

RISE Part 1 – Week 3

The Church: Part Two

(Female Edition)



By Pastor Ashley Evans – July 2022

A few years ago, I decided to do an experiment when I hurt three discs in my back. I was in a lot of pain. I couldn't sit down, so I took leave and decided not to go to church physically until my back healed. Instead of gathering with people, I tried doing online church for eight weeks.

My experiment was also an opportunity to test the idea that there is no real difference between doing church online or being there in person. What I discovered was startling and troubling. The first week, I watched the whole service, and it was great. In week two, I watched most of the service, and it was good. The third week I wanted to see what TD Jakes and Stephen Furtick were up to, so I watched them as well, flicking back and forth, and it was interesting. In the 4th week, I only watched half the worship and half the message because I got distracted and had things to do.

Over my 8-week absence, I discovered that not being at church didn't help me at all. It wasn't even neutral. It was like drinking Diet Coke. It looks the same as the real thing, but it's not. And here's why—**the power of the church is not in the information we get but in what happens when we gather."**

- Ps. Ashley Evans

WRONG THINKING ABOUT THE CHURCH

If we are to truly love the Church, we must correct our wrong thinking.

1. The Church is not just about getting information.

The first error we need to correct is the idea that Church is about getting information. Many people turn up for Church around the end of the worship. Why would they do that? It's because they believe the worship is like pre-dinner drinks. It's just the introduction to the real thing, which, in their opinion, is the message. They think that Church is about getting good Bible information. They think that knowledge is the reason for Church, which is often why people come for the sermon and leave as soon as it's finished.

The Church is not about content delivery. It's about the transformation that happens in the gathering of God's people, which God calls the Church.

2. Jesus is not separate from the Church.

The second error people make is to try and separate Jesus and the Church. You *cannot* separate Jesus and the Church. The Bible clearly shows that is impossible because it says that Jesus and the Church are ONE!!!

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:29-32, ESV)

3. I, as an individual, am not the Church.

The third error regarding the Church is the idea that I, as an individual, am the Church. The truth is that, individually, I am a believer. It's when we are gathered together that we are the Church. The *gathering* of individual Christians together is called The Church.

The Greek word for Church is the word “*ecclesia*.” *Ecclesia* means “gathering” or an “assembling of people together.”

When the word is used in the New Testament, it's also used to refer to any ASSEMBLY of people. For example, in his address to the Sanhedrin, Stephen calls the people of Israel “the assembly [*ekklesia*] in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38). And in Acts 19:39, *ekklesia* refers to a convening of citizens to discuss legal matters.

The Church is the “WE.” The Church is an *ecclesia* when individual Christians gather

together. The power of the Church is created in the gathering. Jesus said when you are gathered together, there I am in the midst.

A great example is a board of directors. Our Church has a board of directors. Each board member has status and a title, but they have no power ... until the board meets. When the board meets together, there is power. When they meet, the board has the power to decide things that have consequence. The same is true of the Church.

The power of the Church is not in its status but in the gathering together.

In our pursuit of individualism, we have de-emphasized the need for gathering. However, in Acts 2, you will notice that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit did not happen in their individual homes. It happened when they were gathered together.

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” (Acts 1:1, ESV)

God could have baptized them with the power of the Holy Spirit in their homes, but He didn't. He purposefully asked them to wait together, and when they were together in one place in one accord, He released His power on them corporately.

GOD'S DELIVERY SYSTEM OF GRACE

One of the biggest reasons God created the Church was to be His delivery system of grace to non-Jewish people. There is no Church in the Old Testament. Have you ever wondered why? There didn't need to be a Church because God dealt directly with the Jews as a nation in the Old Testament.

How was He going to get His grace to non-Jewish people? There had to be a system that could distribute God's favor and grace to people outside the circle of the privilege of God's chosen people, the Jews.

So what did God do? He sent Jesus. Yes, Jesus came to die for your sin as an individual, but He also came to create the delivery system of grace, which is the Church. It's the Church that distributes the grace of God to non-Jewish people.

“And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News. Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, He graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret

from the beginning. God's purpose in all this was to use the Church to display His wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Ephesians 3:6-11, NLT)

We could illustrate this by using an example. Most people love Amazon. They love the endless products they can buy. They love the convenience and the ease of ordering. But it doesn't matter how many incredible things there are to buy, or how easy it is to order—without those blue vans which deliver the goods you need to your door, you will never get anything.

The Church is the “blue van” that delivers God's grace. Without the Church, the community around us and the world at large can hear about the grace of God, they can read about the grace of God, but on the whole, they can never fully experience the grace of God. The Church is God's blue van—His delivery system of grace.

WHAT KIND OF LOVE SHOULD WE HAVE FOR THE CHURCH?

When the Bible says you shall love the Lord with all your heart, and when it says Jesus loved the Church so much He gave His life for her, the Greek word the Bible uses is the word “agape.” Agape refers to a pure, willful, sacrificial love that intentionally desires another's highest good.

- *Agape* is used 200 times in the New Testament.
- Agape isn't born just out of emotions, feelings, familiarity, or attraction, but from our will and as a choice. *Agape* requires faithfulness, commitment, and sacrifice without expecting anything in return.

1. Having agape love for the Church means intentionally nourishing it and nurturing it.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. (Ephesians 5:29-30, ESV)

If Jesus nourishes the Church, He asks us to do the same. How? By intentionally caring for the Church, serving the Church, and giving to the Church.

God asks us to give generously to nourish His bride, the Church. When we give our finances to the mission and health of the Church, we ensure the Church is capable of fulfilling its mission. God invites us to participate in His mission.

In 1 Corinthians 12, He says that we are the body of Jesus and that each of us is meant to contribute our time, our talents and our money. Our entire body

contributes to the health of itself as every part of the body does what it is supposed to do.

It's exactly the same with the Church and why God refers to it not only as His wife but as His body. When everyone in the Church serves and gives generously, the Church is built up. If everyone gave what they were supposed to give, the Church would be healthy, its mission would be powerful and strong, and it would change the world. If 100% of the people in the Church gave, the Church could do 100% of its mission. If only 20% of the people give, the Church can only do 20% of its mission. It's that simple and why churches where people tithe have the most impact.

We also nourish the Church when we offer our gifts to the Church. Each of us has something to offer. When we offer ourselves to serve and take the time to discover and use our spiritual gifts, we build up the Church.

2. Having agape love for the Church means we make the Church a priority.

We are called to build and, if necessary, readjust our life around Jesus and the Church.

Jesus preferred the Church before Himself. He looked after Himself less than He did the Church. He loved it so much that He gave Himself to die for it.

"... just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her." (Ephesians 5:25b, NIV)

We're not asked to die for the Church here in the west. But is it too much to ask that if you love Jesus, you make the Church, its welfare, and health your priority?

If you want your marriage to thrive, you must give 100%, and you must adjust your individual lifestyle to make room for the person you love. It's the same with the Church. Wise people who understand how God's principles work build their lifestyle around the Church.

Jesus said it this way in Matthew:

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33, ESV)

Seek Him first and put Him first. And this means building your life around the Church, Jesus' wife, the Church.

3. Having agape love for the Church means we are loyal and defend the Church.

"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will rise up and distort the truth to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:29-30, NIV)

If someone attacks the person you love, your first instinct is to defend and protect them. Be a protector of the Church, a defender of the Church.

4. Having agape love for the Church means we serve the Church.

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment, according to the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all members have the same function, so in Christ we who are many are one body, and each member belongs to one another. We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If one’s gift is prophecy, let him use it in proportion to his faith; if it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is giving, let him give generously; if it is leading, let him lead with diligence; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” (Romans 12:3-8, NIV)

Make the effort to discover what your spiritual gift is. One of the greatest sources of joy is using your gift. It’s God’s supernatural gift to you to help you live a joy-filled life. The Church will only be as beautiful as we make it. The more we serve, the more we give, the more powerful and beautiful the Church becomes.

When our sons were teenagers, they didn’t understand that the house they live in was their inheritance. They went through a phase when they were careless and mistreated their home. I told them, “Boys look after this place. It’s your inheritance.” Church, the house of God, is *our* inheritance. If we look after it and nurture the Church, the Church will look after us. Never forget that the Church was created by Jesus when He died on the cross. He created the Church as your inheritance.



DISCUSS

What most stood out to you in this lesson?

How has this lesson changed your view of the Church?

What will you do differently now that you know this?

Now that you know how important the Church is, how do you feel about regularly giving to the Church a portion of your finances so it can thrive?

How do you feel about investing in the vision of the Church by giving your spiritual gifts and time to make the bride of Jesus powerful?
