

One Another

Created for One Another

August 9, 2026

Introduction

In researching for today's message, I came across a fascinating article in the Washington Post by a Christian sociologist named Ryan Burge who is easily one of the sharpest observers of American religion. He points out something very strange happening in American religion right now.

For thirty years, Christianity in America has been in a slow, steady retreat. , and every graph pointed the same direction. But over the last two or three years, belief in God has ticked up in a few surveys. Bible sales are climbing. Young men, of all people, are leading the way in this. There's an uptick of some pop cultural voices who once mocked Christianity but are now curious about it, sometimes even sympathetic. Something is warming, and the word getting thrown around is "revival."

But in his research, Burge points out something really interesting: the behaviors of those people who are warming and curious and sympathetic to the faith ... the behaviors have not changed, nor have their beliefs. What's moving, says Burge, is SENTIMENT. VIBE. People feel warmer toward Christianity than they did five years ago, without necessarily going to church more, praying more, or believing more. Burge calls it a "vibes revival."¹

The root of the vibes revival is this: **(SLIDE) People want the feeling of Christianity without the commitment of it. They want the warmth without the belonging.**

But if we think about this just 1-2 more layers, we immediately see the inherent flaw of a mere sentimental orientation to Jesus or Christianity. **(SLIDE - Flannery O'Connor)**. In one of her many essays, Georgia's favorite author, Flannery O'Connor, wisely surmised that **sentimentality is to Christianity what pornography is to human love.**

Think about pornography's relationship to love. Pornography isolates a legitimate good (sex) from its rightful whole (a marital relationship). With porn, you're consuming the sensation ... the VIBE ... of a relationship, and the end result is that it actually destroys your ability to engage in a healthy relationship. Now, take that same logic and apply it to sentimentality and Christianity. Sentimentalism isolates a legitimate good (call it "fellowship" or "culture") from its rightful whole (a covenant relationship with other local Christians), and the end result is that it actually harms your ability to engage in a healthy relationship with Christians in a local church. **(TITLE SLIDE)**

¹<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2026/07/31/positive-views-religion-arent-same-religious-commitment/>

Sentimentality ... VIBE ... wants the warmth of Jesus without the cost of following Him. It wants to feel close to God without being committed to his people. It wants the glow of the wedding day without walking to the altar and keeping the covenant. And Flannery is right: A “good vibes only” or sentimental view of Christianity ultimately harms you and God’s people. And I want to show you why directly from an exposition of Ephesians 5:25-27.

Body

Look at it with me. (SLIDE)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless.

In the context of Ephesians as a whole, Paul has spent three chapters going deep into the theological components of the gospel, turning in chapters four through six to apply the gospel to everyday life. In this text, Paul is applying the gospel to marriage, and more particularly to the way husbands are to love their wives. But in doing so, Paul drops a golden nugget of gospel truth about Jesus and the church, about how the gospel shapes the church. And in so doing, he gives us four reasons to move from sentiment to substance in our love for Him and the church.

Christ Loved the Church (v. 25a)

(SLIDE) Look at the first phrase in verse 25. “Christ loved the church.”

Can we ponder for a moment just how utterly remarkable that statement is? Do we believe that? Do we believe Jesus loves His church? Do we grasp, as Paul prays that we would in Ephesians 3, what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love for the church? **(SLIDES as I say them).**

- **Christ’s love for the church is long.** It reaches back before the foundation of the world, before there was a church to love, before there was a you, back into eternity past where the Son set his affection on a bride who did not yet exist.
- **Christ’s love for the church is wide.** It’s wide enough to gather in every tribe and tongue and nation, wide enough to stretch from the thief on the cross to the missionary in the jungle to the wandering prodigal who staggered back to the church, wide enough to cover the sin you are sure is too much.
- **Christ’s love for the church is high.** It lifts a people out of the grave, out of trespasses and sins, and seats them in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that the church has an address in glory before she ever gets there.

- **Christ's love for the church is deep.** It goes down as far as you have fallen. It goes down into the pit. It goes down to a bloody Roman cross where the Son of God drank the cup of wrath to the dregs so his bride would never have to taste a drop.

That is the love of Christ that holds the church. Not a vibe. Not a sentiment. It's a love with dimensions. A love you could spend eternity measuring and never reach the end of. **And that love is aimed straight at the church.** At the gathered, blood-bought, unremarkable, glorious local church.

(SLIDE) I ask you, brothers and sisters, if Christ's love for the church is inexhaustibly magnificent, how can the Christian's love for the church be little more than a vibe?

When we truly begin to grasp the love that Christ has for his church, we can only begin question the viability of a sentimental or "good vibes only" relationship with the church.

Christ Gave Himself for the Church (v. 25b)

But just in case we are missing it or are still not convinced of Christ's great love for the church, Paul explains how that love was demonstrated.

(Slide) Look at the second half of verse 25. "Christ loved the church and gave himself for her."

In His love for the church, Christ did not advise her on a better way or model for her a better way or counsel her as a relationally detached therapist. His love for the church had a cost that accomplished something for the church He loves.

- **He accomplished REDEMPTION**, which means he paid a price. We were slaves on the auction block of sin, sold under it, owned by it, and Christ stepped up and bought us with the only currency the Father would accept, his own blood, so that we are not your own, but were bought at a price.
- **He accomplished FORGIVENESS**, which means the debt is gone. Not reduced. Not refinanced at a better rate. Gone. Nailed to the cross, cancelled, stamped paid in full, the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands erased forever.
- **He accomplished SUBSTITUTION**, which means he stood where we were supposed to stand. The wrath that our sin summoned, he absorbed. The cup we had filled to the brim with a lifetime of rebellion, he lifted to his own lips and drank to the dregs. He who knew no sin became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.
- **He accomplished RECONCILIATION**, which means the war is over. We who were far off, we who were hostile in our mind toward God, we who had our back turned and our

fists up, have been brought near by the blood of Christ, and the God we ran from now calls us sons, calls us daughters, calls us his own.

*(SLIDE) And here is the question that should stop us cold: **If Christ gave himself to accomplish these things for the church, how can the Christian's love for the church be little more than a vibe?***

Christ is Purifying the Church (v. 26)

But don't think for a minute that God's inexhaustibly magnificent love for the church stops at giving his life for her.

(SLIDE) Look at verse 26. Christ gave himself for her "to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word."

We see here that Jesus did not bleed for his bride just to forgive her and then leave her exactly as he found her. **He bled to change her. Jesus is not content to pardon the church. He is determined to transform the church.** The same love that went to the cross to justify the church will not rest until it has **sanctified** the church, until every last stain is out and every last wrinkle is pressed and the bride he purchased actually looks like the bride he purchased.

The question we always have is HOW? How does Christ actually wash his bride? In his book *How Does Sanctification Work?*, David Powlison describes sanctification as a house with five factors at work.² *(SLIDE - image of house diagram).*

- At the foundation, **God** changes you. **The Spirit** himself is the one scrubbing. Nothing happens without him.
- Then the roof over everything, the word of truth changes you. Scripture is the water. It is how God speaks, corrects, and cleans.
- But watch where the word usually comes to you. Through the walls. People change you. A brother who tells you the truth, a sister who reminds you who you are, a sermon that lands too close, a life group conversation that hits home.
- And on the other wall, suffering changes you. Trouble catches your attention and drives you to need him.
- And in the middle of the house, you change. You repent. You believe. You turn.

Now notice something. **Three of those five walls require other people.** Sanctification is a communal exercise.

*(SLIDE) Let us ponder the question you know is coming: **If Christ is committed to the church's transformation, how can the Christian's commitment to the church be driven by vibe?***

² Powlison, D. (2017). *How Does Sanctification Work?* Crossway.

Christ Will Cherish the Church (v. 27)

So we now know that Christ loves the church, as demonstrated by his giving himself for her in order to transform her into the bride he bought.

Many of you probably know that.

But have you ever wondered ***why*** he did it?

(SLIDE) Look at verse 27. "He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless."

The sanctification of the church has an end date. It is bridal preparation. He is getting her ready for the aisle. And on that day the Bridegroom will do something staggering: he will present the bride to HIMSELF. He is the one who bought her, the one who washed her, and he is the one who will receive her.

And she will be GLORIOUS. STUNNING. RADIANT. Not a spot on her, not a single stain from a lifetime of sin left behind, every last one scrubbed out by the blood and the water. Not a wrinkle on her, none of the aging, none of the sagging, none of the wear that sin and time and sorrow press into all of us, all of it smoothed away forever. The bride who was dead in trespasses will stand there without a single accusation left to bring against her, because every charge was nailed to his cross and every sin was drowned in his washing.

The church you belong to (or the one you're avoiding). The church with the imperfect preacher and the narrow hallways and the members who disappoint you and the leaders who have let you down and the 3.9 star Google reviews. That church is walking, right now, toward a day when Christ himself will look at her and be unable to look away.

She will be radiant. Not because she made herself radiant, but because he did. She will be spotless. Not because she cleaned herself up, but because he washed her. She will be blameless. Not because the accusations were false, but because the blood covered them. And Christ, the Bridegroom who bought her, will present her to himself.

(SLIDE) Congregation, can we ponder the question that you know is coming: If Christ's desire and design is to cherish his Bride, the church, for eternity, must we not love her with something more than a vibe?

Conclusion

Now let me take you back to where we started this morning.

Ryan Burge and the vibes revival. Warm feelings toward Christianity without a corresponding movement in behavior, belief, or belonging. And you might have heard that at the start of the

sermon, and the whole sermon now, and thought, “Rob, I’M HERE! This is not a sermon for me. I’ll share the YouTube link later, because this is a problem for people out there.” **(TITLE SLIDE)**

But stay with me, because the vibes revival has a version that lives inside these walls too.

In here, the vibe looks like showing up every Sunday **and never being known**. It looks like not having anyone to carry your burdens with you, or for you to help carry burdens with. It looks like enjoying the music, tolerating the preacher, appreciating the culture (VIBE), and keeping every actual person in it at a careful, comfortable distance. That is a vibes revival too. It is just the insider's version.

Ephesians 5 will not let us settle for that.

- A vibe cannot love you the way Christ loved the church.
- A vibe cannot die for you the way Christ died for the church.
- A vibe cannot cleanse you the way Christ is cleansing the church.
- A vibe cannot cherish you the way Christ will cherish the church.

Christ did not give himself for a feeling. He gave himself for a body. And the good vibes you feel toward the church on a Sunday morning, real as they are, are only the front door. The vibe gets you in the room. Being known is what Christ died to give you once you are there.