

***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Eph. 5:25-27***

A few years ago, someone from my congregation gave me a card. On the front of the card was a poem entitled *The Perfect Church*. The poem reads this way:

If you should find the perfect church  
Without one fault or smear,  
For goodness sake don't join that church  
You'd spoil the atmosphere.  
If you should find the perfect church  
Where all anxieties cease,  
Then pass it by, lest joining it  
You spoil the masterpiece.  
If you should find the perfect church  
Then don't you ever dare  
To tread upon such holy ground  
You'd be a misfit there.  
But since no perfect church exists,  
Made of perfect men,  
Let's cease on looking for that church,  
And love the church we're in.  
Of course it's not the perfect church,  
That's simple to discern.  
But you and I and all of us  
Could cause the tide to turn.  
What fools we are to flee the past  
In that unfruitful search  
To find, at last, where problems loom  
God proudly builds his church.

Perhaps many of us have experienced frustration with either our current or former church. Sometimes our frustration with the church may have valid reasons. But what concerns me is the trend for many Christians to allow their frustration with the church motivate them to search for that “perfect church,” or even worse, be the cause for leaving the fellowship of the church altogether. No doubt there are times when finding another church is a necessity. But I think there are times when people leave their church over trivial matters.

But what should we do when we are frustrated with the church? What should we do when we realize that the church in which we are a part is not perfect? Can we come to appreciate the church? And if so, how? From the passage above, I want to point out 4 things that might help us to have a better appreciation for the church, even when that church is not perfect.

First, we read that Christ *loved* the church. What is interesting about his passage is that the apostle Paul is comparing the relationship between husbands and their wives with that of Christ and His church. Paul’s admonition for husbands to love their wives comes from the love that Christ has for his church – or to put it another way – his bride. Just as Adam loved Eve because she was “*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*” (Gen. 2:23), Christ loves his church – his body. Therefore, we should also love the church. I believe it is inconsistent to say we love Christ and not love his body – the church.

Second, Christ *redeemed* the church. What Paul says here is that Christ “*gave himself up for her*” (v. 25). He willingly offered himself as a substitutionary sacrifice in order to redeem or “reclaim” that which truly belongs to him. And because we have been redeemed, the church belongs to Christ. It is his prized possession. Since Christ redeemed the church, he values the church. Therefore, we should too.

Third, Christ *sanctifies* the church. To sanctify means to “set apart” or to “make holy.” Although it’s true that church isn’t yet fully holy, it is viewed as holy because she is being made holy. God’s saving work doesn’t end with our justification. If I can steal from the title of the 1970 hit song by the Carpenters, it is like God is saying, “We’ve Only Just Begun.” We should not expect the church to be perfect any more than we expect anyone else – or ourselves – to be perfect. What we should expect, though, is for the church to be increasing in its holiness.

Fourth, Christ *glorifies* the church. Paul says here in v. 27 that the outcome of Christ’s love, redemption, and sanctification is the glorification of the church. That is, he plans to present his church “*without any stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*” We

have the sure promises of the Word of God that God will glorify his church (Rom. 8:30) and that the work that he began in us he will complete (Phil. 1:6). Therefore, we should view the church not by all its imperfections; rather, we should see the church for what it is yet to become.

So, do love the church? Remember, Christ loves it. He loved it enough to redeem it, to sanctify it, and one day he will glorify it. May we never fall into the trap of looking at Christ's church all its imperfections. Instead, let's look at Christ's church by how Christ looks at, thereby gaining a healthier appreciation for Christ's church.