

Gathering pt2

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Gathering / Ephesians 5:25–27

LAST WEEK: Who started the church?

One of the most disturbing questions that came out of the pandemic was asked by a lot of people- does the Church really matter? We asked that question out loud and silently in a lot of ways. We got twisted up on questions like this and attempted to answer them in ways that varied from deeply theological to historical to anecdotal to downright bizarre. But when it comes down to it, there is only one answer to this question for Christians:

The church matters because Jesus died for her.

Full stop.

I could end the sermon here. And it would be enough. Jesus dies so the Church could come into existence. That's enough for the church to matter.

When you stop and consider the magnitude of that sacrifice, then it pales in comparison to our complaints about the church. No church is perfect- it is made up of people who are learning not to sin. When sin is allowed to run rampant in a church, it is an abomination. Yet the Church, big C, is something that Jesus values so much He is willing to give His life for her sake. So this morning I want to look at a short passage of scripture that really brings into stark relief the magnitude of what Jesus did for His church...and what that means for us and the world.

In [Ephesians 5:25-27](#) Paul challenges husbands to love their wives as Jesus loved the Church. And He gives specifics as to what this looks like.

First- He “loved her”- the power of this statement cannot be understated. Jesus loved the church, before there was a church. In His pre-existence, from before the foundation of the world, Jesus saw the Church, the people who would make her up, and what she could be, and He loved her. The closest comparison we might be able to come to, would be the love parents would have for a baby they had not yet held or seen, but who they knew was coming.

The Message of Ephesians 3. The Duty of Husbands (Verses 25–33)

the words Christ loved the church, preceding as they do his self-sacrifice on her behalf, seem to look back to his eternal pre-existence in which he set his love on his people and determined to come to save them

Second- He “gave Himself” for her. That is a reference to the death that Jesus died. He dies for the Church. Without Jesus death, there is NO church. We have no reason to gather, to worship, to celebrate, the study, to do anything. If Jesus does not die, we have NO hope.

And think about this in the context of that love in the first part, Jesus loved the Church knowing what He would have to do to redeem her and create the people who would be a part of the Church. Despite knowing the sacrifice that would be required, He willing GIVES Himself for the church, completely and utterly.

In fact, the word “give” in this passage translates as “delivered up.” Jesus literally delivers Himself to earth, delivers His teaching to the beginning of the church, and then delivers Himself to death on the cross. Why would He do that?

Third- Paul says Jesus “sanctifies” the church. What does that mean? Sanctification is the process by which we lay aside sin and pursue holiness. Jesus is doing this, not just on an individual basis, but to churches as a whole. And in many cases, this word, which we talk about here a lot, is the long term process of being less like us and more like Jesus. **But in this case, the word is more about an initial preparation, being made holy- closer to initial justification in nature than the process we are all engaged in currently.**

This occurs because the nature of the Church is a people who have been set apart- the ekklesia we discussed last week- assembled or gathered from the nations for an explicit purpose- to make known what Jesus has done for the world. We are “set apart” for the purposes to which Jesus has called us. *And that purpose at West Metro is best expressed in our summarizing statement of our mission and vision- “Love Jesus and People Passionately.” We cannot love people like we need to love them without first loving Jesus, and we cannot love Jesus without being reconciled to Him by His sacrifice- trusting Him as our Savior and experiencing His love for us firsthand.*

Fourth- Paul says she is cleansed by the “washing with the word.” The church matters because it is supposed to be where we are confronted with the truth of scripture. When we preach and teach and instruct and hold one another accountable, that matters, It is consistent with the teachings of Scripture. This is the “sanctification” we are more used to hearing about where we, thru our learning more about Jesus and His Word, become less like our old selves, and more like Him as we lay aside old sins and embrace a new way of life- as God reveals it to us.

The Message of Ephesians 3. The Duty of Husbands (Verses 25–33)

The 'sanctification' appears to refer to the present process of making her holy in character and conduct by the power of the indwelling Spirit

We have seen this in our own time. Whole churches and denominations confessing their corporate and individual sins and repenting. ***We have lost some of the value of that in our day- we don't like to discuss or admit corporate guilt- but that is actually a thing in the NT, and it is something that is good and needed.*** Sometimes, we get carried away by the culture or outside forces and we need to own up to it. Jesus honors that. Maybe that needs to happen here at WMCC?

This is where we are most deficient in the 21st century. We shy away from being attentive to the Word and holding one another accountable. That's not good. We owe it to one another to be kind yet honest. ***And maybe that's why we struggle- we are either too kind (not wanting to cause offense) or too honest (seeking to offend with our words rather than with the truth).*** We need to find the balance point between the two so we can really be washed and corrected and spurred on to good works! (Hebrews 10:24-25)

The Church was CREATED to be a living testimony to the love and goodness and holiness of Jesus. We cannot embrace one to the neglect of the others.

Finally- the last part of these verses- we are being made HOLY without blemish. This ties back to sanctification. We are becoming less like us and more like Jesus. And on day will be presented to Jesus. This ties back to our discussion a few weeks ago about what happens when we die- those who trust Jesus stand before Him and are welcomed into His Kingdom. And He accomplishes this thru the process we see here in these verses- both on an individual and corporate level.

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It is to this constructive end that Christ has been working and is continuing to work. The bride does not make herself presentable; it is the bridegroom who labours to beautify her in order to present her to himself. His love and self-sacrifice for her, his cleansing and sanctifying of her, are all designed for her liberation and her perfection, when at last he presents her to himself in her full glory

I know I say this a lot. I mean it. **When we are followers of Jesus, our lives are a progression.** That doesn't mean there are not setbacks and frustrations. But it does mean, what I see in my life now looks different. We need to ask questions if it does not (salvation with fear and trembling)

This is why the Church matters! It is a LIVING testimony to the difference that Jesus death, burial, and resurrection makes. We are NEW people!

So what does this mean for us?

First, since Jesus does all of this for the Church, she belongs to Him. We do not own her or boss her or remake her purpose. Jesus, and Jesus alone, has dominion over the church.

Second, we enter into the church thru Jesus- not a class, or an act, or a test. If we have not trusted Jesus, we are not a part of a church- even if our name is on a list somewhere.

Third, those who are a part of the Church are a part of her mission- to learn to be more like Jesus and to help more people to find Him. This manifests itself in MANY ways, but when the methods begin to overshadow the message, the church ceases to function as a church and becomes something else that is not healthy nor holy.