

Rooted: Core Truths

Week 5: The Church Belongs to Christ -- Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25–27

Picture Paul on a beach near Miletus, the Aegean lapping at the shore, gathered one last time with the elders of the church at Ephesus. He has sent for them because he is on his way to Jerusalem, and he is convinced he will never see their faces again. These are not strangers; he spent three years among them, teaching publicly and house to house, often with tears. Now the goodbye is heavy. And in the middle of his charge to these shepherds, Paul lets slip a phrase so weighty it can stop you in your tracks. Care for the church, he tells them, the church of God, “which he obtained with his own blood.” The flock they are tending was not bought with money or built by human cleverness. It was purchased at the price of God’s own blood. That is how much the church is worth, and that is whose it is.

We do not usually think about the church that way. We tend to talk about church the way we talk about a club we belong to or a service we use: a place we go, a program we like or dislike, a group we are part of or have drifted from. Scripture speaks in another register altogether. Paul tells the Ephesians that Christ “loved the church and gave himself up for her,” the way a husband lays down his life for his bride. The church is the blood-bought flock of God and the cherished bride of Christ, being washed and made beautiful for the day He presents her to Himself. The church is not a human invention or an optional add-on to private faith. She belongs to Jesus, body and soul, bought with His blood and loved with His life.

This matters more than we might realize, because how we think about the church shapes how we treat it. If the church is just a religious club, then we will come when it suits us, criticize it like consumers, and leave when something better comes along. But if the church is the bride for whom Christ died, then she deserves our love, our loyalty, and our care, because she has His. The way we speak about the church, invest in it, forgive within it, and give ourselves to it says a great deal about whether we have understood what it cost and to whom it belongs.

That is where this week takes us, to a beach in Miletus and a wedding in the heart of God, to the staggering truth that the church was purchased with blood and is loved as a bride. Read these verses slowly. Let them lift your eyes above your own preferences and frustrations to see what Jesus sees when He looks at His church, and let that vision reshape the way you love and serve her.

Group Discussion: Many people today, even sincere believers, think of the church as optional: a helpful resource if you find one you like, but not essential to following Jesus. Where do you think this view comes from, and how does it change things to hear Paul say the church was “obtained with (God’s) own blood” and that Christ “loved the church and gave himself up for her”?

Personal Reflection: Be honest about how you tend to relate to the church. Do you approach it more like a consumer choosing a service that meets your needs, or like a member of a family Christ died to gather? Where do you most need your view of the church to be reshaped by what it cost and to whom it belongs?

Read Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25–27

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 16:18, Christ building His church on the confession that He is the Son of God; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, the church as one body with many members who need one another; Ephesians 1:22–23, Christ given as head over all things to the church, His body; 1 Peter 5:1–4, elders shepherding the flock of God as undershepherds of the Chief Shepherd; Colossians 1:18, Christ as the head of the body, the church, who is first in everything