

OH, HOW HE LOVED HER!

In the Ephesian letter, Paul wrote of the most moving love story of all time:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.... For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church (5:25–27, 29).

This supreme love is further documented by Paul in Acts 20:28, which tells us that Christ purchased his church “with his own blood.” Surely, there is no greater sign of true love than the willing sacrifice of one’s own life for the safety and well-being of the beloved. Christ’s love for the church is such that He feels every injury men inflict upon her as if it were inflicted upon Him personally (Acts 9:4).

If the Son of God, possessing infinite wisdom and power, knowing all of the deep secrets of the universe, having perfect knowledge of the important and unimportant, of the valuable and the valueless, would so love and esteem that entity He designated “the church,” then there must be some weighty lessons for us poor, limited mortals to learn from that affection.

The church is people—believing, penitent, baptized, redeemed people. But, the church is not only people. It is composed of people who are charged to live in a certain way because they are in the kingdom and because they are redeemed (1 Tim. 3:15). There is a structure and pattern to the work and worship of the church, which causes it to take on a distinct identity in the New Testament. Only when the church behaves as

her husband desires is she that glorious and holy bride, having neither spot, wrinkle, nor blemish.

Christ loves the church “in general,” but He is as deeply concerned over local churches (cf. Rev. 2–3). If Christ so deeply loves the church and we are to follow His example (1 John 2:6), then we must love the church supremely. Yes, this means we must love one another as people who compose the church. It also means that we must love the behavior pattern Christ gave to the church and guard that glorious purity with our very lives. It means that we will love the work and worship of that holy body so that her progress and welfare are our principal concern. Oh, how Christ loved (and loves) the church! How does your love for her compare?

— Dub McClish

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