



I'm Big on the Church!

If you don't like misunderstanding, bad communication, sin, anger and confusion, join a service club and stay away from the church. I think I'll die the next time someone tells me that they want to create, attend or be a part of a "New Testament" church. The implication, of course, is that in the "olden days" of the Bible, Christians were somehow more pure, more committed, more loving and more together than we are in the modern, apostate, "country club" churches.

That's insane!

Not only that, it shows a woeful lack of biblical knowledge. The early church was not a pretty place. Two of their main leaders (Paul and Barnabas) couldn't stand each other and couldn't even minister together (Acts 15), and their members bounced checks and lied about their own stewardship (Acts 5). Political battles divided the church, hardly anybody agreed on the main things and hypocrisy was rampant among the best known and most respected leaders (Galatians 2). Talk about anger...the apostle Paul was so angry that his language would offend most modern-day Christians (Galatians 5:12).

The last time I checked, nobody at my church is, as far as I know, "sleeping with" his father's wife as was the case in the early church at Corinth and, if it ever did happen, people in my church would be bothered by it which, from what Paul said, didn't bother anybody at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). I have yet to meet anybody at our church who has made communion into a drunken party as was the case in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:21), who has brought in unbelievers to judge a dispute within the church (1 Corinthians 6:1-6), or who has been publicly sleeping with prostitutes (1 Corinthians 6:16).

When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he said, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). He wrote that because it was so painfully obvious to everybody that Christians were earthen jars and it would have been insane and disingenuous at best for Paul to have said anything different.

I'm big on the church. I give of my time, my money and my presence to the church. But the reasons for my positive feelings are not what you think. I'm big on the church because Jesus was big on the church. The Bible says that the church is the "bride of Christ" and it doesn't do to disvalue another man's wife...especially if that man is the King of kings and Lord of lords. And it isn't wise to disvalue the wife of the man for whom I work as a servant.

There are some Christians who irritate me—probably far less than those I irritate. But if Jesus loves them, maybe I should try. (I saw this bumper sticker: "Jesus loves you but everybody else thinks you are a pain.") Jesus gave himself in love on the cross for a lot of irritating people in general and for an institution (i.e. the church). If he did that, the least I could do is affirm the ones and the institution he loves.

Another reason I'm big on the church is because of what it is becoming. I love the church's goals...even if the church doesn't come close to fulfilling those goals. I think the church is something else because, in its finest moments, it is a kind and generous institution even if, on occasion, it is selfish, mean and prideful. I want to be a part of the church because the core beliefs of the church are convictions which I share...even if those convictions are sometimes distorted, not well articulated and often not even believed.

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he asked me

Paul said that Jesus is working with the church so “he might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27 NKJV). He's not finished with us...not by a long shot. But I don't know of a single hospital built by an atheist organization, and I have yet to see The First Church of Paganism do anything about AIDS or poverty or illiteracy. I've been loved when I didn't deserve it, accepted when I shouldn't have been and affirmed when nobody else would (even if sometimes I've been condemned, criticized or rejected by the church).

I know...so much more could be done. But when a dog plays checkers you don't criticize his game, you're just surprised that he is playing at all. The church plays—imperfectly, sometimes for the wrong reasons and often without much enthusiasm—better than any dog I know. And if the Bible is right...you ain't seen nothing yet!

Another reason I'm big on the church is because when I'm a part of the church, I'm a part of a club where the members are as bad, sinful, prideful and messed up as I am. Not only that, I'm a member of an organization where the charter states that the only qualification for membership is that the member not be qualified.

Who said he wouldn't be a part of a club that would accept him as a member? While I understand the sentiment, it isn't one with which I can agree. I want to be in a club where, if they would accept me, they would accept anybody.

Every once in a while someone who isn't a part of the church tells me that they can't be a part because _____ (fill in the blank). I always want to say, “you don't know what you're talking about and don't have the foggiest idea how bad it really is. I could tell you stories that would shock you.”

But still...it's His wife. He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown

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