

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why I Love the Church, Part 1

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John MacArthur

A young man contemplating conversion to Roman Catholicism wrote me to explain why he was thinking of leaving Protestantism:

Protestants don't seem to appreciate the Church. The Bible describes the Church as an institution Christ founded and loves. The Church is everything to Catholics; it is nothing to most of my Protestant friends.

In a similar vein, the 15 July 1998 issue of *Christianity Today* included an article by Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University: "What I'd Like to Tell the Pope About the Church." The article's subtitle: "Responding to the main criticism Catholics have against evangelicals: that we have no doctrine of the church." Dr. George quoted from a sermon by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in which Bonhoeffer noted that the word *church* "to Protestants has the sound of something infinitely commonplace, more or less indifferent and superfluous, that does not make their heart beat faster; something with which a sense of boredom is so often associated."

Let's be honest: there is too much truth in those criticisms to dismiss them lightly. Evangelicals are far too prone to indifference about the church. Some evangelicals live on the periphery of the church, attending and observing without ever really becoming an integral part of the body. Many who profess faith in Christ remain totally impassive about the church. As author Michael Griffiths noted,

A high proportion of people who "go to church" have forgotten what it is all for. Week by week they attend services in a special building and go through their particular, time-honored routine, but give little thought to the purpose of what they are doing. The Bible talks about the "the bride of Christ" but the church today seems like a ragged Cinderella. It needs to reaffirm the nonnegotiable, essential elements that God designed for it to be committed to. [*God's forgetful Pilgrims* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978)]

He's right. Worse yet, I know of people in full-time Christian service, employed by evangelical parachurch organizations, who have no involvement whatsoever with any local church. This is to the shame of the whole evangelical movement.

Of course, the remedy for evangelical apathy about the church is not a return to the twisted, extrabiblical ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church. Evangelical Protestants must approach ecclesiology as they have soteriology—from the perspective of Scripture alone. Unfortunately even among many Protestants, too many of the popular notions about the church are laden with human traditions, superstitions, and other holdovers from the medieval Catholic Church. Scripture alone can give us a sound understanding and appreciation of the true role and nature of the church.

I love the church. I am inveterate and incurable lover of the church. It thrills me beyond expression to serve the church. Although I am also involved in some parachurch ministries, I wouldn't trade my ministry in the church for all of them combined. The church takes first place in my ministry priorities, and all the parachurch ministries I serve are subordinate to, and grow out of, my ministry in the church.

In fact, my whole life has been lived in the church. My father was a pastor, as were my grandfathers for three more generations before him. So a deep love for the church practically runs in my blood.

In a short series of upcoming posts, I'm going to outline some biblical reasons I love the church.

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