

## Loving What God Loves and Living for What Christ Died for (part 1)

When I say the word “church” what’s the first thing that comes into your minds? Is it a building? Is it a preacher? Is it people?

The universal Church is made up of all those who have placed their faith and trust in the finished work of Christ Jesus...

A “local” church is a gathering of believers committed to each other and committed to the same basic doctrines living their lives *together* for the advance of the Gospel!

**Eph 3:10-11; 4:7, 11-16**

We’re called to impact our culture and our times for God’s glory by living out genuine, authentic faith within the community of believers God has sovereignly placed us in – and by doing this we place the truth of God’s Word on full display.

**God has chosen to advance the Gospel through the *mission* of the local church.**

“Mission”? The “work and calling and function” of a local church.

God intends the local church to be a *local*, corporate display of His glory and wisdom both to unbelievers and to unseen spiritual powers.

Mark Dever: *“God’s purposes for all of human history revolve around the local church as the visible, corporate manifestation of His Son, Jesus Christ! He has ordained that His most important objectives both here and in heaven be accomplished through the agency of the local church.”*

**Specifically, how** should our relationship with the church affect our lives? How does this affect you, the ninth grader facing pressures to run with the wrong crowd?

The twenty-year old, deciding what career to take on?

The dad, trying to provide for the family financially and spiritually?

When I got married my relationship with my wife became the most important relationship I had (humanly speaking). It affected everything. Why? She was and still is my **bride!**

I spend most of my time with her. I care for her more than anyone else. I ask her advice more than anyone else. My relationship with Valerie has transformed the way I relate to everyone. She’s had quite an influence on me.

In a much bigger way, our relationship with God's Bride (the church) should transform the way we relate to EVERYONE else.

The Bible talks about the church as the "Bride of Christ"? (Eph 5)  
The church is called the "body of Christ"?

These are some serious descriptions!  
These descriptions should remind us that the church isn't a man made institution – its God's idea and God's plan.

God's Word should define what relationships are most important to us!

The temptation to sin in our relationship with the church is great!  
You know it. I know it. Sin is ugly – it's deceptive, and it tries to destroy the relationships that God wants to build.

Part of the problem is that we lose focus on what's most important and get distracted by our selfish desires...by relationships that don't please God, by a life of ease, a life of "personal peace" and "affluence"...

There's a clear individualistic drive at the heart of our culture.  
It's a drive that says, "*I can find spirituality on my own.*"

A lot of people have a desire for a first-century lifestyle based on faith, goodness, love, generosity, kindness, and simplicity even a desire for community.

These desires fall short of God's desires as long as they remain unconnected to the local church.

Some of us might carry around in our heads a "warped" and distorted view of the church...maybe you've had a bad experience in the past...

- How do *you* view the church?
- Do you see the crucial role it plays in your life?
- Do you understand that God has sovereignly placed you in this church and given you the specific people to live out your faith with?

Life gets messy! Life can hurt.

I don't ever want to paint a picture of the Christian life as a life of ease; a life of no problems or pain or suffering or sorrow.

That's not the Christianity of the Bible.

**Have you ever joined a club before?**

You might get a hat, a shirt, a key chain, a magnet, have a special song, enjoy a special hand shake, etc. Maybe you play a certain sport.

**This is so much more than a club – this is the greatest cause of all – this is about God being glorified and proclaimed through our lives!**

**This is about His fame being spread throughout the world through His Church (that’s you and me!)**

**Consider Ephesians 1:11-14! Sealed. We have a *Guarantee!***

**Here is my prayer:**

That you and I would have a growing love for the church.

That we would have an understanding of its role in our lives and in God’s glorious plan of redemption.

And that we would have a clear demonstration of that love and knowledge through enthusiastic participation within *this* local church.

Let’s love what God loves and live for what Christ died for!

If the church is God’s chosen means to accomplish His purposes in this life then our decisions in life should revolve around the church:

- Is there a gospel centered church where I want to go to college?
- Is there a God-honoring church, a Bible loving church, Christ-centered church where my job is asking me to move?
- Is this the church God wants me to serve in?
- Are these the people He’s given to me?

God intends to manifest (to make known and make visible) His wisdom *through the church*.

Because of this...

**1. Our relationship with the church should effect every other decision we make in life!**

A. As a believer, we should have a growing love for and commitment to the church. **WHY?**

John MacArthur, Jr.: *“Nothing could be more honorable or have greater eternal significance than serving our Christ in **his** church. This privilege is also the most serious responsibility a person can undertake.”*

- Jesus promised to build and to bless the church. (Mt. 16:18)

- The church is the most precious assembly on earth since Christ purchased it with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)
- The church is the proclaimer and protector of divine truth. (1 Tim. 3:15)
- The church is the primary place for spiritual growth. (Col. 1:24-29)
- The church is the environment where strong spiritual leadership develops and matures. (2 Tim. 2:2)
- The church is an expression of the great wisdom of God. (Eph. 3:10)

**Hebrews 10:19-25** tells *us* to draw near to God, it tells *us* to hold fast to our hope, it tells *us* to stir up one another to love and good works, it tells *us* not to neglect meeting together, and it tells *us* to encourage one another.

This isn't about the individual. This is about *us*.

- B. **Christ loves His church.** He gave Himself for her!  
Does this mean that He loves this building? These chairs? This structure?  
NO! The church is made up of people who have been saved from their sins by trusting in Christ Jesus alone!

People – church – church – people.

For us here at Gulf Coast, we're called to be committed to SPECIFIC people. We have the privilege to care for oneanother, forgive oneanother, serve oneanother....

To say you love God and never demonstrate that love through commitment to His church is hypocritical. (Eph. 5:25-27, 29-30)  
What is a "hypocrite"?

- C. Someone who says one thing and does another. Someone who claims specific beliefs and never follows through with them.

What is your attitude towards being a *member* of a church? Have you ever thought about it? Do you even know *why* it's so important?

Is it just like any other "membership" to you?

I have a card that says I am a member of "Knights Shooting Range"...

I went once. I might go again whenever I *feel* like it. But that's *not* how we should view commitment to a local church!

- D. Josh Harris has a wonderful book on the subject of the local church called "*Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Family of God.*"

In chapter 5 he lists ten provoking questions that help the reader evaluate what kind of church they should be looking to be a part of. These questions also help those of us already committed to a local church evaluate if we are committed to the Biblical model of what a local church is called to be.

1. Is this a church where God's Word is faithfully taught?
2. Is this a church where sound doctrine matters?
3. Is this a church in which the Gospel is cherished and clearly proclaimed?
4. Is this a church committed to reaching non-Christians with the Gospel?
5. Is this a church whose leaders are characterized by humility and integrity?
6. Is this a church where people strive to live by God's Word?
7. Is this a church where I can find and cultivate godly relationships?
8. Is this a church where members are challenged to serve?
9. Is this a church that is willing to kick me out?

Church discipline should always be an expression of love. Love for the brother or sister in Christ caught in sin and love for the church body at large.

Its goal should always be restoration, protection and witness.

10. Is this a church I'm willing to join "as is" with *enthusiasm and faith* in God?

The bottom line is that we want to be a church that is discernibly faithful to God's Word.

We should always strive to build a culture and community of both hearing and obeying God's Word.

The Word of God is so important to us because God has chosen to reveal Himself *through* His Word, He's chosen to speak to us and meet with us *through* His Word.

The Word of God holds out the object of our faith to us!

We have faith in a personal God – not a "slot machine" God who just obeys whatever commands we bark out – but a personal God who calls us to draw near to Him.

**Ask God for a deep and sincere love for the church. Ask Him to put inside of you a love for the things and the people that He loves!**

When I was a teenager, the church was a refuge to me – it was an oasis. Not an escape – an oasis. And there's a difference.

It became a visible expression of God's love and grace at work!

What you love the most can be seen in what you build your schedule around.

What matters most to you?

- If it's sports – games and practices go on the schedule first.
- If it's education – everything gets built around homework.
- If it's money – your work schedule gets top priority.
- If its church – Sunday meetings, Care group, youth meetings, service projects, evangelism, etc. is what your schedule gets built around.
- Otherwise, church meetings and activities begin to be seen as an inconvenience or even an interruption in our already busy lives.

I don't like activity for activities sake!

We aren't just part of an alternative to the *Happy Hands Club!*

We're part of something so big, so grand, and so glorious. We're part of something that has meaning and purpose like nothing else. Life is short.

Our decisions matter. Your choices today will affect your life tomorrow!

Take another look at the church. Look really close.

Look at God's Word and see for yourself. The church is there. Read the book of Acts. Read any part of the New Testament...

To the youth: do you see this church as "your church" or as "your parent's church"?

The answer to this question is really determined by whether there is *enthusiastic* participation or not on your part. (Ps. 122:1)

What motivates us to do what we do?

We see a goal. We have a vision. We're provoked or stirred. We want to honor someone.

What's our greatest motivation? The cross!

Apart from this work of grace you and I would have no inclusion in the family – no acceptance before God – there would be no church.

- E. **Here are some things that enthusiasm for the church *might* include:**  
**When** considering whether you should attend a Sunday celebration or...  
The question shouldn't be: "*Do I like the series?*" Or "*Whose leading worship?*"  
Rather, the questions could be: "*Who can I invite?*", "*Who can I reach out to?*", "*How can I serve?*", "*What can I learn?*"

**When** attending meetings where God's Word is being taught or discussed: Bibles and paper are brought for taking notes.

**Is there** a desire to serve as much as there is a desire for "social" activity.

I want to give myself to the greatest cause on this earth...I want to serve the Kingdom of my God through His church!

Because God has chosen to advance the Gospel through the mission of the local church...

## **2. Our relationships in life should be defined by our relationship with the church.**

Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

### **A. Are we striving to build friendships within this church?**

I'm not talking about hiding in a bubble! I'm not talking about retreating from the world around us to our safe place!

I am talking about building true, God glorifying friendships through the church that will contribute to the building of God's church!

I don't know of a greater tool the devil uses to influence youth than ungodly friends.

The kind of friends a person chooses to surround himself with, is one of the most crucial decisions he will ever make.

Your friends will either challenge you and encourage you in your walk with God, or seek to weaken it.

Your friends probably have more influence on your life than almost any other force!

### **B. Are you getting "bored" of serving the way you do? Has it become mundane?**

Are you reaching out to new people as they come?

Are you just assuming other people will do that?

Are you pointing your non Christian friends and family members to God?

Are you introducing them to other Christians?

We're not talking about a casual "friendship" with the church, we're talking commitment to what Christ prizes and loves.

His Bride. His Body. His people. His plan. His church.

Passion spills out. You can't keep it inside. You can't hide it. It's seen. How do you demonstrate a passion for the local church?

**I hope you're beginning to see the beauty of God's plan for the church and the unimaginable power that could be unleashed through a generation embracing that plan!**

## Discussion and application questions

1. What is God's view of His church? How should this affect our view?
2. What are some ways that you have been serving your church? What are some ways that you can begin serving your church?
3. Why is it important to find a gospel-centered church wherever you move?
4. What does *enthusiastic* involvement in the church look like? Are you involved this way? Why or why not?
5. Name a club or sport that you are involved with or used to be involved with. How is being a part of the church different from being a part of a club?

Additional verses that help us understand the church:  
Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27