

Love Your Church by Belonging

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, for a short while this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. Ephesians chapter 5, page 1177 in the Pew Bible.

Ephesians chapter 5, and if you read again at verse 24. Ephesians 5, verse 24.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

As many of you know, I mentioned recently some easy-to-read Christian books. And they're easy to read because, like many people, I'm not a very good reader.

But I force myself to read so that I'll grow, first and foremost, as a Christian. And one book that I mentioned to you, probably about a month ago now, was a book by Tim Chester, Will You Be My Facebook Friend?

[1 : 32] Will You Be My Facebook Friend? And it's a book that I think every Christian who is on Facebook should read. Because it highlights all the dangers and also the delights of using social media.

The other book that I highlighted is a book that I hope some of you have now started reading or have finished reading. The book, Heaven, How I Got Here by Colin Smith.

It's a book, which I hope you know by now. It's a book about the thief on the cross and how a crucified criminal at Calvary received the crown of glory in heaven. So, Heaven, How I Got Here. It's a brilliant book. There are still some copies at the door. I took a couple more down tonight. So, please pick them up. If you haven't read it and you want to read it, just take it home with you. It's free to a good home.

But the book I want to draw your attention to this evening is a book my sister-in-law gave to me. She passed it on to me. It's by an American pastor called Tony Merida. And the book is entitled Love Your Church.

[2 : 33] Love Your Church. And it's all about what it means to be part of a local church living within a community. And that's what we're going to study. Love Your Church.

So, boys and girls, the study is called Love Your Church. And with the help of Paul's words here in Ephesians 5, I want to introduce this study to us this evening by highlighting three things about our church.

Our church is our focus. It's our family. And it's our fellowship. Three things about our church.

Our church is our focus, our family, and our fellowship. Our focus, our family, and our fellowship.

So, first of all, our focus. Our focus.

Read again at verse 25. Paul says, Husbands, love your wives as Christ 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.

[3 : 35] Now, the title of Tony Merida's book, it exhorts us and encourages us to love your church. Love your church. But the question that immediately arises in my mind is, well, why should you love your church?

Why should you love this church? Why should you love Barba's free church? And Paul tells us, you should love your church because Christ loved your church and gave himself for her.

He gave himself up for her. You should love your church because Jesus Christ was willing to suffer for your church. You should love your church because Jesus was willing to be sacrificed on behalf of your church.

You should love your church because Jesus Christ was willing to be substituted in place of your church. You should love your church because Jesus loves your church.

You should love your church because Jesus loves your church. Of course, it's technically not your church. It's not my church. Nobody should ever say it's Myrtle's church. It's not. It's Christ's church.

He's the one who rescued his church from the penalty of sin. He's the one who redeemed his church from the power of sin. He's the one who is restoring his church ultimately from the presence of sin. So in that sense, it's not your church. It's not my church. It's Christ's church. He was the one who was wounded for our transgressions, the transgressions of his church. He's the one who was bruised for the iniquities of his church. He bound himself to his church. He bought his church with his own precious blood.

[5 : 19] My friend, Jesus Christ loves the church so much that he gave himself for his church. And his promise to his church, as we mentioned in our opening singing, his promise to his church is, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. For as we sang in Psalm 127, except the Lord do build the house, the builders lose their pain, except the Lord the city keep, the watchmen watch in vain. Without him we can do nothing, but with him all things are possible.

And this is what Paul is highlighting to us, that Jesus Christ loves his church. He loves this church. He loves Barba's free church. And because he loves this church, you should love this church too. You should love your church. Love your church. But as you know, the church of Jesus Christ, it isn't confined to these four walls. It isn't confined to Barba's free church or the free church as a denomination. Because the church of Jesus Christ, it's universal. It's worldwide. It's made up of different peoples in different places all over the world. It's made up of people with different tongues and different teaching. The church has, it's very different, it's very diverse, with different creeds and different catechisms, different theological standpoints and different statements. And yet, you know, despite all of these differences, what unites the church of Jesus Christ is our union with Jesus Christ.

What unites the church of Jesus Christ is our union with Jesus Christ. That's not what Paul said. He says in the letter to the Galatians, there is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male nor female, for you are all one. All one in Christ Jesus. You are all one in Christ Jesus. And you know, I'm sure I mentioned this to you before. That's what I love about the Keswick Convention.

That's why we love going as a family every year. We go every summer to the Keswick Convention. Because when you go there, if you've never been, go. It's something you should do before you reach glory, is go to the Keswick Convention. Because you meet Christians from different countries and different continents in the world. It's amazing. And yet, you know, despite all our differences, all our different ideas, all our different viewpoints, we're all one in Christ Jesus.

[8 : 15] We're all one in Christ Jesus. In fact, there are banners all around the Keswick Conference Center with the words, all one in Christ Jesus. All one in Christ Jesus. My friend, the church of Jesus Christ has lots of different branches. But they're all rooted in the same true vine, Jesus Christ.

But our focus in this study, Love Your Church, our focus is not on the universal church that we're part of. We are part of a great worldwide church. Our focus in this study is on the individual church, the individual congregation that we are part of. Our focus in this study is to exhort us and encourage us to love our church. We're to love our congregation as we live within this community.

And you know, I can't stress the importance of this enough because, as you know, the church is not a building. The church is not a building. Yes, it's good to have a church building. It's good to have a meeting place of worship. But too much emphasis is often placed upon the church building.

And far too many people, people within this community, they love their buildings, and they're tied to their buildings to the point that they can't and they won't worship God anywhere else except in their building. But I want to be absolutely clear, because the Bible is clear on this. The church is not a building. The church is a body. The church is not a building. The church is a body. More than that, the church is not a place. The church is a people. The church is a people. The church is a saved and sanctified people. The church is a rescued and redeemed people. That's why Peter reminded and reaffirmed to the church in 1 Peter, his first letter to the church. He said, we were once not a people, but we are now the people of God. There was a day when we had not obtained mercy, but now we have obtained mercy.

Therefore, says Peter, the reason that we are the people of God, the reason we have obtained mercy, is not because of anything we did to save ourselves. It's not because there's anything good, gracious, or great about us. No, it's all because we were called out of darkness and we were called into the marvelous light of the gospel. We were called out of darkness and called into the marvelous light of the gospel. We have been called out. That's what the church is. We are those who have

been called out. That's what the word church means, boys and girls. You're listening. The word church in Greek is ekklesia. Ekklesia. It means called out. That's what the church is. We are called out.

[11 : 24] And so my Christian friend here this evening, we are the people of God and we have received the mercy of God, not because of anything good in ourselves, not because we learned anything in Sunday school or did anything, but because we were called out of darkness, effectually called out of darkness and called into the marvelous light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We were called out, called out of darkness and death and the dungeon of sin and called into the marvelous light, life and liberty of the gospel. We were called out. We were called out. Ekklesia. That's the word, called out. We are the church.

And our focus in this study, it covers eight areas of church membership. This evening, we're just touching upon belonging. But in the weeks ahead, God willing, we'll look at welcoming, gathering, caring, caring, serving, honoring, witnessing, and sending. And my friend, our focus is to love our church. We're to love our church because Jesus loves our church. And we're to love our church because it's our family. We're to love our church because it's our family. That's what we see secondly, our family. So our focus and our family. Our family. Look at verse 28.

Verse 28, Paul says, In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So in this section, Paul is exhorting the church in Ephesus to love one another as Christ has loved them. But you know, Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it's a fascinating letter. Wonderful letter to read. I suppose the whole Bible is a wonderful book to read. But the letter to the Ephesians, it's a fascinating letter because in chapters 1 to 3, it's full of indicatives. Chapters 4 to 6 is full of imperatives. So chapters 1 to 3, full of information.

Chapters 4 to 6, full of application. Chapters 1 to 3, full of explanation. Chapters 4 to 6, full of exhortation. And chapters 1 to 3, Paul explains to the church in Ephesus that they've been saved by grace. They're saved by grace. Then in chapters 4 to 6, Paul exhorts the church in Ephesus to remember that they are to serve by grace. They're to serve by grace. They're to serve one another by loving one another as Christ has loved them. And here in Ephesians 5, Paul uses the image, this very familiar illustration of marriage. And he does so not only to emphasize that marriage is a high and holy calling between a man and a woman, but also that marriage, marriage is to be mirrored on Christ's marriage with his bride, the church. He says, wives are to submit to their husbands, just like a Christian is to submit to Jesus as Lord over their life. And husbands are to love their wives, which is a high calling. Husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. And Paul is saying here, that's the kind of love that you are to demonstrate and display towards one another. You're to love your church because Jesus loves your church.

You're to demonstrate and display selfless and sacrificial love for your church because Jesus demonstrated and displayed selfless and sacrificial love for your church.

[15 : 42] But as you know, when two people come together in marriage, they become a family. They become one flesh. That's what we read. They become a family. And that's how the church is often depicted and described in the Bible. It's described as a family. It's a church family.

And as Paul emphasizes and also explains here, we are to love our church family. We're to love our church family. We're to love one another. You know, in the introduction to his book, I hope you all buy the book, get a copy of it, follow along with it. But in the introduction to the book, Love Your Church, Tony Merida, he explains that he and his wife have adopted five children. So they have five adopted children. Four of them are from the Ukraine, and they have one son, Joshua, from Ethiopia.

And he describes Joshua's first Christmas when he met all of his new family, all of his relations. He met them at the age of only five. And he says there was a large family gathering, big Christmas gathering, with a house filled with grandparents and parents and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins.

But when little Joshua walks into the room and sees all of his, all these people in his home, he turns to his father, Tony Merida, the author of the book, and he says, are all of these people our family? Are all of these people our family? To which little Joshua was told, yes, they're all our family. And you know, every time we come into our church, we can say the same. All of these people are our

family.

[17 : 36] All of these people are part of our church family. And you know, as much as me, we might want to, in the back of our mind, we might want to, you can't choose your family. You can't either even change your family.

And sometimes when it comes to large family gatherings in our own families, we can think, well, unfortunately, some of these people actually are our family, where we have grumpy grannies, or we have annoying aunties, or squabbling sisters, and boisterous brothers. And sometimes we can think that our family is a dysfunctional family. But you know, that's what the church is like too.

That's what the church is like too. The church is full of people with different backgrounds, different baggage, different understandings, different upbringings, different temperaments, different talents. And sometimes church has people who are distant, and they're detached, and they're difficult to love. You might even be one of them yourself from now and again.

But you know, the reason the church is often a dysfunctional family is because this is the reality. The church is not a museum of good people. It is a hospital for the broken.

The church is not a museum of good people. And you know, I wish the community knew that. They all think that we're above them, or we're better than them. But the church is not a museum of good people. It's a hospital for the broken. And you know, the beautiful thing about the church of Jesus Christ is that despite its differences, its diversity, and its dysfunctional aspects, it's a family. It's a family. It's a church family. And the Bible reminds us, this is our family. This is where the Lord has placed us in providence. So this is our family.

[19 : 35] And it's our family because every single Christian has been adopted into the family of God. Every single Christian has been adopted into the family of God. You know, when Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he assured them of their salvation. And he said to them, he said to them, you have received that spirit of adoption. You've been adopted into the family of God. You've been accepted into this family. You've been named and numbered as the children of God. And that's why Paul encouraged them. He said to them in Romans 8, he encouraged them and enabled them to plead and pray to our Father, which art in heaven. And we're to plead and pray to Him because He's our Father.

And this is our family. We have received that spirit of adoption, he said, whereby we can all cry, Abba, Father. And you know, that's the thing about being a Christian. Because when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you not only enjoy a relationship with God as our Father, you also enter into a relationship with the church as our family. The church is our family. And I mentioned to you before what the reformer John Calvin said about our family. He said that God is our Father, the church is our mother, Jesus Christ is our elder brother. And every Christian, everyone who is united to Jesus Christ by faith. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. God is our Father, the church is our mother, Jesus our elder brother, and every Christian our brother and sister in Christ. And you know, I love Calvin's statement because, you know, it reminds me that in our church family, there should always be a family resemblance. In our church family, there should always be a family resemblance. We often see that on a physical level, don't we? We see families with facial features, familiar facial features. We see families with characteristics that are copied from one generation to the next. There are personalities and traits that resemble and remind you of other members of the family. Some people, you meet them, and you know immediately who they belong to because of, well, the way they look. There's a family resemblance. I can even see that from where I'm standing this evening. I look at some of you and, well, you can see family resemblances. You can see resemblances between brothers, resemblances between sisters, resemblances between mothers and daughters, between fathers and sons.

There are family resemblances. And you know, that's what Calvin was drawing her attention to, that our church family of brothers and sisters in Christ, we're to have a family resemblance to our older brother, Jesus. And we're to have a family resemblance to our heavenly father. We're to imitate and emulate our elder brother. We're to imitate and emulate our father in heaven. We're to possess and practice these family characteristics in our Christian character, conduct, and conversation.

And you know, this is what makes our family, the family of God. This is what will make it distinct and different from the world. That we imitate and emulate our elder brother and our father in heaven.

[23 : 08] And we do that by loving one another. We're to love our church family. Sadly, history has taught us that we're very poor at doing that. But that's why Jesus, our elder brother, stressed to his disciples in the upper room just before his death, he said, as I loved you, you also are to love one

another.

Why? By this, by your love, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

And that's hard. That's not easy. But that's the call of being part of the church family. We're to love one another. So love your church because our church is our focus. Our church is our family.

And our church is our fellowship, which is what we see lastly and briefly. Our fellowship. So our focus, our family, and our fellowship. Our focus, our family, and our fellowship. Look at verse 32.

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. But particularly verse 32, this mystery is profound, and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Paul reminds us, he reaffirms to us in this section that you're to love your church because Jesus loves your church. And as we said, you're to love your church because the church is not a building. It's a body. It's not a place, but a people. It's not a fan club, but a family.

[24 : 59] It's a family. Therefore, the church is our focus. Our church is our family, and our church is our fellowship. And this is important to remember because as a family, we're to encourage and enjoy fellowship with one another. We're to encourage and enjoy fellowship with one another.

Sadly, however, maybe it's due to the pandemic, we have become very introverted, individualistic, and we start living isolated lives. But that's not the way we're to be as a church family. It's not the way the Bible has encouraged us or exhorted us to be. We're to seek to have fellowship. And you know, we have to see the importance of fellowship with one another. But sometimes we don't see the importance of fellowship. Sometimes we don't see the importance of staying for tea after church, for example, or attending congregational fellowships or congregational dinners or coming to Bible studies. That's a place of fellowship or coming even to the means of grace midweek or on the Lord's Day. And you know, and when we neglect fellowship, we then wonder why we don't know people in the congregation, or we wonder why we feel so distant from people in the congregation, because we're neglecting fellowship. You know, we need to make the effort in fellowship. It requires energy. It requires effort. It's a lot to go and speak to people. But we need to make the most of fellowship, because fellowship is so important within the

Christian church. And you know, I thought we would realize the importance of fellowship after living in lockdown for so long. For so long, we couldn't see one another. We were on cameras and Zoom and laptops and all these things. And so it's so important to have fellowship, to be together. Do you know when the Apostle John wrote his second letter to the church, 2 John, he expressed the importance of fellowship to the church. He stressed the importance of fellowship, because for John, so far away from the church, he was in Ephesus at the time, and he's communicating with the church with pen and paper.

And he says to them, nothing compares to being face-to-face. Pen and paper is no use. So for us, laptops and iPads are no use in comparison to being face-to-face and communicating in person. And what John said here, he wrote, though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face-to-face so that our joy may be complete. I hope to come to you and talk face-to-face so that our joy may be complete. The importance of fellowship. John longed and looked forward to having fellowship with the church family.

[28 : 06] And that's because fellowship is part of our family resemblance. Fellowship is part of our family resemblance. Fellowship first existed between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There was fellowship within the Trinity. And that fellowship is to be imitated and emulated within the family of God, our church family.

And as you know, this is explained and it's expanded upon throughout the New Testament, the importance of fellowship. Paul always talks about it, probably because he was isolated, probably because he was always in prison every time he's writing his letters, feeling so far away from the church. He can't have fellowship. And he's stressing, says it to the Philippians, he stresses the importance of partnership and fellowship in the gospel. And I've mentioned to you before that Greek word, boys and girls, I hope you're still awake and still listening.

The Greek word for fellowship is koinonia. So the Greek word for church is ekklesia. The Greek word for fellowship is koinonia. You've heard that word before. And you know, I love that word koinonia, because it means fellowship, partnership, communion, sharing. Koinonia. And you know, we're to love our church family because within our church family, we're to have koinonia.

Koinonia. Just say it. That just sounds good, doesn't it? We're to have fellowship with Christ and fellowship with other Christians. We're to have communion with the Savior and communion with the saints. That's what we're going to do, God willing, in a couple of weeks' time. Communion. It's fellowship. Fellowship and communion. Communion with the Savior, communion with the saints. We're to share. So koinonia is fellowship. It's partnership. It's communion. It's sharing. Sharing with one another.

[30 : 11] We're to speak. We're to speak. We're to share with one another about our salvation, about our sin, about our sufferings. We're to share about our struggles. We're to share about our stresses.

We're to share about our sicknesses and even our sorrows. Donald and Emma this evening with the youth fellowship will be sharing. They'll be sharing their story of salvation because that's what fellowship is. It's all about sharing. We're sharing about how the Lord has worked in our life. It's so important to share with one another. Dear and my friend, as a congregation, as a covenant community, as the Bible describes us, we're to be committed to koinonia. We're to be committed to koinonia. Because the truth is you can't experience and enjoy fellowship in its fullness by sitting on the sidelines or sitting on the settee at home. You cannot experience and enjoy fellowship in its fullness. No, we need to see one another. We need to be with one another.

We need to strengthen and support one another. You know, if you went through the Bible, the New Testament, and saw the amount of times Paul emphasizes the one another, to love one another, bear one another's burdens, and look after one another and support one another. You know, Paul emphasizes it again and again. We need to love one another as Christ has loved us.

So, my friend, let us love our church. Love your church. Because our church is our focus.

[32 : 03] Our church is our family. And our church is our fellowship. So love your church. Love your church as Christ loved your church and gave himself for her. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for reminding us this evening that Jesus loves this church and He loves our church. And Lord, help us, we pray then, to imitate Him and to emulate Him by loving one another, by loving one another the way that Jesus loves them, by looking after one another and seeking to serve one another and to bear one another's burdens and pray for one another.

O Lord, we confess that we fall so far short of what we ought to be and what we should be. But Lord, we pray that Thy Word would teach us. And Lord, we pray that even as we come to Thy Word, we would be saying like the psalmist, teach me Thy way. And in Thy truth, O Lord, then walk will I, unite my heart that I Thy name may fear continually. Lord, watch over us, we pray. Lead us and guide us.

Help us to love the church that Christ loved and gave himself for her. Go before us into the week that lies ahead, a week as we always know is unknown to us. But Lord, we commit ourselves into Thy care and keeping, knowing, as we said, that without Thee we can do nothing, but that with Thee all things are possible. Go before us. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening. We're going to sing in Psalm 84, just picking up where we left off. Psalm 84, in the Scottish Psalter, page 339.

[34 : 07] Psalm 84. We're singing from verse 7 down to the end of the psalm. Now, before I forget, I nearly did.

So I'm going to ask the questions before I forget. Because it'd be a disaster if I forget. Okay, question one. You all awake? Yep, good. What is the name of our study?

Love Your Church. Well done. Okay, what is the Greek for church? Ekklesia, yeah, well done. What is the Greek for fellowship?

Koinonia. Well done. So the name of the study? Love Your Church. Greek for church. Ekklesia. Greek for fellowship. Koinonia. Good. So that means you'll get food at YF tonight.

If you didn't answer them right, you weren't getting anything. I didn't want to say that to you beforehand, but I'll say it now. So Psalm 84, that we're singing from verse 7 down to the end of the psalm. A psalm, as we said, it reminds us about the loveliness of Christ's church. This is the lovely dwelling place of God's people. And this is Psalm 84, as you know, it's Ian Murray's favorite psalm. His favorite verse of Psalm 84 is verse 7. I don't know. I'm sure he won't mind me telling you. When he can't sleep at night, he would recite Psalm 84 verse 7 until he falls asleep.

[35 : 42] That is, it's the great hope of the Christian. That so they from strength and wearied go, still forward unto strength, until in Zion they appear before the Lord at length. So we'll sing Psalm 84 verse 7 to the end. We'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise.

Psalm 84 verse 7 to the end.

Psalm 84 verse 7 to the end.

Psalm 84 verse 7 to the end.

Psalm 84 verse 7 to the end. Psalm 84 verse 7 to the end.

[38 : 01] 1 in 1. 1. 3.

O them that thou art my name to live. O thou that art the Lord of hosts, that man is truly blessed.

Through my assured confidence on thee alone thou praise.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Clos kitten Miguel DeRuco