
On Being a Parishioner: **How Should I View the Church**

Various

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Introduction

Do you like church? Does it appeal to you? How does it make you feel? Is it meeting your needs? Are you getting what you want out of it? Well, if not, I've got some insider information for you. You can get in your car and drive a short 40 miles south and arrive at the church that has been created for those who don't like church. Here is how their website reads:

So you don't like church? Honestly, neither do we. That's a big part of what [this church] is about. We want to be a place where you can come to know God in an amazing and personal way. So come in and check out the rest of the site – then stop by some weekend, hang out with us and drink some coffee... If you know much about us you know our mission is to reach the unchurched. We are going to do everything short of sinning to reach people with the message of Jesus Christ. If you came here looking for the same old, same old... you might be disappointed. If you have an open mind and are ready to experience "church" in a new way... then come on in – we are glad you're here!

But what if the reason you don't like church is not because you are looking for something new and cutting edge, but because you are looking for "the way it used to be... or 'the same old, same old'" Have no fear. You can drive less than ten miles north and arrive at the "End of your search for an old-fashioned church..."

Now it is likely many of you know exactly what churches I am speaking of and it is important that I say that I know nothing of the teaching or ministry philosophies of these churches. There may very well be excellent things in place at these churches. At the same time, we must admit that billboards and websites are the modern day equivalent of introductions – you don't learn everything in an introduction, but your first impressions and hunches are significantly formed.

So here we have north and south – opposing geographic anchors and apparently opposing philosophical anchors... one offers a new experience, the other offers an old experience. One invites those with open minds, the other, those with nostalgic minds. One almost seems to represent the beginning of a search, while the other is the end of your search. It is stained glass set against tattooed bodies, piano-led hymns against piercing electric guitars and driving beats, Buicks and Lincolns against Scions, Hondas, and Volvos. I am almost certain, however, that both places serve coffee! Albeit espresso drinks versus drip.

But is coffee the only commonality? I don't think so – in fact, I think the commonalities might be far more poignant than the apparent differences. Consider these two with me. First, both churches make an overt play to what YOU are looking for in a church. Are you

trying to avoid the same old, same old? Drive south. Are you trying to delve deeper into what use to be the same old, same old? Drive north. What is it YOU are looking for? Both make strong appeals by impressing upon the reader what they are NOT, versus what they are. While one can understand the reasons behind such an approach, this tends to draw out the person who is reacting to their own perceived needs, wants and judgments of the church versus the person who, guided by biblical truth, is looking for a church that is what God calls it to be. It is the difference between saying, "I'm looking for a church *that is not...*" versus saying, "I'm looking for a church *that is...*"

Most of you know that Beth and I have been in the process of buying and selling a home in recent days. Like most home buyers, we made our list of what we were looking for. Like a geek, I printed this out and would take a clipboard or a notebook to the various showings and make notes and rankings based on our criteria. Why did I need a list of what we wanted? Because those things that we didn't want tended to rise to the surface without any prompting whatsoever and take complete control of our impression of the home. Ewww – that paint color is awful. Ughh, the carpet smells. Blah, they left the water in the hot tub untreated. Yuck, the doors are thin and old... etc. What we were looking *for* quickly fell out of mind. The parallel here is this, *it is very easy to get caught up in what we don't want* and *what we do want* is often difficult for us to remember. Billboards like the two we just discussed, tempt us to put ourselves, our personal preferences, and the sense of what we don't want, at the center – versus, Christ, his Word, and what he calls for. **In other words, they makes church about us.**

A second thought resulting from these two approaches is the impression left that there is something "wrong" with church in general. Hence we need alternatives - a church for those who don't like church, a church for those who believe that a bygone era is when church was done "right". In some way, I believe the public is reinforced in its worldly thinking about church – that it is about us, our desires, our judgments, our past experiences, and it is we who determine what church should or should not be. Therefore, if you don't like it, just like your old shoes, you can toss them out and get some new ones.

So it sounds like I'm setting us up for a series about what the church should be. But I'm not. What if the billboard south of here – instead of reading, "a church for people who don't like church," read "a church for people who are looking for people who love the church." Does that not immediately reshape our thoughts about the church behind the billboard? All of a sudden, we are asking, "Would I fit in there? Do I love the church? What does loving the church look like? I don't know if I knew I was supposed to love the church" These are much more godward thoughts than, "Ewww, I really don't like what we sing, the preacher, the friendliness, etc. of my current church, or of any church I've been in... so maybe I need to go to a church for special people like me... who don't like the church." Such thinking puts me in the center and radically reduces the high view of the Church that the Word calls us to. So, this series is not about what the church should be to you – it takes that question and stands it on its head, it asks, "What should you be to the church?" Or in other words, this series is On Being a Parishioner.

Series Overview

Over the next four weeks, we will consider what it means to be part of the church, what our commitments should be marked by and our character known by. Each week we will consider a simple “How to” question and answer that question from the Word. This morning, we begin with *How to View the Church?* Then, weeks 2 through 4 we will answer the questions: *How to Listen to a Sermon?* *How to Serve my Fellow Believer?* and *How to Participate in Fulfilling the Mission of the Church?* Again, our focus is what should we be to the church, not what should the church be to us.

I should briefly mention that the common meaning of “parishioner” is simply a member of a local church or parish – but its Greek roots move us closer to a biblical understanding: one [who is] in a community of sojourners. And is that not what we are? A community with Christ at its center, moving together through our earthly journey simultaneously as aliens and ambassadors. Given this unique identity, what are we to be to the church?

We will consider three vantage points, or angles. The first two more doctrinal with distinct everyday applications, and the last one more practical but based on sound doctrinal principles observed in the Word.

One final word of introduction. This 4-Sunday series is a departure from our normal AM preaching approach which is usually dedicated to the paragraph by paragraph exposition of the Scriptures, working systematically through books of the Bible. Occasionally, however, we approach a subject topically and this series is one such exception. [Pray]

A High View of Church

Beth and I have been privileged to have friends from many different places around the world over the years. While we were living in Seattle we became very close to a couple from Israel as well as two colleagues from Taiwan. When you begin talking to these individuals about their homelands and their country’s place in the geopolitical map, you quickly begin to realize that they not only have a strong (almost fierce) commitment to the legitimacy of their homelands, but they also have a very developed sense of history and destiny as a people group. The Taiwanese and the Israelis have a lot in common in that manner. They certainly have a high view of their homelands, their people, and their heritage. They did not develop this sense of self by staring into their navels however; it came through an outward gaze.

When believers begin to read their Bibles well from cover to cover, a very similar sense should begin to shape and form their affections. We begin to understand who we are. Not because you get to know yourself better, but because you begin to know the Church better. When our lives begin to resonate with the mission and the mind of the church, we know we are beginning to develop a biblically-informed high view of the church. The primary way that this happens is through the Spirit-enabled application of God’s Word to our understanding and our affections.

Let me give you a taste of how the believer with a high view of the church reads his or her Bible. We’ll use this sentence to order our thoughts:

The Church is a select people who have been endowed with power for the achieving of God's plan and purposes, resulting in His glory.

The Church is a select people...

Let's look at several passages across Old Testament Scripture which demonstrate this selecting characteristic of God:

Genesis 17:7-8: And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.

Leviticus 26:12-13: [If you obey] ...I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt...

Isaiah 44:1-5: But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. This one will say, 'I am the Lord's,' another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, 'The Lord's,' and name himself by the name of Israel."

Regardless of how you think about Israel's relationship to the Church, what we clearly see from these passages, and so many others, is that God is a "choosing" God. He selects, he prefers, and he differentiates. He is an exclusive God – there is an "in" people and an "out" people throughout all of redemptive history.

In the New Testament, Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians that the Church (universal) is all those who know Christ as Lord and Savior:

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours...

Peter helps us see that these people are regarded differently by God

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... 9But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Here is the point, to be part of the Church is to be among those who have been chosen. It is not incidental or accidental. You are among the elect, you are chosen, you are a living stone built into God's spiritual house. Are you special? Somehow warranting this favor by God. You and I know better than that – it is all of God's mercy and love. Not of our will or our effort.

It is hard to find an earthly parallel. All exclusive groups of people we would compare this to are based on some personal quality or action that we have taken to include ourselves in the group - even the lottery requires that you buy a ticket. The closest image in my mind these days is the adoption of a disabled baby found face-down in a gutter in Iran, unable to do absolutely anything for itself, for all practical purposes, dead. If we take a strictly secular position – no adult is obligated to secure the future of any abandoned, disabled baby from a nation that is openly aggressive toward us. The baby is not your own. He or she is not your responsibility. The baby will not add to your personal wealth (on the contrary, it will likely subtract from it). The baby may or may not bring you happiness. As he or she grows, they will most certainly cause heartache... Yet one may pick up the baby and take it in. What has that baby done to earn or deserve this? -Nothing. Who is praised in this scenario? The baby? No, the adopting adult. The baby, when he or she grows up, if they are wise, will realize how special it is to be adopted. They were not left to die in the gutter. What an incredible thing to be selected.

The understanding parishioner regards their membership in the church as an incredible and undeserved honor, nothing short of a miracle. We must preach this to ourselves daily. By this truth we are humbled and awed, we become ever conscience of the uniqueness of our position because of Christ and his sacrifice. As we remember these things, our view of the Church drifts upward.

...who have been endowed with power...

Not only are we selected, but we are also we are given promises and power. Extraordinary promises and derived power –let's start with the first mention of the "church" in the New Testament:

Matthew 16:17-19 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

We don't have a long time to spend here – but this is a key statement of Christ to get right, as entire false religions are built on misinterpretations of this passage. First, Christ makes it clear that it is on Peter's clear profession of truth (Christ as the Son of God, v.15), that the Church will be founded. Central here is Christ's identity. But beyond this, many other passages support this simple but profound fact that the Church is established by the Truth¹,

¹ Ephesians 2:19-22

Christ, and contained in him is all truth². Ephesians 2 further elaborates by teaching us that the Prophets (OT) and the apostles (NT) teaching builds the foundation of the church with Christ as it's cornerstone. A so-called church, unhinged from Truth (its foundation), forfeits its authority and its power.

Second, not even all the fury of hell and its minions can prevail against the Church so long as it is grounded in Christ, who is Truth. The gates of hell cannot prevail against Christ and the Word – does this not help us understand verses like Psalm 119:89 “Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.” Or Isaiah 40:8 “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” Colossians 3:3 tells us that believers’ lives are hidden with Christ in God. How can believers absolutely trust in the permanence of the church against all trials – Hebrews 13:8 answers the question clearly: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Do you realize, Believer, what a good and safe place you are in? The Lord may allow trial, temptation, chaos, poverty, and despair to find its way into the Church (and these things only for a time), but NEVER will hell prevail against it. You are forever your Father’s. Those outside the church have no such confidence.

Third, the church has been given the one true Word that is able to save, namely, the gospel³. Salvation comes through the Word, the Word comes through preaching, and preaching comes through the Church. Ephesians 3:10 tells us that the Church is even being used to make the glory of God’s plan known beyond earthly realms to rulers and authorities in heavenly places... in other words, we have a ministry of cosmic proportions.

Passages like Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, help us understand more clearly how this truth is applied negatively in church discipline. So whether it is the gospel bringing persons into the Church, or church discipline moving them out from *association* with the Church, the Church has been endowed with the extraordinary responsibility of bearing the gospel to the world. To be clear, our authority is derived, the Church is under the Word and under Christ and apart from these we have no authority, regardless of what we call ourselves. So, if you are part of the church, you are part of that entity through which God declares his holy plan to the rest of the world, both to save and to judge.

...for the achieving of God’s plan and purposes, resulting in His glory.

So not only is the Church a select group who have, in God’s indescribable mercy, been chosen, but they have been given the serious duty of bringing the gospel to the world. Lastly, all these things are so that God’s plan and purposes might be achieved, for his glory. Earlier we considered 1 Peter chapter 2 where we were told that the church is

9 ...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light... 12Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that

² John 1:1-4

³ Romans 10:5-21, 2 Timothy 3:10-17

when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

This passage lays it out quite clearly and succinctly for us. The Church, we, have been chosen to do this work of proclaiming the almighty God's excellencies – both in word and deed that all may glorify God!

What are you to be to the Church? You are to be someone who has a high and holy and exalted view of it. Truly knowing that the Church is selected by God, is given the weighty but glorious task of declaring the gospel, and understanding that God is using the church to carry out his very own will for his glory, ought to transform the way we live!

But sadly it often does not. I want to make one application from this material that you may find challenging –and perhaps it is because I am Pastor for Youth that this comes to the forefront of my mind when we are discussing a high view of the church. Do you have a high view of church? Let's do a test. Here is the question - would you do this for the church?

1. Would you spend 1-2 hours 3-6 days a week for more than six months a year practicing for it?
2. Would you allow your family schedule to be mastered by it?
3. Would you enter into ultra-elaborate planning and scheduling, coordinating drop-offs and pick-ups for multiple participants in it?
4. Would you spend sizeable amounts of non-disposable income on shoes, uniforms, equipment, and training for it?
5. Would you attend expensive week long camps to learn more about it?
6. Would you schedule family vacation around it?
7. Would you schedule family meals around it?
8. Would you let go of "family time" for it?
9. Would you be willing to accept a significant level of stress just to be involved in it?
10. Would you be willing to let your own or your children's self-image and esteem be built on it?
11. Would you be willing to let your own or your children's identity and social groups be determined by it?
12. Would you allow it to be the best motivation for you or your child getting good grades?
13. Would you be willing to let it heavily influence the way you dress?
14. Would you be willing to let it shape your dreams about your future?
15. Would you be willing to allow it to shape your values?
16. Would you be willing to sprain ankles, break bones, and ensure yourself a future of arthritis for it?
17. Would you be willing to memorize large amounts of information and execute complicated feats with great precision for it?
18. Would you be willing to "take one" for that group of people?
19. Would you be willing to be give all you have for it?

So what am I talking about? It sounds a lot like sports? Does it not? It could be band, your career, your family itself, a hobby, your own body, almost anything. But the contrast here is that I'm not talking about any of those things – I'm talking about the church. We are wrong in our thinking if we believe church requires anything less than the list I have just gone through. Yet... so many other things seem to fit that set of questions better.

My intent here is not to be harsh – but it is to be clear. Many show by their lives that they have a far higher view of sports (etc.) than they do church. Perhaps we are telling ourselves that our children are learning essentials for life in sports that they cannot get elsewhere. Or that our children will receive college scholarships that will save us and them thousands of dollars. Or that they will be playing sports to make a living. Even if these things were true in every case (which they patently are not), they would still not be able to replace the role of the church. The sad thing is that we allow our highest affections, our best loves, to be consumed by things other than the church. We grossly neglect what is best for other earthly loves. Good becomes bad when it takes the place of the best.

The most essential thing, maturing in Christ in the context of the body for God's glory (Ephesians 4), is simply a Sunday morning thing for many of you. God's glory will never suffer for a lack of involvement in sports – but the same is NOT true for a lack of involvement in church. What messages are you conveying in your home? Church is for life – or more accurately, our lives are for the church. The message here is not necessarily drop your sports or other extra-curricular activities, but it is to spotlight the passion we dedicate to earthly things which should be dedicated to the church for God's glory. What does your life say? If we approached church like many of us approach sports, we would, indeed, turn the world upside down.

There are two final topics to briefly cover in answering the question, How should I view the Church? A High View of Church Life and a High View of Church Membership.

A High View of Church Life

We'll speak more extensively to this two weeks from now, but I wanted to bring this to you early on because it is so often that a very low view of church life is taken in the Church. I think there are many reasons for this. Some lack knowledge, they do not understand what the Word has said about the body and its role in their lives. Some lack humility, all they can seem to see are the unsightly things about the church and how they do not want to associate themselves with such hypocrites. Some lack contentedness, they are looking to the church to compete with the world to stroke their natural affections, hence comments such as "church is boring... we don't do anything at church, we just sit there... the music at church is not as good as the music I listen to... etc." Others are lazy and selfish, they realize that involvement in the Church requires sacrifice of time, treasure, comfort, security, and they simply are not willing to give those things up.

Whatever the case, a low view of the body is sure to produce a parishioner who is not to the church what they ought to be. How does the Word orient our view of the body? We'll only go to one passage – but be assured that there are many more than this. Let's read together Ephesians 4:11-16 [Read].

Simply note one thing in this passage, what is the result of the functioning body? Saints are equipped. For what? The work of the ministry. To what ends? To build up the body of Christ! How long will this go on? Until we are unified in faith and knowledge and are mature to the extent that the perfection of Christ is exemplified in us. What does this do for us? It keeps us from being sucked into the world and out of the church. Can you say it more simply? Yes! As we say Bible truths, in love, to each other, people grow. Grow into what? Into Christ, Christ-likeness, spiritual maturity. How is this possible that we – poor sinners like ourselves, could be involved in such a holy activity? Christ, the head of the body, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up.

But if you are not interested in an Ephesians 4 view of church, you may be interested in immaturity instead. What does that look like? It looks like fence-riding. Never giving yourself fully to the church, always holding back. It looks like a disabled limb, never contributing to the work of the body. How can you accomplish this? Set a low priority on church life and it should come rather easily.

Similarly, if we as a church, are interested in ineffectiveness, staleness, malnourishment, looking the same next year as we do this year, in spiritual zero growth sums, in strife and disunity, in chaos, reversals, error, or heresy... It's not too hard. Simply cut off the head. Reject his words. Do church our own way. Practice body life in a way that makes clear our love for the ways of the world. Be earthly-minded. Fail to understand what Christ, through the Word, calls us to.

As a child I lived on a small farm. Every year we would raise and butcher chickens. Chickens do quite well, generally speaking, with very little care from the owner. They eat, they grow, they reproduce, and they return home at night. But that is all true only so long as their heads are actually attached to their body. Remove them and you very quickly have a bloody mess, a dead carcass, and a lot of grossed-out onlookers. The church is no different. Just as the believer cannot live apart from the body, even more importantly, the body cannot live apart from the head, Christ. Ephesians 4 is the picture of what church life looks like when all the body parts function and the body is connected to the head.

A High View of Church Membership

Lastly, I want to briefly speak to church membership as a logical extension of having a high view of the church and a high view of church life. As you know, our church is one that practices church membership, that is, we have a process for formally identifying those who are baptized believers and have chosen to associate themselves with the teaching and leadership of Clearcreek Chapel. Although we believe this practice to be good and wise, there are those who will attend a church regularly and faithfully for years without ever becoming a member. Why is this? Perhaps some take membership lightly, others may not be aware of it or ignore it, while others may simply disagree with it. A question that often quickly arises is, "What is the biblical basis for church membership?"

Because we cannot go to a place in the Bible that says, "You should be a member of a church" some believe that the practice is unwarranted. The reality, however, is that it is readily apparent that the New Testament church had some mechanism of keeping track of

who was part of their body. We don't have time to consider all the arguments, but here are two.

First, in 1 Corinthians 5 we see Paul dealing with the sexual immorality of a certain individual in the church. In verses 12 and 13 he says this:

12For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

This instruction from Paul clearly assumes that there was an understanding among those who received the letter that there were outsiders and insiders and there was a distinct group from whom the "evil person" was to be removed. Their body was identified and delineated. Secondly, we see Paul instructing the church in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 that:

14If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. 15Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Just as with Matthew 18, one would have to be aware that they were formally committed to a group of some sort for church discipline to make any sense at all. Otherwise the process would be similar to arriving at the grocery store and while wandering in the aisles someone says to you, "The way you shop doesn't fit here, I think you should go." Besides changing aisles, you'd probably reserve the word "weirdo" for this type of person. Who are they to say how you should or should not shop, let alone tell you whether or not you are welcome to shop there. It's ridiculous. You never put yourself under anyone's authority when you entered the grocery store and you never agreed to shop in any certain way.

These passages and others in the New Testament make it clear that there was some means for the body to understand who was and who was not part of a local body of believers. The practice of church membership is simply a modern day expression of this clear pattern in the New Testament.

9Marks, a ministry to churches out of WDC, in discussing the topic helpfully outlines additional reasons for membership⁴ and I wanted to give you a quick summary of their thoughts. First, being a member helps unbelievers, both those associated with the church and those outside the church to understand what it means to be a Christian. The process of church discipline is implied here in the case of those associated with the church. When someone claiming to be a believer lives a life characterized by sin, both that person and the world needs to clearly see that this is not what a Christian is. Being able to say I value your relationship with God more than I value your relationship with me sends a very clear message to the individual and the world that to be a Christian means something – not just anyone is in. And we do not want to be part of anyone's self-deception, the stakes are far too high.

⁴ http://sites.silaspartners.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID314526|CHID598014|CIID1679124,00.html

Second, being part of a church challenges believers to grow in love. Listen to this quote:

It is one thing to love a friend. It is quite another thing to love a spouse. Anyone who is married can testify to the fact that love before marriage and love after marriage are two remarkably different actions. Love before marriage is often spurred by attraction. Love after marriage is spurred by commitment... The strongest Christian may know what it is like to serve the poor and minister to the lost on his terms, but does he know what it is like to commit to a body of believers? Does he know what it is like to love brothers and sisters through thick and thin? Does he know love that isn't on his own terms? If he doesn't, it is possible that his spiritual "success" is nothing more than a personal ego trip.

Third, identifying as a member of a church helps the leadership serve you because they know they are responsible for you. Elders are to shepherd the flock. This is hard to do if the shepherd does not know who the sheep are. Membership identifies you as one who is a believer and as one who has submitted themselves to the teaching and leadership of a particular church. You are saying that you take your responsibility to love and be loved by a specific body seriously. As your shepherds, we can come to you with this mutual understanding. You are best served in these circumstances and we are best helped. As shepherds, our first commitment is to those who have formally identified themselves with the church through membership.

Lastly, and perhaps most compellingly, membership in a local expression of the church, gives testimony before man and before God that you belong to the bridegroom. One of the most compelling pictures in the Bible is the comparison of the church to the bride of Christ. In the latter part of the book of Revelation⁵ we see the Church-bride coming to meet her bridegroom Christ and this represents the fulfillment of all that God has intended for his plan throughout redemptive history. He has purchased a bride, at great cost, for his Son. Publically identifying with the church through membership proclaims to the world that you are part of the bride, and even more importantly, it gives attention to the beauty and the strength of the bridegroom. What bride would not want to declare to all onlookers that she is her bridegroom's?

Conclusion

So we are brought to an end this morning. I thought to wrap up, versus reviewing what it means to have a high view of the church, the body, and membership, I would show you what it means via a seemingly normal couple in the New Testament. John Piper recently and helpfully informed me more fully about Priscilla and Aquila. He described them as movers, workers, and riskers. Do you realize that Priscilla and Aquila appear to have moved⁶ no less than five times that are recorded in the New Testament? At least four of these moves appear to have been closely related to serving the church and its gospel mis-

⁵ Revelation 19:7, 21:2, 21:9, 22:17

⁶ Pontus to Rome, from Rome to Corinth (Acts 18:2), from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), from Ephesus to Rome (Romans 16:3), and from Rome to Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:19)

sion. They were movers. They were also workers, in addition to their day job of tent-making, they hosted the church in their home, they closely disciplined believers, and they were actively involved in the missionary work of Paul. The fact that they are mentioned again and again throughout the whole of Paul's ministry clearly indicates the long-term commitment they exhibited to the church. Lastly, Priscilla and Aquila were riskers. Paul makes a very interesting comment about them in Romans 16:3,4:

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.

What does living with a high view of the church look like? Priscilla and Aquila make the picture so clear. It means living in a manner which submits every aspect of our lives to the cause of the gospel, as Christ has intended to accomplish it through the Church. Neither home or location, work or comfort, or even our lives, are safe from the requirements of the gospel and needs of the body. We will give all for Christ, the glorious Shepherd and cornerstone for the church. **This** is what it means to have a high view of the church. [Let's pray].