
Sermon Notes

April 3, 2016

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

What Makes a Church a Church?

Ephesians 5:25-27

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

What's Different?

- ❖ We know what a church isn't... but what makes a church a church?
 - what does it mean to be the people of God's own choosing? (*cf.* 1 Peter 2:9-10)
 - what do these people do? how do they think? respond? act?
- ❖ What distinguishes Jesus' church from a club, social/civic organization, a synagogue or a mosque?
 - these are vital questions for us to be able to answer
 - we need to clarify our understanding of what we believe and why we believe it

The Church's One Foundation

- ❖ Jesus is building His church on the rock solid, unshakable confession Peter makes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (*cf.* Matthew 16:17-18)
 - this is the Bible's first mention of "the church"
 - when we confess faith in Jesus Christ, He unites us to Himself **AND** to His church [*i.e.* His living body]
 - we become part of God's "called-out" people
- ❖ Those who belong to Christ belong to His church
 - identifying and affiliating with a local assembly of like-minded believers is not optional
 - Chuck Colson: Commitment to Jesus' church and to Jesus' purposes for His church are "indistinguishable from our commitment to Him."

Jesus Died to Create the Church

- ❖ Christianity is not a solo enterprise, it is a team endeavor
 - Jesus bought the church with His own blood
 - Jesus is preparing the church to be His spotless bride

- ❖ Being a Christian entails having a corporate identity
 - the church of Jesus Christ is a new community
 - Carl Henry: "the new society of the twice-born"
- ❖ We have been bought with a price for God's purposes (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
 - Jesus died to **purchase** His church
 - Jesus died to **purify** His church
 - Jesus died to **present** the church to Himself
- ❖ Only Jesus can make a church, build a church, cleanse a church, and keep a church

The Church: Past, Present, Future

- ❖ In the **past**, Jesus shed His blood on Calvary to purchase His church
- ❖ In the **present**, Jesus is actively engaged in purifying His church
 - through His living presence within us and the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit
 - through the ministry of His Word
 - the Holy Spirit applies God's Word to our hearts
 - the Word does its work

- ❖ In the **future** Jesus will present the church to Himself *in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*
- ❖ Let us continue to seek the Lord, asking Jesus to
 - revive us, retool us, reshape us, reform us into the church He died for us to be
 - work through His Word to convict us of and cleanse us from our sin
 - be more fully and more wholly united with Him and each other for the purposes that He purchased us and joined us together

Personal Application

1. How would you describe the differences between Jesus' church and a club, social/civic organization, synagogue or mosque to someone who has no Christian background?
2. What value do you place on your membership in and affiliation with a local body of believers?
3. In general, do you tend to face life as a "lone ranger" or with a sense of corporate identity and solidarity with others? Do the Scriptures this sermon is based on call you to reevaluate your patterns of thinking and relating with others? If so, what changes will you make, and how will you make them?
4. In the present, Jesus is actively engaged in purifying His church. How is Jesus' purifying work showing up and shining out in your life? How is the Word doing its cleansing work in your life?