

## **Rooted: Core Truths, Teacher's Guide**

### **Week 5: The Church Belongs to Christ**

**Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25–27**

#### **Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)**

This lesson establishes a truth that shapes the whole of the Christian life: the church belongs to Christ. From Acts 20:28 we learn that the church is “the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood,” and from Ephesians 5:25–27 that Christ “loved the church and gave himself up for her” in order to sanctify and cleanse her and one day present her to Himself in splendor. A great deal is at stake doctrinally here. The church is not a human institution, a denominational franchise, or an optional accessory to private religion. She is the blood-bought people of God and the cherished bride of Christ. The teacher should help students see that the church is divine in origin, purchased at the highest price, central to God’s purpose, led and cared for by Christ through shepherds He appoints, and to be guarded in faithfulness to the apostolic pattern. This high view of the church stands against both the casual consumerism that treats church as optional and the sectarianism that reduces it to a party label. We speak simply of the church of God, the church Christ purchased and loves.

This doctrine is also intensely practical and formative. How we view the church determines how we treat it. A believer who sees the church as a service to consume will be a critic and a wanderer; a believer who sees the church as the bride Christ died for will be a servant and a member who stays, loves, forgives, and gives. Many Christians today carry wounds, frustrations, or simply a thin, low view of the church, and the truth that it was bought with blood and loved as a bride speaks directly to all of that. The teacher’s aim is to let this doctrine do its forming work, moving students from consumers to members, from spectators to shepherds of one another, and from critics to lovers of the people Christ purchased.

So aim at both targets. Send students home with a clear, biblical understanding of what the church is, whose it is, how it is led, and how it is protected. And send them home loving the church more, more committed to it, more patient with its flaws, more willing to give themselves to its life and care. The disciple we are forming is one who treasures what Christ treasured enough to die for, and who gives himself to the church as Christ gave Himself for her.

#### **Question 1**

##### **Student Question:**

*Paul tells the Ephesian elders to care for “the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). What does it mean that the church was purchased with the blood of God, and how should that truth shape the way we value and treat the church?*

## **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Begin by letting the weight of the phrase land. Paul, charging the Ephesian elders, calls the church “the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” The price of the church was not silver or gold, not human effort or clever strategy, but blood, the blood of God in the person of His Son. There is no higher valuation imaginable. The teacher should slow down here, because nothing reorders our view of the church faster than remembering what it cost.

Draw out what this says about the church’s worth. We assess the value of things by what someone is willing to pay for them. By that measure, the church is the most valuable assembly on earth, because God paid for it with the lifeblood of His Son. Whatever a student thinks or feels about the church on a given Sunday, its true worth is fixed by the cross. To despise or neglect the church is, in a sense, to hold cheap what God bought at infinite price.

Note also whose the church is. Paul does not say the elders’ church, or Paul’s church, or the people’s church. It is the church of God, His possession, obtained by Him. This guards against two errors at once: the pride of those who would run the church as if it were their own, and the casual detachment of those who treat it as theirs to take or leave. The church belongs to the One who bought it.

Bring it home practically. If the church is blood-bought and God-owned, then it deserves to be treated accordingly: loved, honored, protected, served, and spoken of with care. The teacher can invite students to consider how their attitudes and words about the church would change if they kept the price tag of the cross constantly in view.

## **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The church purchased with the blood of God in Christ (Acts 20:28)
- The worth of the church fixed by what it cost at the cross
- The church as God’s own possession, not ours to run or discard
- How the price of the church should shape our attitudes and words about it

## **Discussion Prompts**

- How does remembering the price of the church change the way you value it?
- What does it mean that the church belongs to God and not to us?
- How might your words about the church change if you kept the cross in view?

## **Question 2**

### **Student Question:**

*If the church truly belongs to Christ and was bought with His blood, then it is not ours to use or discard as we please. In what ways have you treated the church as a service to consume rather*

*than a body to belong to and serve? What would change this week if you saw it as Christ's blood-bought people?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question turns the truth of the blood-bought church into a personal mirror. Our culture trains us to be consumers in nearly every area of life, and that instinct quietly follows us into our relationship with the church. We evaluate it by what it offers us, shop for the one that best meets our preferences, critique it when it disappoints, and feel free to disengage when something more convenient comes along. The aim of this question is to surface that consumer posture honestly.

Help students see the difference between consuming and belonging. A consumer asks, "What am I getting?" A member asks, "How can I give?" A consumer is loyal as long as the experience satisfies; a member is committed because this is family. The church Christ bought with His blood is not a vendor of religious services; it is a body to which we belong and a people we are called to serve and love. The consumer treats the church as means to his ends; the member treats the church as Christ's beloved, to be served for her own sake and His.

Move toward one concrete change. Ask students where the consumer mindset shows up in their own life with the church: in how they decide whether to attend, in how they criticize, in their reluctance to commit or serve, in their readiness to leave when offended. Then invite one specific way they will relate to the church this week as a member of Christ's blood-bought people rather than as a consumer, whether that is showing up faithfully, serving without being asked, or speaking of the church with honor.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The cultural pull toward consumerism in our relationship with the church
- The difference between consuming the church and belonging to it
- Membership as giving and committing rather than evaluating and shopping
- Relating to the church as Christ's beloved, served for her sake and His

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where does a consumer mindset show up in how you relate to the church?
- What is the difference between asking what you get and asking how you can give?
- What is one way you will relate to the church as a member, not a consumer, this week?

### **Question 3**

**Student Question:**

*Paul says Christ “loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). What does it tell us about the worth and identity of the church that Christ loved her enough to die for her, and how does this picture of the church as Christ’s bride differ from the way we often think of it?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Paul reaches for the most intimate image available to describe Christ and the church: a husband and his bride. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” The teacher should let this picture expand the students’ vision of the church. She is not merely an organization Christ oversees; she is the bride He loves, the object of His self-giving devotion. He did not love the church because she was lovely; He loved her and gave Himself to make her lovely.

Help students feel how this differs from our usual thinking. We often think of the church in functional terms: what it does, how it is organized, whether it meets our needs. The bridal image is relational and personal. It speaks of belonging, intimacy, covenant, and cherished worth. The church is loved by Christ the way a devoted husband loves his wife, with a love willing to die for her good.

Note what this says about every believer’s identity. To be part of the church is to be part of the bride of Christ, loved with that same love. This is deeply reassuring for the discouraged believer who feels unimportant or overlooked. You are part of what Jesus loves most, the people He died to win. The worth of the church, and of each member in it, is established not by our performance but by the love of the Bridegroom.

Connect it to how we treat the church. A man who loves you will be hurt by how others treat the one he loves. To love Christ is to love what He loves, and He loves the church. The teacher can press the point gently: we cannot claim to love Jesus while holding His bride in contempt. Loving Christ and loving His church belong together.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The church as the cherished bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25)
- Christ’s love as the basis of the church’s worth and identity
- A relational and covenantal view of the church, not merely functional
- Loving Christ and loving His church as inseparable

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does picturing the church as Christ’s bride change the way you see it?
- What does it mean for your own identity to be part of what Jesus loves most?
- Why is it impossible to truly love Christ while despising His church?

### **Question 4**

**Student Question:**

*Christ gave Himself up for the church, holding nothing back. Where are you holding back from the church Christ died for, in your love, your commitment, your service, or your willingness to be truly known? What is one way you could give yourself more fully to Christ's people?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question presses the example of Christ's self-giving into the student's own commitment. Christ "gave himself up for her," holding nothing back. The natural question for anyone who belongs to His church is whether we are giving ourselves to His people or holding back. Most of us, if honest, keep something in reserve.

Help students locate where they hold back. For one it is love, keeping relationships at a safe, surface distance. For another it is commitment, staying on the edges so as not to be counted on. For another it is service, leaving the work to others. For another it is being known, attending faithfully while never letting anyone see the real struggles underneath. Each of these is a way of receiving from the church while withholding ourselves from it.

Move toward one concrete step of self-giving. The call is not to frantic busyness but to the kind of self-giving love Christ modeled: showing up for people, serving where there is need, opening our lives to be known and to know others, committing rather than hovering. Ask each student to name one specific way they will give themselves more fully to Christ's people this week, following the pattern of the One who gave Himself for them.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Christ's total self-giving as the pattern for our commitment to the church
- Common ways we hold back (love, commitment, service, being known)
- The difference between receiving from the church and giving ourselves to it
- Self-giving love as the mark of genuine membership

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where do you tend to hold back from the church Christ died for?
- What would it look like to give yourself more fully to Christ's people?
- What is one specific step of self-giving you will take this week?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul says Christ gave Himself for the church "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26). What is Christ doing to make His church holy, and what does this teach us about how a person becomes part of His cleansed people?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question opens up what Christ is doing for and in His church. Paul says He gave Himself for her “that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” The teacher should help students see that Christ’s love is not only sacrificial but transforming. He died not merely to forgive the church but to make her holy, to cleanse her and ultimately present her to Himself “in splendor, without spot or wrinkle.”

Focus on the phrase “the washing of water with the word.” This language naturally calls to mind the cleansing that comes through the gospel and is applied in baptism, where, as the study has already seen, sins are washed away as one is united with Christ (Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5; Romans 6). The word of the gospel is heard and believed, and the believer is cleansed and added to the church. The teacher can connect this to how a person becomes part of Christ’s people: not by joining a human organization, but by responding to the word and being cleansed by Christ, who then adds them to His church (Acts 2:41, 47).

Stress that sanctification is both a settled status and an ongoing work. The church has been set apart and cleansed in Christ, and she is also being made holy over time, as Christ continues His patient work through the word. This guards against two errors: the perfectionism that expects the church to be flawless now, and the complacency that thinks holiness does not matter. Christ is committed to His church’s holiness, and so should we be.

Bring it home. Each believer is part of this cleansed and sanctified people, and is also being made holy by the same Christ through the same word. The teacher can encourage students to value the word of God as the instrument Christ uses to cleanse and shape His bride, and to give themselves to it as part of how Christ makes them holy.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Christ’s love as transforming, not only forgiving (Ephesians 5:26)
- Cleansing “by the washing of water with the word” connected to the gospel and baptism
- Becoming part of Christ’s people by responding to the word and being cleansed by Him (Acts 2:41, 47)
- Sanctification as both a settled status and an ongoing work
- The word of God as Christ’s instrument for cleansing and shaping His bride

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is Christ doing to make His church holy?
- How does a person become part of Christ’s cleansed people?
- How should we value the word of God if it is Christ’s instrument for cleansing His bride?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*The church is not yet what she will be; Christ is still washing and sanctifying her. How does knowing that Christ is patiently making His church holy change the way you respond to the flaws and failures you see in the church, and in yourself as part of it?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question addresses something every honest church member faces: the gap between the glorious church of Ephesians 5 and the flawed congregation we actually experience. Christ is still washing and sanctifying His bride; she is not yet “without spot or wrinkle.” That means the church we belong to, and we ourselves within it, will be imperfect for now. How we respond to that imperfection reveals a great deal.

Help students avoid two unhealthy responses. The first is disillusionment that leads to withdrawal: expecting the church to be perfect, becoming bitter when it is not, and drifting away. The second is complacency: shrugging at sin and flaws as though holiness did not matter. The healthy response holds both truths together. The church is not yet what she will be, so we extend patience and grace; and Christ is committed to making her holy, so we take sin seriously and pursue holiness, beginning with ourselves.

Move toward humility and patience. It helps students enormously to remember that they are part of the very church whose flaws they are tempted to criticize. The same patience Christ shows to the church, He shows to me; the same holiness He is working in the church, He is working in me. Ask each student how a true view of Christ’s patient, sanctifying work might change the way they respond this week to a flaw they have noticed in the church, or in themselves.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The church as not yet perfected but being made holy by Christ
- Avoiding both disillusioned withdrawal and complacent indifference
- Patience and grace toward the church’s flaws, held with a serious pursuit of holiness
- Remembering we are part of the imperfect church we are tempted to criticize

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How do you usually respond to flaws and failures you see in the church?
- How does knowing Christ is patiently sanctifying His church reshape that response?
- How does remembering your own place in the church keep you humble in your critiques?

### **Question 7**

**Student Question:**

*Paul says the elders are to “care for the church of God,” serving as overseers and shepherds of the flock (Acts 20:28). What does this teach about how Christ leads and cares for His church, and what is the God-given role of shepherds, or elders, in His church?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question opens the theme of how Christ cares for His church. Paul tells the Ephesian elders to “care for the church of God,” and describes them as overseers appointed by the Holy Spirit to shepherd the flock. The teacher should help students see that Christ does not leave His church without care. He shepherds her, and one of the chief ways He does so is through men He appoints as elders, also called overseers and shepherds, to lead, feed, guard, and tend the flock.

Draw out the shepherding image. A shepherd knows the flock, leads them to good pasture, watches for danger, and goes after the wandering. Elders are to do this spiritually: feeding the church with God’s word, guarding it from error, caring for souls, and leading by example. Peter describes the same work, urging elders to shepherd the flock “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples,” under the “chief Shepherd,” who is Christ Himself (1 Peter 5:1–4). The authority of elders is real but is always a serving, undershepherd authority, exercised on behalf of and in submission to Christ.

Note the New Testament pattern briefly and plainly, as this is part of equipping students. Scripture assigns the work of elders and overseers, and of those who teach and exercise authority over the assembled church, to qualified men (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). This is the consistent apostolic pattern for the leadership of the church, given for the church’s good and order. The point in this lesson is the comfort and seriousness of the truth that Christ shepherds His flock through appointed shepherds who will give an account for the souls in their care.

Bring it home with gratitude and prayer. Many believers rarely consider the weight elders carry or the way Christ cares for them through these men. The teacher can encourage students to honor, pray for, and follow their faithful shepherds, and to recognize in good eldering the care of the Chief Shepherd Himself for His blood-bought flock.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Christ caring for His church through appointed elders, overseers, and shepherds (Acts 20:28)
- The shepherding work of elders: feeding, leading, guarding, and tending the flock
- Eldership as serving, undershepherd authority under Christ the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1–4)
- The New Testament pattern that the work of elders and overseers is given to qualified men (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9)
- Honoring, following, and praying for faithful shepherds

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does the shepherding image teach about how Christ cares for His church?
- How is the authority of elders different from worldly authority?
- How can you better honor, follow, and pray for the shepherds of your congregation?

## **Question 8**

### **Student Question:**

*Every member, not only the elders, is called to help guard and build up the body. How are you contributing to the health and care of the church, and where might Christ be calling you to take more responsibility for His flock rather than leaving it to others?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

While the elders bear a unique responsibility, the care of the church is not theirs alone. Paul wrote to whole congregations urging every member to build up the body, and Acts shows the early church as a community in which all shared life and responsibility. This question invites students to consider their own part in the health and care of Christ's flock.

Help students move from spectator to participant. It is easy to assume that caring for the church is the job of the paid staff and the elders, while the rest of us attend and receive. But the New Testament pictures a body in which every member has a function and the whole grows as "each part is working properly" (Ephesians 4:16). Encouraging the discouraged, welcoming the newcomer, visiting the sick, teaching where qualified, serving practical needs, praying for one another, and gently restoring the wandering are the work of the whole church, not a few.

Move toward one concrete responsibility. Ask students to consider where they have been leaving to others what Christ may be calling them to do, and to name one specific way they will take responsibility for the care of the church this week. The goal is to help each student see himself or herself not as a customer of the church but as a contributing member of the body Christ purchased.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The care of the church as the work of every member, not only the elders
- The body image: each part functioning for the whole to grow (Ephesians 4:16)
- Practical ways members care for one another in the church
- Moving from spectator to contributing member of Christ's body

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How are you currently contributing to the health and care of the church?
- Where have you been leaving to others what Christ may be calling you to do?
- What is one way you will take responsibility for Christ's flock this week?

## Question 9

### Student Question:

*Paul warns the elders that “fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock,” and that even from among themselves men will arise “speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30). Why is faithfulness to the apostles’ teaching, the pattern given in the New Testament, so essential to protecting the church, and how do we guard Christ’s church against error while keeping His blood-bought people united in the truth?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the weightiest question of the lesson, and it flows from Paul’s sober warning to the elders. He tells them that “fierce wolves” will come in from outside, “not sparing the flock,” and, more disturbingly, that “from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.” The danger to the church is not only external persecution but internal error, false teaching that distorts the truth and divides the flock. The teacher should help students take this danger as seriously as Paul did.

Show why faithfulness to the apostles’ teaching is the church’s protection. Just before this warning, Paul reminds the elders that he “did not shrink from declaring ... the whole counsel of God.” The safeguard against the wolves is the faithful, complete teaching of God’s word. The early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42), and that apostolic teaching, now preserved for us in the New Testament, is the pattern Christ gave for His church. When the church holds firmly to what the apostles taught, she is protected; when she drifts from it, she becomes vulnerable to every twisting wind of doctrine. This is why the authority of Scripture, especially the New Testament as the pattern for the church, is not a dry technicality but a matter of the flock’s survival.

Help students see how to guard the church without becoming harsh or factious. Guarding the truth means knowing the word well enough to recognize error, testing teaching against Scripture rather than against personal preference or popularity (Acts 17:11), and lovingly holding one another to the apostolic pattern. It does not mean suspicion of everyone, a quarrelsome spirit, or dividing over matters of opinion and judgment. The goal is to keep Christ’s blood-bought people both true and united, holding “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) while bearing with one another in love.

Address the tension between truth and unity directly, because students feel it. Some are tempted to prize unity so highly that they tolerate any teaching; others are tempted to prize being right so highly that they fracture the body over trifles. Paul will not let us choose between truth and unity. The church is to be one, and she is to be true, united in the truth. The teacher can show that real unity is found not in setting doctrine aside but in all submitting together to the same apostolic word, under the same Lord.

Bring it home to the local congregation. Each student can help guard the church by knowing the Scriptures, by valuing sound teaching, by refusing to be drawn after novelty or personality, and by gently calling one another back to the word. Remind them what is at stake: this is the flock Christ obtained with His own blood. To guard the church in the truth is to protect what He died to purchase.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The danger to the church from both external wolves and internal false teachers (Acts 20:29–30)
- Faithful teaching of the whole counsel of God as the church’s protection (Acts 20:27)
- The apostles’ teaching, preserved in the New Testament, as the pattern for the church (Acts 2:42)
- The authority of Scripture as essential to the church’s purity and survival
- Testing all teaching against Scripture rather than preference or popularity (Acts 17:11)
- Holding truth and unity together: one church, united in the apostolic faith (Jude 3)
- Guarding the church without a harsh, suspicious, or factious spirit

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why is faithfulness to the apostles’ teaching so essential to protecting the church?
- How can we guard against error without becoming harsh or divisive?
- How do we keep truth and unity together rather than sacrificing one for the other?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back across both passages. You have seen the church purchased with the blood of God, loved as a bride, washed and made holy by Christ, shepherded with care, and guarded against error. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about the church that you most need to carry into this coming week?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone question asks students to gather both passages and name one specific way Christ is forming them. Resist letting answers stay general. Press gently for the concrete: which truth, changing what, beginning when.

It helps to retrace the movement. You have seen the church purchased with the blood of God, loved by Christ as His bride, cleansed and being made holy by His word, shepherded with care through appointed elders, and guarded against error by faithfulness to the apostolic pattern. Invite each student to ask which of these truths their heart most needs this week, whether it is loving the church more, giving themselves to it, extending patience to its flaws, honoring its shepherds, or helping guard its truth and unity.

Close by reminding students that the goal is transformation, not merely information. A right view of the church should make us better members of it: more committed, more loving, more serving, more patient, more faithful. Encourage each one to leave with a single truth to carry, return to, and pray over until the next gathering.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Scripture aimed at transformation, not merely information
- A high and loving view of the church Christ purchased
- Moving from consumer to committed, serving member
- Treasuring what Christ treasured enough to die for

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which truth about the church does your heart most need this week, and why?
- What would it look like, concretely, to live in light of that truth?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one step?