



*Love Jesus, Love His Church*  
Series: The Apostles' Creed [#8]  
Selected Scriptures  
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November 12, 2006

## Introduction

A student protestor once marched with a placard saying,

JESUS — YES!  
CHURCH — NO!

Other statements echoing that sentiment include

- “Jesus is cool, but His church is not.”
- “I love Jesus, but I don’t want anything to do with the church.”
- “Love Jesus, hate the church.”

People saying they love Jesus but not His church is not new, although some of what brings them to that place changes.

How do we respond to this thinking? First, we should realize that not everyone who loves Jesus but has a problem with the church is a *hard line critic* or opponent of the church. Some have become disillusioned with churches and church leaders. Others have felt left out, or not been able to connect. While some have drifted away because of the hectic pace of their lives, or one of a host of other reasons.

Our response must start with understanding two things. First the nature and purpose of the church that God gives us in the Bible; and then, how the church is living today as well as the thinking of people who love Jesus but not His church.

The section of the Apostles' Creed before us today as we approach the end of this series, states, “I believe in the holy catholic/universal/Christian church, [and] the communion of saints.” We will think about that with our own placard, “Love Jesus! Love His church!” I want to explore this statement by looking at two questions.

## Why Should I Love The Church?

The first question is “Why should I love the church?” The first answer is because Jesus Christ loves the church. In Ephesians 5, which kind of our anchor passage for the morning, beginning at verse 22 the apostle Paul addresses some basic family relationships. As he does that, he also gives us critical truth about Christ and His relationship to the church. We pick it up at verse 25.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (verses 25-27).

Christ has loved, and always will love His church. He does not have a *Plan B* for reaching the world and nurturing believers in this age. His plan is the church. He demonstrated and proved His love by dying on the cross to bring the church into being. We should love the church because Jesus loves the church.

Seeing this truth, immediately then there is an incongruity of someone saying “I love Jesus, but not the church.” Of course we do not and should not love teaching and actions of *the church* which do not measure up to the measure of Scripture. For the Christian there is no room for apathy or separation from the church. Christ loves the church and so should we.

Secondly, we should love the church because the church is Christ’s body. This is a good place to think about what the church is/is not. When the Bible speaks of the *church* it is not referring to a building or a denomination. The church in the Bible refers to people: to everyone who has repented of their sin and placed his/her faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. The word in the New Testament for church can be translated *assembly*. Its background was in the democratic governing of Greek city states. It was used of people who were *called out* from their homes and workplaces to act on the matters of governing their city state. It was a group of people *called out* for that purpose. In time the term was used more broadly to describe any assembly or group with a common purpose. The church consists of all those who have believed, who have been called out from the world by God to be with God.

The church, as the original form of the creed states, is *catholic*, meaning it is *universal*. It includes all regions, cultures, races and generations of the church age. It is made up of all the individuals, all the local assemblies or churches that are truly in Christ.

The church is Christ's body. This is stated frequently in the Bible. For example, 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." The church, as it has often been said, is more of an *organism* than an organization. It has organization, any organism has to have some organization. But it basically is a living and dynamic relationship of God's people to God, to each other, and in their mission, to the world.

We can't trace this image of Christ's body throughly now, but it tells us that we belong to Christ, that we have an interdependency on each other in the same way as the parts of our physical bodies do, that both our unique gifts and differences as well as our relatedness and dependancy are important, that we are placed in the body where God has chosen to enable growth, service and unity. We should love the church because it is Christ's body.

Thirdly, we should love the church is because Jesus Christ is committed to His church. In Matthew 16 Jesus had a frank question and answer teaching session with His disciples about who He really is. Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (verse 16). Then Jesus said,

"Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (verses 17-18).

Jesus gave Simon Barjona a new name, *Peter* or, in the language of the New Testament, *Petros*, which means *rock*. Then Jesus said, "upon this *rock* I will build my church." This second word "rock" is different from the first. It is *petra*, the feminine form of the word. Jesus was not saying that the church would be built on Peter, but on this truth He had revealed to Peter and which Peter affirmed, that is, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is the bedrock foundation for the church. There is no true church apart from Jesus Christ.

Having that cleared up a bit, I want you to see Jesus' commitment to His church, seen in two statements: "I will build my church." This is a positive, ongoing, affirmation. Jesus said I will build, keep on building, always be building My church. And if that isn't clear

enough, He makes the second statement — “the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Hades, remember, refers to death. So, Jesus told Peter and tells us, He will *keep on* building His church; it will never die, never become extinct.

That commitment of Christ to His church is seen back in our *anchor text* for the day, Ephesians 5. Christ *was* committed to His church — He died for it. Christ *is* committed to His church — He is building it. Christ *will* be committed to His church — He will “present it to Himself in all [its] glory,” holy and blameless.

We should love the church because Jesus Christ loves the church, because it is His body, and because He is committed to His church.

## How Should I Love The Church?

That brings us to the second question “How?” “How should I love the church?” First, have the same kind of commitment to it that Jesus Christ has. What kind of commitment did He have, does He have? As I noted just a moment ago from Ephesians 5, He died for it, He is building His church, and He will perfect it. Twice in this chapter Paul says Christ “gave Himself up for us” (verses 2, 25). That is *total commitment*.

Being a believer means much more than being saved from sin and everlasting punishment. It also means being saved to everlasting fellowship, worship and service of God. *And*, it calls for *our total commitment*. You may recall the old story of the chicken and the hog. They were walking past a church and noted a question on its outdoor sign, “What can we do to help the poor?” They began to discuss the question. After a while, the chicken said, “I’ve got it!” “We will help the poor by giving them a ham and eggs breakfast!” “No way!” the hog shot back. “That only means a *contribution* to you, but for me it’s a *total commitment*.”

When you have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, when you are part of His body, there is no *chicken’s way out* of commitment! God calls for total commitment to Him, His purposes and His program — and that includes the church.

Why do people who say they love Jesus but do not see serving the church, or the church itself as essential, or even important? For some, the answer lies in a lack of understanding of God’s truth about themselves and Christ’s church. Listen to the comments of one person

who clearly identifies herself as a believer. “What George Barna [a Christian researcher and writer] calls *moral relativism* I’d like to call privacy ... theocratic rules make us squeamish, it goes against our history, our grain, our personalities ... is that moral relativism or is it *just minding your own business?*” *Newsflash* for that person, for that kind of thinking, who God is and His truth are not determined by either a vote or private opinions.

Our love for the church is demonstrated in having “the same kind of commitment to it that Jesus Christ has.” A total commitment to Him and His people. That’s one of the reasons we pray on a specific Sunday of each (although certainly not the only time) for our brothers and sisters, parts of the church that are suffering because of taking their stand for Christ. It is part of our commitment to stand with them.

Secondly we should love the church by understanding as much as we can and being part of fulfilling its purpose and mission. What is the purpose of the church? Briefly, our purpose is to glorify God, that is, to bring praise and honor to Him, point to His splendor, majesty and greatness, bring it into public view. In Romans 15:6, Paul prayed that the church “may with one voice *glorify* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is our bottom line purpose. 1 Peter 4:11, speaking of worship and service, tells us we are to be speaking and serving “so that in all things God may be *glorified* through Jesus Christ.”

Our mission as the church is how we fulfill this purpose. In the world the key component is to reach people for Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded us in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy spirit.” Later, in Acts chapter 1, verse 8 Jesus commanded, “you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” We are to be effective salt and light in the world. This touches every area of life and need of people. The bottom line of our mission in the world is to rescue those who are perishing in sin.

In the church, sharing just a few things this morning, our mission begins with worshiping God together. Jesus, in John 4:24, said true worship is worship “in spirit and in truth.” In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul speaks of the times “when you assemble,” and goes on to give directions for worship. Hebrews 10:25 directs us not to “[forsake] our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another as you see the day [that is, the day of Christ’s return] drawing near.” You see, the “I don’t need the church” did not

originate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; it was around in the first century. God spoke through that writer saying “Don’t do that! Worship together!”

Our mission also includes teaching God’s truth to each other. Paul wrote to his young protege Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” I am convinced that there would not be as much apathy about the church today if the church as a whole was carrying out this part of mission as it should. We are to teach God’s truth to each other and grow in that truth.

Building on that, our mission is to serve and equip each other for ministry and maturity. Ephesians 4:11-16 is a beautiful passage describing God’s gifts to and in the church so that it will serve, equip and mature.

Add to that sharing and caring for each other. The Creed speaks of “the communion of the saints.” *Communion* refers to sharing together with. *Saints*, or *holy ones*, refers to each and every believer. We are separated from sin and to Christ, holy in Him. A helpful exercise to see how we are to share and care for each other is to check the phrases “one another” and “each other” in the New Testament.

The most frequently mentioned one is to love each other, one another. But there are more. We are to

- be at peace with and be devoted to each other
- to accept each other
- to have humility and give preference to one another
- to care for, comfort and encourage each other
- not to complain about or judge each other
- to forgive one another
- to stimulate each other to good deeds
- to pray for each other
- to be tolerant with one another
- to tolerate each other
- to be kind and build each other up
- to have the same mind, that is, to be in unity
- to bear each other’s burdens
- to have tender hearts for each other

to have fellowship with each other  
we love the church when we share with and care for each other in that way

One more way in which we should love the church is to understand and look forward to its future. Very briefly, the future of the church, of everyone of us who know Jesus Christ is that ultimately we will be in His presence in His presence forever. That happens one by one when life on earth is completed or when Christ comes for the church, which could be at any moment.

Then what? If Christ returned for us in the next few seconds, besides not having to listen to the rest of this talk, what do you be doing? do in heaven? The cartoons paint a picture of sitting around on clouds, strumming harps. *Hardly!* The Bible tells us there will be fellowship, worship, service, rewards and blessings forever. The “marriage of the Lamb and the Bride” in Revelation chapters 19 & 21 pictures the special fellowship of the church with Christ that we will enter into and enjoy forever. There are not a lot of specific descriptions, but that is part of our future. One of the areas of ministry will be reigning, ruling with Christ. Revelation chapter 1, verse 6, “He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.” Some of that is during Christ’s millennial or thousand year reign on earth. Chapter 20 verse 6 states that we will reign with Him for a thousand years. And in that thousand years Revelation 2:26 speaks of having authority over nations. Again, we are not given details no that. But that is not the end of this aspect of service. Revelation 22:5 states that the church “they will reign forever and ever.” We will have that service, responsibility from and for Him.

## **Conclusion.**

Love Jesus, Love His Church. Let me close with a couple of observations and suggestions for us in our time and place in 2006. When we talk about how people think and feel about the church the first, and often last thing many launch into is different models, methods, and styles of being the church. That has a place, but it is not the most important thing.

Much of the diversity, confusion and even hostility about what the church should be and do eventually boils down to a couple of things. There is a lot that is good about the church in North America. But there are some things that are not in focus. One of them is that the church in North America has not been and is not doing a good job in its mission of reaching

the unsaved for Christ. Year after year the church does not keep up with the growth of population. Year after year there are more people in real numbers and as a percentage of the population who are not churched, let alone true believers. In the 1960s along with a shift in North American culture, the church was no longer seen as a socially important feature of life by many, and people who didn't really believe stopped attending church. So within the church the call went out to take evangelism out of the church facilities and more into the world. That made good Biblical and practical sense. But we have had a problem. The problem has been that we haven't done it that well in the world of our neighborhoods, schools, and the workplace. So, starting in the 80s the momentum shifted back to "How do we get people into the church?" that is, the facilities?" Market driven methods and styles multiplied. But on the whole we still are not doing the job well. *We must do better!* That means each one of us. It begins with me, you, our church, churches in our city and country. Again, I believe this is one of the fundamental underpinnings of the confusion about and even opposition and hostility toward what we are to be as the church.

Secondly, we are not doing a good job in the church as a whole of teaching and training, encouraging and equipping God's people. In short, of being the church. And so, it should not surprise us that a growing number of people who say "I love Jesus but I really don't see any use for the church." Frankly, no model of the church has *a lock* on being the church as it ought to be whether ultra-traditional or ultra-contemporary; whether it be ancient – modern or post-modern; soul winning station; classroom style; or fellowship group; and all the ones in between and beyond. It is past time for the North American church to end its love affair with theories and models as well as with letting others and programs do the work of evangelism, and return to the centrality of true love of Christ and His church.

Love Jesus! Love His church! As you spend time with God now, thank Him for the church — that the church is Christ's body which He loves and will keep on building. Thank Him for the past, present and future of the church. Evaluate your love for the church, its role and importance in your life. Determine to love Jesus and love His Church.

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