

For Love of the Church

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Sunday, October 13, 2019

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

We have started a brief series on the doctrine of the church, somewhat of a topical series, you might say. We're studying a few key doctrines that we are treating as a beginning toolbox for Christian living, Christian living dealing with the doctrines of regeneration, we have been born again not of our own effort or our own ability but by the power of the Spirit of God; the doctrine of providence, that God reigns once he saves us. He's always over all but as we come into life in Christ, we come into a realization that the God who saved us is the God who rules over all details. Life is not random and our circumstances are not subject to random forces, but they are all carefully orchestrated by God in order to accomplish his will in our lives and in the purposes that he has for his people.

Now we've gone on, we're not at all claiming that this is a comprehensive toolbox, that's why we're calling it a beginning toolbox, we just think that some of these doctrines are especially key and important for us and now we have come to the doctrine of the church, and that might surprise many people, that you would go there when you talk about a beginning toolbox for Christian living, but the reality, my friends, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, is this, is that God saved you and when he did that, he placed you into the body of Christ and when he placed you into the body of Christ, he placed you into a spiritual organism, you might say, that has many members and therefore he saved you to be a part of something bigger than yourself. Christianity is designed to bring you into relationship with Christ, with God vertically, first of all, but then also into relationship with his people and that's what we are trying to bring out here in these few brief messages that we're currently in the midst of.

When we come into the body of Christ in our salvation and when we come into a local church in order to share in the life of that church, you might say, the question is this: what should define our attitude toward the church? How should we think about the church? And what motivates us in our involvement in the church? What should be driving our thoughts and desires and our actions as we gather together not just on a Sunday morning or on a Tuesday evening, but as we gather together as a pattern of life, as a body of believers in this place where God has providentially put us all together. What is the attitude that one should bring into the church? And notice how I phrase that. You know, we kind of presuppose, or I am presupposing the existence of body life within the walls of a church, okay? Whatever else is happening, there's a life going on in a congregation and the question is, as people come from outside and step into that body, what should their mindset be as they enter into it? What do we bring as our motivation into the life of

a body of believers? That's a pretty important question and that's what we're going to talk about here today.

Now what is it that I want when I go to church? What's good for me? What will satisfy me? What is in my interest and what do I want out of my church experience? That is so common that it might surprise some of you that I'm even challenging that as being as something that needs to be evaluated because the tendency would be to think, "Well, of course, why else would I go to church except to find out what it has for me?" And beloved, what I want to say to you with the tenderest, most gracious attitude that I can muster up in my fallen heart, is to say this, that that self-centered presupposition is the root of all sorts of evil. To approach the body of Christ with the attitude of, "What's in it for me," is completely contrary to the entire spirit of Christianity and I want to show you that today, and to show you hopefully a better place to start our thinking.

You know, let's you and I, whatever else everybody else does, let's you and I start at a different starting point. Let's you and I bring a different presupposition to life in the body of Christ both as those of you that are new coming to our church, those of you that are blessed because you're such a blessing to us, established members of Truth Community Church. Let's go back and refresh our minds and for those of you maybe that are contemplating whether you want to pursue church membership or not, this is what our church would say to you to consider in light of the word of God. So rather than saying what do I want, what's good for me as I come to church and consider what I want, let's you and I give preeminence to a different biblical principle, the biblical principle of love. Of love, beloved. Let's you and I give preeminence to the biblical principle of love and we're going to kind of define that term as we go along here and look at two different aspects of love in relationship to the church.

The title of today's message is "For Love of the Church," and the whole idea in the attitude of Christ toward his people, everything he did was for the sake of love for the church and therefore if we are of his people, that is going to be our mindset as well, that what we bring into the walls of an existing body is an attitude, is an emphasis, is a priority on love and on what we give as we come. We're gonna look at this from two perspectives: a vertical perspective and a horizontal perspective, you could say. The attitude of Christ toward the church and the resultant attitude that should mark his people within the life of the church during the short years that God gives us to be amongst his people.

So point 1, what I want to bring out to you is this and this is kind of an indicative statement, it is a statement about who Christ is and what he did, point 1: Christ gave himself for love of the church. Christ gave himself for love of the church and it is remarkable how often Scripture speaks about the attitude of Christ that caused him to do what he did, his work for the salvation of his people, and over and over again it ties the love of Christ for the church with the reality that he gave himself for the church.

Look, if you will, and we're just going to bounce across a few passages here and that's okay. This is not the only way to preach, by any means, but at times it is the necessary

way to preach so that you can synthesize different passages of Scripture and come to a doctrinal understanding of something that's very critical that might be missed in the details of other approaches to preaching that we, you know, that we're glad to do.

So Christ gave himself for love of the church and we began our discussion of the church last week with this starting premise. This is where we started everything else on our discussion of the church: the church belongs to Christ. It is his and it is his by right of purchase. You go into a store, you gather some goods into your cart, you pay the money for them, they now belong to you because you paid the price to take ownership of them. Well, in a far greater, far infinite better scale, Christ owns his people because he came into the world and paid the price that was necessary to redeem sinners, to deliver them from their bondage to sin and Satan and their self-centered approach to life. So Christ by the shedding of his blood paid what was necessary to obtain the release of his people from their spiritual slavery.

That's what redemption means and the question is, it doesn't, maybe doesn't get asked and answered quite often enough, I don't know how you could ever speak of this theme enough, but let's go back to it again: what motivated Christ to do that? Why did Christ give his life for unworthy sinners like you and like me? Why would he do that? It's not like we added anything to the perfections of his essence. It's not like, you know, it's not like we somehow added to a lack that he previously had. No, it wasn't like that at all and in John 3:16, if you would turn there with me, I realize you know the verse but even for you young people under the age of 12, 10, 12 and below, this is such a central verse for you to read, to memorize, to think on because in it is encapsulated the very nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In John 3:16 it says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." God loved the world. God sent his Son. In the language of the text, God gave his Son. The point that we're making here this morning is that God's love prompted him to give. Say that again and I'm gonna just keep repeating this kind of theme throughout our time together here this morning. God's love prompted him to give, to seek and to give of himself, to give his Son for the betterment of the world and for the particular salvation of those who would believe in his Son. His love prompted him to give.

Now beloved, oh, where that goes is just remarkable! You see, the love of God in Christ, the love of Christ in seeking out and saving a people of his own, was not a mere passing sentiment, a mere impulse of flash of emotion, a flash of generosity that came and went, the love of Christ for his people – watch this – led him to do something, it motivated him to act and to act and to give of himself.

So if you would turn to the book of Galatians 2 with me, just past Romans and the two Corinthian letters, in Galatians, Galatians 2:20 where the Apostle Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [and then he gives this relative clause to describe Jesus and what he did], the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Now look, this all gets pretty humbling pretty quickly when we remember our prior rebellion against Christ, when we remember even now as believers

our inconsistent attitudes and love for our Savior, we wax, wane and cold and hot, and we go back and forth and we're so inconsistent in our love and devotion to him and yet we come to Scripture and we see that he, knowing all of that in advance, loved us to the point that he gave himself up for us, and in that giving up of himself, what Paul is obviously referring to is the fact that he gave himself up for us on the cross of Calvary, that in love he went and he suffered in our place, that in love he came and he lived a perfect life and established the righteousness that God would assign to us in our salvation, a righteousness that is outside of us that God accepts on our behalf. Christ gave himself up for us, gave up, relinquished the glory of heaven to come to earth in love living the perfect life, in love going to the cross, in love bearing our sins, bearing the wrath of God against our sins, representing us, standing in our place, in love doing what was necessary to save us, to redeem us, to deliver us. A price that we never could have paid on our own, a price that he paid when he was under no obligation to do so, he voluntarily gave himself up for us, John 10:17-18. This is what he voluntarily did, he gave himself for us, he gave himself for love of the church. Look at that clause there again in Galatians 2:20, "the Son of God loved me and gave Himself up for me." And the way that he laid himself down evokes a love within our hearts for him as well.

So beloved, as you're thinking about Christ and the way that he loved the church, what I want you to see is this, is that Jesus Christ gave all of himself at a great sacrifice for our well-being, right? In one sense this isn't complicated. We see the broad sweep of it and we just summarize it and reduce it to simple principles, is that Christ gave all of himself at a personal sacrifice for our well-being without which we would all be lost. Wow, I love him for that, don't you?

And beloved, we see here in Galatians 2:20 that he loved us by name, he loved us individually. He thought of you in his sufferings. And you go beyond that and, you know, there's just this multifaceted dimension to us, he loved us individually but there's also a corporate dimension to it and this is where we kind of transition a little bit. We shouldn't, you and I should not be thinking about this purely in individualistic terms here this morning, but to recognize the breadth of the intentions and the love of Christ in his saving actions.

In Matthew 20:28, I invite you to turn there with me as well, Matthew 20:28, and we'll go to verse 26 to lead into the context of the verse just ever so briefly. Jesus had said in verse 25, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them." Give a pagan authority and he rules over people. Jesus said, "It is not this way among you," among my disciples, this is not the way it's done, "but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as," here's the parallel, here's the analogy as Jesus speaks about himself in the third person, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." For many. There's this corporate dimension to it and Jesus loved the church, he loved the many and he gave himself up for them.

Now your mind should be expanding and the light bulbs should be going on in your mind to recognize the practical dimension to the love of Christ for his people. That love of Christ motivated him to give himself for the good of his people. That's why he came. And you can turn to Ephesians 5 for another moment, if you will, as I'm about to wrap up this first point here this morning. Ephesians 5 in the passage that I read to open the service, Ephesians 5:2, Paul echoing the theme of that passage in Matthew 20 that we just read as it talks about the attitude of the people of God amongst each other, being derivative of the attitude of Christ toward them, in chapter 5, verse 2, he says, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." He comes back to that again as he addresses husbands in verse 25, he says, "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." Christ delivering his people, making them better by his actions and by his love.

So beloved, I trust that you've seen from this 5, 6 passages, however many its been that I've alluded to here, is that the love of Christ produced a giving in him and – watch this – a giving of himself, a deliverance of his very life over to the salvation of his people. So Christ relinquished his glory in heaven for a time, lived on earth in poverty, in perfect righteousness, and ultimately out of love gave his own life for his church. It was no sentiment. It was no emotion. There was a deliberate act of his volition aimed at obtaining a good for his people. He gave his very own self for us. He gave himself for us. Do you see it, beloved? He didn't appoint a proxy to go and do the work for him. He didn't send, God didn't send an agent, God himself came and gave himself for us.

Now that's the vertical dimension. How does that impact us within the walls of a local church? How does that impact our attitudes, our actions, our approach, our attitudes, our actions, our very approach to life in a local church? And by the Spirit of God's help, I hope to be able to share this with you in a clear way that will probably be convicting for many of us, that will have an element of correction for us, but also elements of affirmation as well. So it's with a sense of dependence on the Spirit of God that we go into this second part of today's message.

Point 2: Christians should give themselves for love of the church. You see, there's a parallel and it could be no other way. Christ gave himself for love of the church. As a result of his love for the church, he was motivated to give himself for it, for us. Now in like fashion, those of us who have been redeemed by him, what we do is we give ourselves for love of the church. You give yourself for love of the church. There is this giving of self that is central to an approach to life in the body of Christ.

And in my opinion, that conclusion is utterly inescapable. It is profoundly derivative of the love of Christ. Christ's love for the church, beloved, sets the inevitable standard and pattern for the way that his people think about the church. Beloved, it could be no other way. It could not possibly be any other way. Christ loved the church and he loved us and we are saved and benefit from his redeeming work if you have repented and put your faith in Christ, and when we recognize his love and we recognize the humble depths to

which he went, we can't do anything but respond in love to the love that was first set upon us, right? But it's not simply an attitude toward Christ, we love – watch this, this is a really critical hinge point, transition point in the message – you see, true Christians love what Christ loves. If Christ loved the church, then true Christians will love the church also because they love what their Savior loved. He loved me. I say, "Lord, what do You love? Oh, You love Your people? You gave Yourself for Your people? Then I'm seeing what my path forward is in my involvement in the body of Christ. It's a giving of myself for the love of the church."

Now beloved, we could talk about this at two levels, we could just talk about it generally in terms of how Christians generally should think about the church, but today I guess my focus is a little bit more specific in that this influences the way that we all should think about church membership and being a part of a local body which is a local manifestation of the universal church for whom Christ died. Beloved, I don't know how else to say this. I've labored over this. Church membership is not rooted in what pleases me. It's not about preeminently what makes me happy. Church membership in light of who owns the church and what Christ did for the church and how he gave himself for the church, church membership should somehow be a reflection of that so that we view church membership as a giving of ourselves for those for whom Christ died. Christ gave himself to save a people. We come and we associate with a local body and identify with the local body in membership. That means that our attitude toward it is you always start everything with Christ. What did Christ think? What did he do? He gave himself for the church. What do I come when I start to become involved in the life of the body of a church? Oh, I give myself for it. My preeminent priority is not what's best for me, but how can I give myself in love for these people for whom Christ died.

Now what I want to show you in our remaining time here is the inevitable way that Christ himself brought forth this application. He taught this in his own words and then his appointed apostles gave us a lot of indication of what that looks like in the life of a body. Now let's just step back. You know, look, the longer I go in preaching, the more I repeat myself, the more I want to emphasize similar themes again and again because I just really believe that that's how they get down into our hearts for us and they start to change us and define our very character. So some of this isn't going to be new at all, but Christ taught the preeminence of love in his own words. What did he say the greatest commandment was? Mark 12:30, you can also see it in Matthew 22, "You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.'"

Now just in light of that, beloved, just in light of that great commandment focusing specifically on the second one, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," just from that general principle it should be obvious to us that we should not be choosing a church that's simply based on who caters to us with the best coffee, with the best wifi, with the best light show, and what makes me happy and what do I want. Do you see how when that is the presupposition, the approach, and what am I going to get out of this, beloved, what you see in that is that it is the exact antithesis of what the Spirit of Christ in his church is

and what led to it. Christ gave himself and now we have cultivated and we have conditioned people over decades to come to the church saying, "What have you got for me?" There is nothing that could be a greater reversal of the Spirit of what the body of Christ is supposed to be like than that, people coming with selfish motivations for what they can get out of it. It's entirely mixed up.

Jesus set the priority on love amongst his disciples in the Gospel of John 13. Turn there with me, if you would. John 13:34-35, and Jesus just lays it out. He says in verse 34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The context in which Jesus is saying these words is what's known as the Last Supper. In this context, he washes humbly his disciples' feet. He leaves from there to go knowingly to hand himself over to Roman authorities, knowing that Judas was betraying him, knowing that he was on the verge of going to the cross, and in that context of humble sacrifice, giving himself for love of his disciples, Jesus says, "You love each other like I've shown you how to do it, with humility, with the other person's interest in mind."

Look over at John 15:12. This wasn't a one-time, isolated, out of context passage here. In John 15:12 you see how urgently important this is to Christ. And you know, and I just, I read what he's saying here in light of what was on his mind and what was immediately in his future, and it just becomes even more poignant, even more pressing upon in its demands upon our conscience, realizing that in the midst of the greatest act of self-sacrifice, this is what he is speaking to his disciples. John 15:12, he says, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." He's giving his life, he's laying it down. He said, "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." And then he circles back and he concludes that section saying, "This I command you, that you love one another."

You see, beloved, when we talk about love for each other within the body of Christ, we're not trying to manipulate people to do something that they don't want to do, we're not interested in that at all. What we're trying to be faithful to is the fact that Christ says, "This is the way it is with My people." And we can't diminish that, qualify it, excuse the lack of it without being disobedient to Christ because he said, "This is My commandment. I command you to love one another." It's therefore placed in the realm not only of understanding but in the volitional obedience in response to the one who gave himself for us. His example and his teaching, his death, his life, the whole package of Christ shows us that there is to be this giving of ourselves in the context of the church.

The New Testament epistles, Romans through Jude, the New Testament epistles confirm what we're saying here, illustrate it, and command this love with the famous what are

called the "one anothers. The "one anothers." So it would be a very right and fair question at this time for you to say, "Okay, I get it. Love and giving ourselves, what does that look like? What does that mean?" Well, far better than me trying to illustrate it with human examples from the 21st century, far better to see what the Spirit of God, who recorded all of Scripture for us, how he takes and applies that in the context of relationships within a local church.

So what does love in the church look like? Here's five to start with. Love one another. Live in harmony with one another. Welcome one another. Instruct one another. Care for one another. Romans 12:10, 16; Romans 15:7 and 14; 1 Corinthians 12:25. And what you see is that there is this mutuality that takes place in the context of relationships that assumes that there is interaction and presence with one another and this is what is happening in the context of relationships within the body of Christ, this is how we do it with one another. This is what it looks like.

The great J. C. Ryle said this and I love the practical tender nature of this man's words. He said and I quote, and listen carefully, beloved, those of you especially that might be prone to being critical of the failures of people that you see in a local church. Hear what he says those of you that perhaps are tempted to have a superior attitude toward others that haven't attained your elevated level of sanctification. Hear what this man says, this pastor from the 19th century. He said and I quote, "Our Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull students in His school, many raw soldiers in His army, many lame sheep in His flock. Yet Christ bears with them all and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to do likewise with his brethren."

But there's more. There's more. As you go on in these "one anothers," you see Scripture telling us to serve one another, Galatians 5:13; to bear one another's burdens, Galatians 6:2; to bear with one another in love, Ephesians 4:2; to be kind to one another, Ephesians 4:32; to forgive one another, Ephesians 4:32. Relationships presupposing that you get wronged and nicked along the way, love, be kind, be forgiving, bear with each other in your weaknesses and in your faults.

What does it mean to love one another? John MacArthur says this about the "one anothers," he said, "By putting these directives into practice, God's people edify the body of Christ and exemplify the love of Christ to a watching world." It's relational. It's a giving of yourself.

But there's more. There's more. He goes on to say, Scripture does, address one another in songs, Ephesians 5:19; count others as more significant than yourself, Philippians 2:3. By the way, these quotations are from the English Standard Version, for the sake of some consistency. Do not lie to one another, Colossians 3:9; encourage one another, 1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11; seek to do good to one another, 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

What does it mean to love one another in the context of the body of Christ? We're starting to see from Scripture how multifaceted of various colors the painting is. This is profound and it is profoundly relational and it assumes commitment to one another over the course

of time. The theologian Bruce Milne says this, he says, "The unity of life in Christ should express itself in genuine and tangible care for and commitment to one another.

But there's still more. Just the extensive number of these has a collective impact on us that goes beyond the individual statements. And so there's still more. I have just read 15 and there's still more. Somehow this must be important to God and important to Christ. Do you get it? This must be important because it's said in these ways so many times. I'm not angry, I'm just being emphatic for the sake of Christ.

It goes on and says, Scripture does, stir up one another to love and good works, Hebrews 10:24; confess your sins to one another, James 5:16; pray for one another, James 5:16. But there's more, keep loving one another, 1 Peter 4:8; show hospitality to one another, 1 Peter 4:9; clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, 1 Peter 5:5. That's 21. I'll stop there.

What does it mean to love one another in the context of the body of Christ? Charles Spurgeon says this, he says, "The church is not perfect but woe to the man who finds pleasure in pointing out her imperfections. Christ loved His church and let us do the same."

As I was preparing all of these things, I thought back to when I was back in California and in a much different kind of position. We lived quite a ways from the church. It was not convenient to get there. Morning service, evening service, time for an evening service came and I did not want to go. I had an idea of what was going to be preached, that's not gonna be relevant to me. I don't want to go. I'm tired. It's been a long day and it's a drive down and a drive back and I just want to stay home. I know that none of you have ever felt that way about coming to church, right? But I have. You're all ahead of me, I guess. But we went and as we're driving down, my attitude hadn't gotten any better along the way. But we got there and I'll never forget what happened that particular night and probably happened on more than one occasion, but I remember there's this sweet woman, widow in her 80s probably at the time, sitting alone. She knew me. She'd heard me teach. She appreciated me and I went over and I sat down and I just talked to her. She was really encouraged by that. She responded to it. She told me, you know, words to the effect of, "I'm just so glad you came. This really meant a lot for me for you to spend the time with me." A few minutes there and, you know, went back to my seat. That was so convicting. I had framed the whole night about what was in it for me, had decided nothing was and nearly didn't go, and then I realized that the whole point of me going that night was not for my sake, it was for hers. I needed to give of myself to her. There was an aspect of encouragement to her in that point in her life that God had appointed me to do. Such a shame that I won't get any eternal reward for that because my attitude was so rotten about it.

But there you go, and in that little microscopic microcosm of it, beloved, that's part of what I'm trying to say. You see, our whole attitude of what's going to be in this for me today is entirely misguided and entirely contrary to the spirit of the New Testament and to what Christ did for us. There's this giving of self and maybe even if you don't want to

be here, maybe there's something that you have to give to somebody else who does. And I'm not just talking about whether you come to one service or not, that's not my point at all, it's about a whole mindset about how do I think about the church, and that becomes even more specific in application when we think about church membership.

Now beloved, let me make a couple of things really clear at the start. You need to understand everything I'm about to say from here on out through this prism. Church membership is voluntary. Church membership is voluntary. We don't compel people to become members. In fact, the truth of the matter is, it's good for you to know this, that many many many times people have come to our church initially excited about it, say, "I want to become a member right now!" And my attitude and my counsel to them all the time in that is, "Friend, you need to wait. Take your time. Get to know us. Let us get to know you. Don't be in a hurry here because church membership is serious and you might find after the initial enthusiasm wears off that maybe you find out that you don't think our church is for you." And a lot of times they move on to other places and that's fine. That's fine. We don't want anyone here that doesn't truly want to be here, okay? It's so important for you to understand that. Church membership is voluntary and it's certainly not compulsory from the elders. Not at all. But beloved, once church membership has been embraced, once you have given yourself to a church, the biblical requirement is that you love that church, you give of yourself to that church.

And somehow, beloved, and this is why I felt like I needed to say this, what I'm going to say over these next couple of minutes, somehow people miss this. They miss the most fundamental basic idea of things. In fact, many people miss it, and I'm speaking about principles here, not people in what I'm about to say. We're talking about principles for up-building, not to criticize decisions that other people have made in past times, okay? We're talking about the future spirit of our church going forward in a position of understanding, understanding it by the positive precepts of Scripture and reinforcing that by some places where it's been missed.

So this is what happens over the course of years in a local church. I've seen it with my own eyes. People become members and then literally leave the church a few weeks later. Where is love in that? Perhaps they stay for a while but then they leave without warning. They send an email in the middle of the night, "I'm out of here." And you look at that and you say, "But I thought we loved each other? I thought we loved each other and you're just walking away and you didn't say anything beforehand, that there was a problem or that there was some dissatisfaction? Where's the love in that? Wow, I thought we loved each other?" Some will run at the first sign of accountability. Others flat-out say no when you ask for a meeting for reconciliation.

Friends here today, do you see how those kinds of things and more violate biblical love? Nod for me if you see that. Do you see it? Do you see how that is a violation of biblical love, the love that gives of self? Look, it's not that people can't leave once they become members. People retire. People relocate. You know, it's not about that at all. It's not that you come in and you can't go out. People will come and go. My point here is not about leaving at all. My point here is about loving. It's about giving yourself to the people of

Christ whom you publicly promised in the presence of God that you would love. That's what we're talking about. I have to say these things for the sake of Christ. It's his church. Somebody has to say it.

Now just to be real clear in terms of where I'm coming from with you that are here this morning, if those people had stayed, do you know what they would have done? They would have learned love from many of you. They would have learned it from you by the way that you are living your life in the context of Truth Community Church. Absolutely. Maybe they don't see it from me, they'd see it from you.

They could have learned love of the church from you who consistently attend despite the personal difficulties of all of the travel inconvenience. They'd learn the love of Christ, they'd learn to love the church from people like you.

They'd learn from you, they'd learn from the woman who consistently shows up with meals for the sick and insists on no recognition in return. They'd learn about the love of the church from you.

They would learn from you who give of your earthly resources for the anonymous gifting to the private needs within the body. They'd learn. They'd learn from that. They'd say, "Oh, that's what the love of the church looks like? I get it."

They'd learn from the internationally recognized scientist who freely gives his sparse time to pastoral care in the local body. They'd learn from him. They'd learn from a man like that what love of the church looks like.

They'd learn from the young families that consistently bring their children to be with us on a consistent basis at our most inconvenient meeting times. They'd learn what love of the church looks like from you. They would learn from you.

They would learn from our outstanding musicians, our devoted choir members who refuse to take even a week off. They'd learn what love of the church looks like.

They'd learn from you, the men who have physically demanding jobs, working all day, worn out, and then come and initiate conversations with new people to show them welcome and concern for their well-being. They'd learn the love of the church from you.

I have and I'm pretty dull and stupid. They'd learn from the tender-hearted women with unbelieving husbands who long to be with God's people, to hear God's word. They come, they stay as long as they can and then they hustle back to tend to those family responsibilities with mates who are not on the same page with them spiritually. They'd learn the love of the church from you.

They would learn from you, the parents who come to worship the God who has still not answered their many prayers for the salvation of their wayward children. They would learn from you what love of the church looks like.

You see, they would learn from you who came long distances, even relocated your families, relocated your house to be with a people where you thought you could be with believers who shared in your convictions about the word of God. They'd learn what the love of the church looks like from you.

You're teaching and you don't even know it. You're living this out and you're not even aware of it. That's the beauty of it. That's what happens when God's people love the church, their lives testify to the great value of the people of God.

They'd learn from you who establish hospitality again and again and every new request is just a welcome opportunity to serve with gladness. They'd learn from you.

Yeah, you see, you're living illustrations of the love I'm talking about. I could go on with those illustrations but you get my point. You give yourself. That's what we do in church membership. That's what we do with each other, we give of ourselves. Some have less time, less resources, less abilities to give than others who have a lot, each one according to their means. It's not that there's a graded scale and the more time you spend, the more godly you are. That's not the way it works at all. That's not it. There's this giving of yourself that I believe marks life at Truth Community Church and I just want you to know I love you for it.

What's the spirit of it all? How could we measure this? Well, let me end on this illustration from the life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones that I've quoted in other contexts before. Some people are surprised to learn that Martyn Lloyd-Jones had risen to prominence as a medical doctor in London before he left the practice to enter Christian ministry. His decision to leave medicine was not lightly made, in fact, he later said it was a great struggle. There was a degree of attachment that he had to a doctor's lifestyle that he first had to lay aside, and in the midst of the struggle, Martyn Lloyd-Jones went to a theater performance with some of his friends. The glamour of the play, the theater and the surrounding city sights left many of them enchanted with the spectacular evening that they had shared together, but on that night there was a different kind of attraction that captivated Martyn Lloyd-Jones' attention when he left the theater after the conclusion of the performance. In his own words he said, "A Salvation Army band came along playing some hymn tunes and I knew that these were my people. I suppose I had enjoyed the play but when I heard this band and the hymns, I said, 'These are my people. These are the people I belong to and I'm going to belong to them.'" And what came on the heels of that was four decades of some of the best preaching since the times of the Apostle Paul because he gave himself to the people of God and to the word of God.

That supremely gifted man gave himself to God's people and so, friends, I simply ask what about you? Do you give of yourself to God's people? Will you give of yourself to God's people? May God help us all to examine our hearts and respond righteously.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.