

## A Godly Family, Part 2: Loving Church Like Christ (Eph 5:25)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on August 5, 2012

[www.goldcountrybaptist.org](http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org)

Josh Harris is a fellow young pastor in Maryland who's probably best known for a bestselling book he wrote in 1997 as a Christian 21-year-old young man. In his book, he said goodbye to dating as the world does it, what I would call "recreational dating with no goal of commitment on most guy's part" and Josh wrote for what he called "a new attitude toward relationships." He saw later his 1<sup>st</sup> book was an incomplete message, and as the Lord matured him and brought him together with his wife Shannon, people were asking him "how then shall we get married?" His 2<sup>nd</sup> book, *Boy Meets Girl*, balances autobiographical and scriptural principles for courtship in a helpful way for intentional relationships involved in community, family, committed to purity, and wisely prayerfully considering commitment toward covenant marital unity.

[for more on this theme, see also 4-part series I taught on [courtship or dating](#)]

Josh's third book I think shows further growth and depth exploring today's text, Ephesians 5:25:

'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 ... Now almost 3 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 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 ...

[Josh writes] 'The irony ... was that even though I had stopped playing the dating game with girls, I was perfectly happy to keep playing it with the church. I liked [being with] on weekends, and I enjoyed the social benefits of church, but I didn't want the responsibility that came with real commitment. Like Jack in our story, I wasn't interested in settling down. So though I gave the appearance of commitment, I mostly ... kept my options open.

Then something happened that I never expected. A friend sent me a set of sermons on tape called "Passion for the Church" by a pastor [named C.J. Mahaney]. I'm still not sure why I listened to those tapes. For a confirmed church-dater like me, the title alone was baffling. "Passion for the church"? The words *passion* and *church* absolutely did *not* connect in my mind! The series might as well have been called "Passion for the Grocery Store." ...

The preacher taught from the book of Ephesians ... This is where passion came in. To be part of the universal church isn't enough, the preacher said. Every Christian is called to be passionately committed to a specific local church. Why? Because the local church is the key to spiritual health and growth for a Christian ... the local church is central to God's plan ...

[Josh writes] 'the biblical truths in those messages picked me up, turned me over, and gave me a good shaking. Out of my pockets tumbled an avalanche of well-worn attitudes about the church...I realized a wholehearted relationship with a local church is God's loving plan for me and every other follower of Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

His book is *Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love With the Family of God*, republished as *Why Church Matters*. This is what I pray God will do in our midst today, to stir in our hearts the heart that Christ has for the church that we read in our text, Ephesians 5:25:

“...*Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her...*”

We’re just going to draw our attention to and stir our affections by, focus on this one verse today, but don’t worry, not the whole verse! There’s more in this verse than we can exhaust in our brief time today. We often go right past those words to husbands and wives, but for today I want us to stop and pause and ponder the depth of Christ’s love for the church, and how we should love the church as families who are part of the family of Christ manifested in a local church. We started a new series on the godly family last week with Christ-centered wives, ending with submission by Christ’s example and enabling, that it’s all from Christ, through Christ, and to Christ. In part 2 today, we pick up with Christ’s love for the church and ours, which should affect us as families.

Premise: Christlike Families must love the church like Christ does

Husbands should lead the way in this love, but this message has application for all of us I want us to consider before we focus on husbands next time. Before we look at the applications for husbands, we need to first understand this massive theological truth in v. 25 and not just jump over this to the “practical” things he calls husbands to do or this can become works of the flesh rather than the Spirit (v. 18). It is building a house or family without the right foundation (2:20) if we try and fulfill chapter 5 without the gospel of chapters 1-3.

Another way to say it is we need to follow Paul’s pattern of giving the indicative before the imperative (command). Paul doesn’t jump right into imperatives for husbands and wives of what *to do*, the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the book Paul reminds them what Christ *has done for them*, and also in 5:25. The love of Christ compels us, not mere law. The Bible isn’t just a book of rules, it’s about a relationship with Christ. If you’re not yet in relationship to Him, I call you to Christ today.

#### OUTLINE:

1. Christ’s Passionate Relational Love for His Church
2. A Christian’s Personal Responsibility to Love His Church

### **#1: Christ’s Passionate Relational Love for His Church**

The church is not a building, it’s all true believers in Jesus Christ in submitted relationship to Him as Lord, Head, Savior (5:23-24). Paul uses wedding imagery in v. 27, a bride presented to a groom in her beauty and glory and the 2 are joined in relationship (v. 31). Passion and emotion in a human wedding is to be a picture to the watching world of a greater relationship: Christ, His bride (v. 32).

Earlier in Ephesians 1:14, Paul spoke of salvation’s sealing like an engagement ring (which the Greek term there can mean). Christ is in a committed relationship with His people that will consummate in a wedding in Rev 19 that the whole universe will celebrate in us. Human commitments, relationships (church, marriage) point to this.

In Song of Solomon 8:6, the bride says to her beloved “*Set me as a seal upon your heart ... for love is strong as death, **passion** fierce ... Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame*” (NRSV). That’s a real person writing of marriage, not mere allegory, but Paul says in v. 31-32, when God designed marriage in the OT and all its joys, it was always to be a picture of a greater passion and love for a bride. The blessing and intimacy of the closest earthly relationships give us a little hint of greater blessing and intimacy to come for eternity, for all who are the bride of Christ, the church Christ is betrothed to (covenant engagement, commitment deeper than even engagement).

From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride  
With His own blood He bought her and for her life He died<sup>2</sup>

Why should we be committed to, love, have a passion for church? #1 reason: Christ loved the church with a passion to the point of laying down His own life for her because of His commitment to her. His love in giving Himself up for her on the cross is called His “passion” in Acts 1:3 in the KJV, old English for suffering. The week He gave Himself up for the church is called “Passion Week.”

Jesus loved His church with a passion by dying for her on a cross. His love was not without passion or affections or emotions. Jesus was not a stoic or like Spock on Star Trek. He had real passions, affections, and emotions. It was for the joy set before Him that He went to the cross (Heb 12:2) and we are to look to and fix our eyes on that view of Jesus. Jesus was moved in passion/suffering, overcome emotionally in Gethsemane. He wept. He had deep affection, compassion for His people many occasions. His passion for God’s house was seen in the overturning of money-changer tables, when zeal consumed Him, Jn 2:17 says. One translation (NLT): *his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: “**Passion for God’s house will consume me.**”*

Jesus was moved by a consuming passionate zeal for God’s house. And what is the “house of God” today? It’s the church (Eph 2:19, 1 Tim 3:15). The Lord’s zeal or consuming passion is not just for the OT Israelites, Jerusalem, the Jews. In the NT, His passionate zeal and compassionate love is also toward the church for all peoples, the new house of God, God’s family and people He loved and died for.

The church is treasured by Christ and the object of His tender care. I get the language of treasure and tender care from end of Eph 5:29 “*nourishes and cherishes...just as Christ does the church.*” Tender care of a spouse nursing a loved one to health, and also treasuring her, cherishing her – those are words of passion and compassion.

In Zechariah 8:2 (NLT) the Lord says of His people: “*My love...is passionate and strong; I am consumed with passion for [them] ...*”

Isaiah 9:6 is that familiar prophecy: *unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace* (imagine an orchestra)

The verse after that talks about how this Messiah/Christ to be born would establish His kingdom. But what drives Christ’s mission to be accomplished? Isa 9:7 *The **zeal** of the LORD...will*

*accomplish it.* Another translation of “zeal”: “passion of the Lord.” NLT: “the *passionate commitment of the LORD* ... will make this happen!” NET: “The Lord’s *intense devotion to his people* will accomplish” and its footnote says: ‘In this context the Lord’s “zeal” refers to his intense devotion to and love for his people which prompts him...’

The very same phrase is used in Isaiah 37:32 for God’s passionate commitment to, devotion to His beloved people. We know Isa 61 is Messiah/Christ speaking because He said so in Luke 4. In Isa 61:10 Messiah says about His salvation for His people: *I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

In Isa 62:2, He says to His people: *The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory* [Eph 5:27]; *And you will be called by a new name ... the mouth of the LORD will designate.*

Even today in human marriages, brides are called by a new name that comes from the groom, in our culture the man’s last name. In the middle of v. 4 He says: ‘*you will be called, “My delight is in her,” And your land, “Married”; For the LORD delights in you...*’ [delight of marital love]

<sup>3</sup> *You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, And a royal diadem in the hand of your God.* [think of Esther and king]

Look at the middle of v. 5: “... *And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So your God will rejoice over you.*”

On a human level the greatest passionate rejoicing we can relate to is a groom and his bride who He joins with on their wedding day in joy. It says your God will rejoice over you in that way. E.J. Young writes: ‘This figure is designed to express the utmost of rejoicing.’<sup>3</sup>

Listen to this parallel passage in Zephaniah 3:17: “*The LORD your God...in His love, will rejoice over you with shouts of joy*” (NASB)

Other translations say He rejoices over His beloved people with “*great delight ... singing*” (NIV) or as the NKJV puts it: “*He will rejoice over you with gladness ... with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*” The ESV translates it as “*loud singing.*”

John Piper says on this: ‘Can you imagine what it would be like if you could hear God singing? Remember that it was merely a spoken word that brought the universe into existence. What would happen if God lifted up his voice and not only spoke but sang! [He does in Zeph. 3:17 for His beloved people! Piper writes]... when I hear this singing I stand dumbfounded, staggered, speechless that he is singing over me. He is rejoicing over my good with all his heart and with all his soul (cf. Jeremiah 32:41)! *Can You Feel the Wonder of This?* Can you feel the wonder of this today? That God is rejoicing over you with loud singing? ... let yourself awaken to the wonder that the Lord, the King of kings, rejoices over you with gladness and exults over you with loud singing.’<sup>4</sup>

The image is exultant triumphant jubilant joyful shouting, singing with great rejoicing and great delight and love, loudness, gladness! Beloved, this is the language of passion God has for His people! And He calls His people to join in passionate celebration of love:

<sup>14</sup> *Shout for joy, O daughter...Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter ... [v. 17]...He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.*

This is not just the Lord's love for Israel, that very chapter also has all nations being gathered with them (Zeph 3:8) to call up the Lord with one voice (v. 9) as they rejoice as a bride the Lord rejoices in. It's a picture of a church to come. One author expresses it this way:

'The Lord smiles at us. The Lord sings over us. He loves us with passionate love. Jesus loves His bride, the church, intensely... As powerful and as passionate as marital love is ... inexpressibly intense [intimacy] of the love a husband has for his wife is but an imperfect representation of Christ's perfect, powerful, passionate love for His bride, the church ... the Perfectly Passionate Husband, Jesus Christ ... is preparing for His glorious, sure-coming wedding day with great anticipation.'<sup>5</sup> So should we if we are His church!

Isaiah 62:11 goes beyond Israel: *Behold, the LORD has proclaimed **to the end of the earth, Say to the daughter of Zion, "Lo, your salvation comes; Behold His reward is with Him** [that's applied to Jesus in NT, and at the end of v.12 it's those redeemed of the Lord]*

All who the salvation of Jesus comes to, all the redeemed of the Lord, are part of a bride pictured in v. 5 it says God rejoices over. The Lord delights in us in v. 4 as well, and displays us in v. 3 like a royal diadem or His very crown of beauty (language like Eph 5:27). Zechariah 9:6 calls His people sparkling/shining "[jewels of a crown]". Other verses call them *the apple of His eye*.

Isaiah 43:4 has more beautiful beloved language to His people: "*Since you are **precious in My sight, Since you are honored and I love you...***" (v. 7 applies this text to all called by His name).

Isaiah 49:15 gives another image of His cherishing tender love:

**49:15** "*Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.* <sup>16</sup> "***Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me.***

He loves His people with more passion than any mom for a baby. He doesn't just know us like the back of His hand, He loves us and our names are graven on the front of His palms always before Him. In the end of v. 18 His people are like a bride decked out in jewels.

My name is graven on His hands, My name is written on His heart;  
I know that while in heaven He stands No tongue can bid me thence depart<sup>6</sup>

The end of the book Revelation describes the bride of Christ in or as the New Jerusalem He makes, a new heavens and new earth, from Isa 65:17: *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth ...*<sup>18</sup> ***But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness.***

<sup>19</sup> ***I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people ...***

6x in 2 verses the joy of the Lord is expressed in His people who are fulfilling their chief end to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. John Calvin, not known for excessive emotion, said here: ‘God is moved...powerfully moved, by such an affection toward us.’<sup>7</sup> All this is OT buildup to Eph 5:25: *Jesus passionately loves his church* --do we? Calvin: ‘If we do not prefer the church to all other objects of our interest, we are unworthy of being counted among her ...’<sup>8</sup>

*Which takes us from Christ’s Passionate Relational Love for His Church, to ...*

## **#2: Our Personal Responsibility to Love His Church**

Calvin was agreeing with the early church father Augustine’s quote: ‘One cannot have God for his father who refuses to have the church for his mother.’ Calvin explained it’s in the church where Christ grows/nourishes us (5:29) ‘under her care and guidance.’<sup>9</sup> For nearly 2,000 years Christians have understood the importance of the church for a number of reasons, but the most obvious is that the church is pre-eminently important to the Lord in Eph 5:25 and all the prophets are pointing to what Paul brings out in Eph 5:32. It is the Lord’s people, in NT language, His bride, the church, that has His highest attention, affection, love, commitment (Mt 16:18).

Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards, wrote in 1800 words representing Christians who love what the Lord loves so:

I love Thy church, O God. Her walls before Thee stand,  
Dear as the apple of Thine eye, And written on Thy hand.  
Should I with scoffers join Her ... to abuse? [many voices do that today]  
No! Better far my tongue were dumb, My hand its skill should lose.  
For her [the church] my tears shall fall, For [the church] my prayers ascend,  
To [the church] my cares and toils be given Till toils and cares shall end.  
Beyond my highest joy I prize [the church’s] heavenly ways,  
Her sweet communion, solemn vows, Her hymns of love and praise.  
Sure as Thy truth shall last, To Zion shall be given  
The brightest glories earth can yield And brighter bliss of Heaven.<sup>10</sup>

It’s not just Jesus who had passionate zeal and love for church. Romans 12:8 says we who have leadership roles in the church are to *lead with zeal* as well, and everyone in the church is to have this “*zeal, be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*” (Rom 12:12 ESV). In our commitment to and service in the church we’re to have zeal or passion like the Lord we serve, fervently, zealously, passionately. We’re not to honor Him with our lips with hearts far from church.

He’s certainly not honored by people who say they love Him but don’t love His church. It’s like saying you want to be around the groom waiting for his bride at the wedding but once she comes around, you’re out of there. “No, really,” you say, “I love you, bro, and I really want to hang out, you and me, but not with your bride”

The *Newsweek* cover story from 4 months ago: “Forget the Church –Follow Jesus.”<sup>11</sup> As if we expect the groom to be impressed when we say at His wedding, “we’re here for you man, *forget your bride*, she’s got problems – we don’t need her or want her...we love *you*. We’re not interested in spending time with who you want to spend time with or loving what you love (church), we just love *you*, man. I’m coming to your house on weekends; make sure she’s not there ...”

No...the Lord has a zealous jealous love for His bride, the church. He is inseparably joined to her, you can't have Him and ditch her. He's not impressed with George Barna's books calling us to leave the church as people have known it for 2,000 years, or William P. Young, who wrote *The Shack*, and doesn't go to organized church where a pastor could have corrected his heresies before publishing it.

Jesus does not like hearing His bride being bashed by supposed Jesus-loving but organized-religion-hating, anti-institution but pro-Jesus emergent nonsense more mixed up than the Starbucks drinks they sit around drinking instead of actually going to a real church.

But what about you who do go to church. Are you committed to it? Do we love the church? If we want to be Christ-like, we must. If others assessed our life, love, commitments, what would they be? Christians from centuries past would have no category for those who would say they're committed to Jesus but who don't commit to His church. Time-travelling even 50 years ago, a conversation might start like this:

"You're a Christian, what church are you a member of?"

"No church. I'm committed to Christ, not to some church. I believe attending is ok, but I just don't believe in the concept 'membership.'"

"But, I thought I saw you at Sam's Club last week? ... don't they require membership?"

"Ok, I guess I do believe in membership if it can benefit me. I don't mind filling out an application and applying for membership at a Sam's Club, I just won't for a Sovereign Christ."

"Hmm, seems like church has a lower standard to you, that you'll join what benefits physically but won't commit spiritually?"

"Well, uh, I don't think churches did it the same way in NT times that churches require us to do today, you know, paperwork."

"Uh, do you think stores did it the same way in NT times as Sam's Club does today? But a more fundamental question is if you want to be like NT churches, doesn't the book of Acts give a picture of people much more committed to their church than you? Doesn't it use phrases like "added to their number" (Acts 2:47) or "join" (5:14), however exactly they did it? Doesn't Hebrews 13:17 say you're to obey and submit yourself under church's leaders, make yourself accountable to them, in however the church does it, for the good of your soul?"

Many sign up everywhere else in life, and join all other kinds of groups as members (AAA, Costco, clubs, gym memberships, co-ops, HSLDA, sports teams, scouts, Elks, etc.), many freely sign-up commitments to everything else, but won't sign commitment to a church, as if Christianity is the one area in life of no commitment? We need to be careful what we communicate when we join other institutions all the time but won't join the one Jesus died for (5:25). We are quick to sign-up for lesser things online, but not a church that we attend year after year. Don't be a church-dater. If you want to court the church awhile with a view towards commitment, that's better, but remember, biblical love commits in spite of blemishes.

"But I can still love my wife without standing up in front of the church in some sort of official way, without making a covenant vow – going through that process – if I love her in private, that's good enough for me." But have you ever thought about her, the church? Brides are encouraged to hear true love and commitment going public.

Leeman: ‘we don’t join churches as we join clubs. We submit to them ... church membership is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church’s affirmation and oversight of a Christian’s discipleship and the Christian’s submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church ... In some ways, all this is like the “I do” of a marriage ceremony, which is why some have referred to a ... covenant. Church membership ... is all about a church taking specific responsibility for you, and you for a church.’<sup>12</sup>

But the NT aims higher than “link up with a church.” Love church! Live in light of it. Not the church building, love the believers who gather there. In the book *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion*, Kevin DeYoung writes:

‘get involved, become a member, stay there for the long haul ... worship there in spirit and truth, be patient with your leaders, rejoice when the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, bear with those who hurt you, and give people the benefit of the doubt. While you are there, sing like you mean it, say hi to the teenager no one notices, welcome the blue hairs and the nose-ringed, volunteer for the nursery once in awhile. And yes, bring your fried chicken to the potluck like everyone else, invite a friend to church, take the new couple out for coffee, give to...offering, be thankful someone vacuumed ... enjoy the Sundays that click for you, pray extra hard on the [ones] that don’t and don’t despise...’<sup>13</sup>

That’s what loving church looks like, things like that. The highest motive I can appeal to for committed love, is the love our Lord committed to. It’s the love of Christ that compels, and if we truly know His love we will grow to love what the Lord loves.

Eph 5:25: ...*Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her...*

So should I. May we grow to cherish the church like He does, v. 29

Matt 6:21 *for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

One of the more dynamic translations of Psalm 84 (Bible in Basic English) says it this way: <sup>2</sup> *The passion of my soul’s desire is for the house of the Lord; my heart and my flesh are crying out ...* <sup>4</sup> *Happy are they whose resting-place is in your house ...* <sup>10</sup> *For a day in your house is better than a thousand. It is better to be a door-keeper in the house of my God ...*

Do we have a passion for the church, the house of God? Pray for it.

Epaphras had a passion, a fervent love for and zeal for the local church in Colossae. Paul wrote to that church, Colossians 4:12-13:

“*Epaphras...always laboring fervently for you in prayers...I bear him witness that he has a **great zeal for you**, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.*” (NKJV, NAS ‘deep concern’)

His deep concern or hard work (ESV/NIV) was poured into the church. What does great zeal or passion for a church look like? Laboring in fervent prayer for a church and its people you love.

What does passionate love for a local church look like? Read any NT letter Paul writes to a church he loves (Romans -> Colossians). The foundation of Paul's love is Eph 5:25: *Christ loves this church*

May we as families love church more like Christ does. May it be to us, as Spurgeon called it, "The Dearest Place on Earth."

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<sup>1</sup> Josh Harris, *Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love With the Family of God* (Multnomah, 2004), p. 11-15.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Stone, "The Church's One Foundation," 1866.

<sup>3</sup> E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Eerdmans, 1972), Vol. 3, p. 470.

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in the Good of His People," preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church, March 1, 1987, [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)

<sup>5</sup> Larry McCall, "A Passionate Love," in *Loving Your Wife as Christ Loves the Church* (BMH Books, 2009), p. 92-93.

<sup>6</sup> Charitie Lees Smith (Bancroft), "Before the Throne of God Above," originally entitled the Advocate, written in 1863.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, (Baker, 1979), vol. 3, p. 399.

<sup>8</sup> As cited by Art Azurdia, in "Renewing a Passion for the Church,"

[www.spiritempoweredpreaching.com/sermons.htm](http://www.spiritempoweredpreaching.com/sermons.htm)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Dwight, "I Love Thy Kingdom Lord," in *Psalms of David*, 1800. Believed to be the oldest hymn by an American author still in common use.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Sullivan, "Forget the Church – Follow Jesus," *Newsweek*, 4/9/2012.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: Building Healthy Churches* (Crossway, 2012), p. 64-65.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Crossway, 2009), p. 226-27.