates that you don't hate. There ought to be nothing that He desires that you don't desire. And there ought to be nothing that He wants you to do, that you aren't willing to do. This is nothing more than seeking the will of God. Here in verse 25, we have a clear statement that Christ has an affection for the church: He loves the church. Do you have an affection for the church as well?

There are many reasons why people don't love the church. For some, they simply haven't been taught about the church, and thus, they think that it is not so important for their own lives. For others, the church has never been the focal point of their own spiritual growth. Perhaps they were saved through some exciting campus ministry or through some nationwide Bible study program or through listening to some preacher on the radio. And the source that caused them to come to faith continues to nurture them in their own spiritual growth. Sure, these people go to church, but it has never been their love. For others, they may have had a bad experience in the church, which has placed a poor taste in their mouths. They used to love the church, but their experiences have turned their love sour. When the husband first married his wife, O, how he loved her! He loved to be with her. He never wanted to leave her side. But, she did some things that he simply cannot get over. And the wife is no longer loved. Those in the church they have attended may have said hurtful things. Or they may have been unfaithful to promises which they have made. People in the church may have been silent in times of great need. Some people in the church may have proved themselves to be hypocrites.

Let me ask this question to help distill some of these notions: "What did the church look like when Christ loved it?" was the church filled with righteous, sinless people? No, it was not quite like that at all. This leads to my first point, ...

## 1. Love Sacrifices (verse 25).

We read at the very end of verse 25 that Christ Jesus "gave Himself up for her." I trust that you know what this means. It means that Jesus sacrificed Himself for the church. It means that Jesus Christ came down from heaven to live among us, and to offer His perfect life in the place of our sinful lives. He died for us. He died in our place. This wasn't easy for Jesus to do. It cost Him greatly. It cost Him His life. He purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). This past week I read a sermon preached by Edward Payson in which he gave a great description of what Jesus did for us. He wrote ...

Few things can be conceived of more abhorrent to our feelings, than to be delivered into the power of raging, insulting, blood-thirsty foes, who will exhaust all the arts of cruelty in tormenting us, and mock our dying agonies with scoffs, revilings, and the exclamations of savage triumph.

What, my friends, could induce you to throw yourselves into a dark and loathsome pit, filled with deadly serpents, scorpions, and other poisonous and disgusting reptiles, all brandishing their envenomed stings, and eager to devour you?

Yet this world, into which the Son of God voluntarily descended for our sakes, was far more hateful, dreadful, and loathsome to his holy nature, than such a pit would be to us; and the poisonous rage of serpents and scorpions, is far inferior in malignity and in the sufferings which it can inflict, to that rancorous enmity which exists in the hearts of sinners, to which Christ gave himself up." [\[3\]](#)

What love is this? Or, as the American folk hymn puts it, ...

What wondrous love is this, O my soul?  
What wondrous love is this,  
that caused the Lord of bliss  
to bear the dreadful curse  
for my soul, for my soul?

Why did Jesus go through such incredible sufferings? It's because He loved the church (verse 25). It's not because the church was lovely in His sight. It's not because the church was especially deserving of such a sacrifice. It's not because the church never hurt Him. Rather it is because of His love for the church!

This is the point of the book of Hosea. Hosea was told to go and to love a harlot (Hosea 1:2). Hosea went and did so with a woman named Gomer. After giving birth to three children, she left the marriage and continued in her unfaithfulness. The LORD returned to Hosea and told her to continue to love her (Hosea 3:1). He went and purchased her freedom from the house of harlotries with a few shekels of silver and some grain (Hosea 3:2). So is God's love toward unfaithful Israel. Though Israel had turned to other gods and been unfaithful to the LORD, yet the LORD remained faithful to them. This is the sort of love that Jesus has for His church. The church isn't made up of well-deserving people, who deserve that the LORD of the universe come to earth to die for them. On the contrary, the church is made up of undeserving people, who deserve to perish in their sins. And yet, the love that Jesus Christ has for the church compelled Him to come and to die in our place.

When you think of your own heart toward the church, do you know anything of sacrificial love? Are there things that you do among the church body that is a sacrifice for you? Or, is your commitment to the church one based on convenience? Are you involved in the church to the extent that it will help only you? Or, is your involvement in the church based upon a desire to be others-centered? The root of sacrifice is being others-centered. Jesus offered Himself upon the cross for others. Sacrificial service has others as its focus. Are there things in your life that you willingly choose not to do, because in doing them, you would miss an opportunity to give to the people of the church? This is the sacrifice that I'm talking about. Is this not what true love is about? It is about delighting in the object of your worship. Aren't tensions created in your marriage when you allocate an undue amount of time in another direction, other than you spouse?

Perhaps it has to do with your time. To be sure, we all busy up our schedules. But when you step back to look upon how you spend your time, is there any sacrifice of your time that you give to the people of the church? Or, is all of your time based upon what you want to do, and any church-related activity gets the leftover -- only what's convenient! When you have a free evening, does it ever cross your mind to spend it encouraging others in the church? When you are thinking through your activities on Saturday evening, does it ever cross your mind to get to bed early enough, so that you can come and pray with the church at 8:45?

Perhaps it has to do with your finances. If you would take out your checkbook and ask yourself, where does my money go. Does it always go for yourself? Or, are there things that you sacrifice, so that you can give to the church? Do you have an abundance? Do you see someone in need? Do you give to them? Or, do you spend on yourself alone?

If you have come to this point in this message and have evaluated your life, saying, "Wow, I guess I don't sacrifice much for the church!" My advice to you isn't, "Well, start sacrificing for the church. Jesus did!" My counsel to you is different. I'm telling you to love the church. When you love the church, appropriate sacrifices will be made. I'm not interested in seeing all of you sacrifice greatly for the church of Christ without a love for the church. The Scripture often speaks of external sacrifices that God hates. Psalm 51:16 says, "You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering." The next verses follows up with the true sacrifices that please God, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). True sacrifices to God are the sacrifices of a heart that is aligned rightly with God's purposes. "Then," David continues, "You will delight in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering. Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar" (Ps. 51:19).

It's love for an object that will cause you to sacrifice greatly for it. What other than love will cause a parent to change thousands of diapers? To prepare thousands of meals? To clean up thousands of messes? To spend thousands of dollars for food, clothes, school, and other necessities? To consume thousands of hours in activities? It's only love that will do such a thing. Parents who love their child will willingly do this.

I think of the guy who loves to golf. He subscribes to Golf Magazine. He spends hundreds (if not thousands) of dollars on his golfing equipment. He pays a professional golfer to give him lessons. As soon as the golf courses open in the springtime, he is there, enduring the rain and the wind. He golfs as late into the fall as possible, enduring the cold. Why? Because he loves to golf. He will sacrifice other things to satisfy his love!

Likewise, when you love the church, the sacrifices will willingly and eagerly come. You will have great joy in sacrificing in this way, because that's what you want to do! Your sacrifices will be acceptable to God, being offered with proper motives and proper hearts of affection toward God! Certainly, there will be times when you find the people in the church not to be lovable. Consider the sacrifice of Jesus. It was His love for sinners that gave Him reason to die for the church. And so, the next time that you are hurt by someone in the church, or witness someone being a hypocrite in church, or are disappointed by someone else's actions, simply remember that Jesus loved the church when it was sinful and rebellious.

## 2. Love Purifies (verse 26).

My second point this morning comes from verse 26. Christ gave Himself up for the church, "that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word." His dying produced a purified church. This is the glorious gospel of Christ! Through the death of the Righteous One, the community of sinful ones are cleansed! Through faith in Jesus, we are sanctified, we are justified, we are cleansed, we are made righteous, we are forgiven, we are righteous in His sight.

The means of this cleansing comes "by the washing of the water with the word" (verse 26). There is all types of discussion as to what this exactly means. There are some who say that this is baptism. There are some who say that this is symbolic, linking it to Titus 3:5, the "washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Whatever it means, (whether it is baptism or mere symbolism), it does picture a cleansing. It pictures a purifying. We know that such purification comes through faith in message of the work of Christ. We know that such purification is pictured when an individual is immersed in water, testifying of their faith in Christ to forgive them. The one who loves will work to purify those he loves.

A great illustration of this happened to me about twenty years ago, before I was married. One summer, I was living with a family from church. I remember that this family had a dog. Now, if you know me, you know that I'm not a fan of dogs. I know that there are many dog lovers in our congregation. I appreciate you, and I admire you, and I respect you. But I am not one of you. And somehow, dogs know that I'm not a fan of dogs. A few years ago, our family house sat for a dog. Every time that I came home or got near the dog, it growled and showed its teeth at me.

Anyway, at this house where I was staying, I remember the time that this dog got in a fight with a skunk. It's not that we saw the fight. It's not that we heard the fight. It's that we smelled the fight. When this dog came walking into the house, there was this distinct odor, which told all of us in the room that something was dreadfully wrong! It took little imagination to figure out what had happened: the dog had got into a fight with a skunk! It took little imagination to figure out what needed to happen: the dog needed to take a bath! Now, as neither the owner of the dog, nor a lover of dogs, I had very little heart to go and give the dog a bath. But, I witnessed the owner of the dog willingly go outside and spray the dog down with a hose and scrub the smell out of the dog as much as he could. It's your love for another that will seek to clean them.

Obviously, as we think about the interaction among the members of the church, we cannot atone for the sins of others. Only Jesus Christ and His sacrifice is sufficient to atone for sins. However, there is a way that we can act that can deal appropriately with the sins of others. If we love the church, we will deal with each other in these ways. Suppose that someone in the church does sin against you, how are you going to respond? At the end of chapter 4 of Ephesians, we are told how to respond. We read in verse 32, "And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." In other words, just as Christ has forgiven you and cleansed you and purified you through the gospel, so also are you to forgive others who wrong you. When you act this way, you demonstrate your love for the church. Notice the connection in the next two verses (Eph. 5:1-2), "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, *just as* Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Eph. 5:1-2). If you love Christ, you will love the object of His love!

Love for others will seek to purify them. There are some other passages in the Scripture that speak to this issue. Perhaps the clearest of all passages is 1 Corinthians 13. You have heard many of these words at weddings.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Many of these characteristics are the very things that come out when people sin against one another. For instance, ...

### Love is patient.

Your patience is tested when someone is irritating you. I have heard some children sing this song, ...

"I know a song that gets on everybody's nerves, ...  
... everybody's nerves,  
... everybody's nerves.  
I know a song that gets on everybody's nerves, ...  
... and this is how it goes.  
I know a song that gets on everybody's nerves, ...  
... everybody's nerves,  
... everybody's nerves.  
I know a song that gets on everybody's nerves, ...  
... and this is how it goes.  
I know a song that gets on everybody's nerves, ... .. ."

Is it not at this point that you can show love to this person, by patiently enduring their annoyances. In the same way, Christ patiently endures our recurring sin against Him. I'm not telling you not to confront them and tell them that they are annoying. There is certainly a place for this. But, I'm encouraging you now not to have a conditional love for those people, loving them only when they change their habits and behavior. Rather, when they continue to be annoying, be patient with them.

We could continue through all of the characteristics of love given in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and show you how each one of them have a purifying effect upon the people of God. But, for the sake of time, we look at one more.

### **Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.**

This is where we can become most like Christ in our attitudes toward other people. Someone does a wrong against you. Someone hurts you very badly. Love will overlook the offense and not bring it to remembrance to hold it against another. Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression." This is the very thing that Jesus has done with us! He has "overlooked our transgression."

Now, of course, Jesus doesn't simply sweep the transgression under the rug. He paid for the sins that He overlooks. And when we overlook a transgression of another member of the church, we aren't simply sweeping it under the rug either. We are believing their sin to be atoned for in Christ, according to their confession of faith in Christ.

This is clearly illustrated by Paul at the beginning of 1 Corinthians. If you think for a moment about the Corinthian church, you will realize that they were a wicked, sinful, and proud people. They followed personalities, rather than following Christ alone (1 Cor. 1-4). They boasted of an immoral situation that existed in their church that was absolutely horrendous! (1 Cor. 5). They were suing one another (1 Cor. 6) and were entertaining sexual sins (1 Cor. 6-7). They were unloving toward other people (1 Cor. 8-11) and abusing their spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14). Some even were denying the resurrection (1 Cor. 15).

And yet, knowing all of the sins of those in Corinth, Paul greets them with amazing words: "I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:4-8).

What an amazing testimony that Paul gives of these sinful Corinthians! He gave thanks to God for them. He spoke highly of the evidences of God's grace that was manifest in them (despite the abundant sinfulness that was also expressed). He was also confident of the Lord's confirmation in that final day of them. Such language is purifying of the church, as it overlooks a transgression.

### **3. Love Cherishes (verse 27).**

My last point this morning comes from verse 27. Christ sanctified the church "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless."

The picture that we have here in verse 27 is that of a bridegroom awaiting his wedding day. Jesus is the bridegroom. The church is the bride. Jesus is anticipating the day when He will finally have a chance to join with His bride in marital bliss. In Revelation 19, we read of "the marriage of the Lamb" (verse 7). It's the day in the future when Jesus will "come out of His chamber" with great rejoicing (Ps. 19:5) to claim His bride. As we think of this parable, who is the bride? The church is the bride! As Jesus anticipates that day, what sort of attitude does He have for His bride, the church? I have found it difficult to find a word that exactly depicts His perspective. I have chosen this word "cherish." Jesus "cherishes" the church, realizing who she is. There will be a day when Jesus will marry the church. With perfect love and devotion, Jesus is consumed with protecting and caring for His bride until that final day.

Men, do you remember how you treated your fiancé in the weeks and months before your marriage? The best word that I can come up with to describe your attitude is that you "cherished" her. You thought about her all the time and did whatever you could do for her. I had this experience as well. I distinctly remember a period of a few weeks of my life when I couldn't get Yvonne off my mind. At the time, I was in seminary, seeking to finish my degree. I found it difficult to concentrate in any of my classes. My mind was so consumed with the things that would take place in the near future, that all else was helpless. I just wanted to be with my [future] wife!

As Jesus will someday marry the church, He has a similar anticipation: waiting for the day when the church will be His. We are called to have a similar perspective. I believe that such a perspective of the church ought to do wonders for your own attitude toward the church. The church will someday be presented to the world as "Mrs. Jesus". As such you need to realize that the church is worthy of your honor. I want you to imagine meeting Mrs. Laura Bush, the wife of the President. How will you treat her? I suspect that you would be very courteous and gentle with her, realizing whose wife she is. I believe that you would grant her great honor and seek not to offend her in any way. You would consider it a privilege to speak with her.

So think about the church. The church will someday be married to Jesus Christ. Will you cherish the church as Jesus does? Or, better yet, do you cherish the church right now? It is a sad testimony that the church is often known for its quarrels, bickering, and disunity. These descriptions of the church are far more familiar than that of love, unity, and harmony. Sadly, this is the testimony of the church. When such things take place, they provide evidence that those in the church have forgotten who they are! They are the loved bride of Christ. When the Church is not loved, it brings dishonor to Christ. Such behavior is unloving toward the church. The church is glorious in the sight of God.

Do you long to be with the church? When you love the church, nobody will be able to keep you from the people of the church. When she gathers, you will find ways to be there. When she scatters, you will find her! Do you love the church? If you do, you will sacrifice for the Church. If you do, you will purify the Church. If you do, you will cherish the Church.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 20, 2005 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church*, pp. 11-12

[2] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, p. 285, as quoted by James Stitzinger in his chapter of *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, p. 56

[3] *The Complete Works of Edward Payson*, Volume 3, p. 139.