

What I Like and Hate About the Church

1. I like the idea of church. The church is a regular gathering of the redeemed to worship, remember, nurture one another, hammer out questions and hold one another accountable. After all, “it is not good for man to be alone.” We were made needing one another and do not function well in isolation.

Show me a Christian who can please God better alone than with other believers, and I’ll show you a one-of-a-kind something never before seen on planet Earth. The Lord thought you and I would need each other, so He placed us in a church fellowship when He saved us.

2. I like the people in the church. Two things can be said of the people who make up almost any congregation on earth: They are a cross section of humanity, of the very type found in a grocery store or in a schoolyard, and they contain a special group—the cream of the crop—of the best people on the planet. Jesus said a sure sign that we are His is our love for one another—for fellow Christians.

Show me a Christian who does not like church people, and I’ll show you someone backslidden out of fellowship with Christ. This is a no-brainer as sure as the sun rises in the East.

3. I like the work of the church. Specifically, Jesus committed to us “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5), another term for spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18-20). Now, He gave plenty of commands to us—everything from loving each other to being salt and light in the community—but nothing trumps the Great Commission, taking the good news of the Savior to the world.

Show me someone who says, "I know I'm not obeying the Lord, but I love Him," and I'll show you a liar. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). And by "commandments," He was referring to all His teachings, not just the famous 10 sayings of Exodus 20.

4. I like the theology of the church. In addition to its identity as the bride of Christ, the household of faith and a kingdom of priests, Scripture presents the church as the body of Christ (Ephesians 4, among other places). Christ is the head, and we are members of the Body taking orders from the Head but working in unison and harmony with one another.

Show me a part of the body that is not properly related to the head, and I'll show you a deformity or an injury. Likewise, a member of the body working in opposition to another part of the body is a good description of a troubled body. A healthy body is well-coordinated throughout.

5. I like the history of the church. Well, I like a good bit of it. Like most family histories, however, this one has its embarrassments—its inquisitions, witch hunts, heresy-hunting and the times when the train left the tracks and did as much damage as good. I love the stories of John Hus, John Wycliffe, Corrie ten Boom, Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Elisabeth Elliot.

Show me someone who loves everything about the church's history, and I'll show you someone who doesn't know its history.

6. I like the effect of church on me. I came to know Christ at church when I was 11. Before that, I loved gathering with the other children and singing the great hymns at the top of our lungs. I loved the church services and always adored the preachers. At 21, I was called into the gospel ministry while singing in the choir. Over a period of 42 years, I pastored six churches and served as a staffer in one. The church

anchored our family and kept my wife and me tethered tightly to our routine of Bible study, prayer and church attendance, particularly during a difficult time when either or both of us may have been tempted to stray from the faith.

Show me someone who has been brutalized by the church—yes, they're out there, to our sorrow and shame—and for each one you find, I'll present a good dozen who have been blessed by it.

7. I like the worship of the church. We worship better together than alone, it would appear. I say that in full knowledge that we can worship God wonderfully in isolation—in a car or in the bedroom, for example—as I often do. But when God's people come together and join their voices in lifting hymns of praise to the Father, there's nothing else like it.

Show me a Christian who does not like to worship and, in most cases, I'll show you someone going about it all wrong.

8. I like the variety of the church. I recognize that denominationalism is the scandal of the church, and I hate that. Even so, I love that some churches are liturgical, and some are loose and spontaneous; some love the great hymns and robed choirs and pipe organs, while others use blue grass bands and sing mountain songs. I like that some preachers are highly educated, and some are self-taught. Some churches can be found assembling in storefronts and under mango trees, while others congregate in cathedrals and steepled edifices.

Show me someone who calls himself a Christian yet who criticizes all churches but his own, and I'll show you an embarrassment to the Lord and to the Christian faith.

Five things I hate about the church:

1. I hate the conflict. It has been with us from the beginning (Acts 6:1-7). God can use conflict to achieve good results, but it's no fun. And unless handled well, conflict will hold

the church up to ridicule in the community.

2. I hate the way some churches mistreat their pastors without any accountability. Just last night, a pastor texted me to say he had just been dismissed abruptly. I grieve with him and pray God will do something about such unloving congregations.

3. I hate the way some churches spend all God's money on themselves while neglecting their greater worldwide responsibility. Our own International Mission Board has downsized its missionary force lately due to the failure of our churches to adequately support the mandate Christ gave us.

4. I hate the competition and backbiting between some. When one pastor publicized that his church was the best thing God had going in his large city, I sent him a note saying, "Doesn't that sound prideful? Doesn't the Lord have some other good churches in your city doing His work?" He replied harshly. Not long after, that pastor was forced to resign suddenly due to some improprieties in his life. There are no words to say how much the entire thing grieves me.

5. I hate that so many of our churches and denominations fund lavish lifestyles for their leaders. They might call it "rewarding excellence" or some such foolishness, but there is one thing you will always notice: They never publicize the salaries due to the shame and embarrassment that would follow.

An elderly lady asked her deacon nephew to invite me to visit her one week. When I sat in her humble apartment, she said to me, "Pastor, I have not asked you here to talk about my salvation. I know I'm saved, and I'm grateful for that. But something else is bothering me. Pastor, I haven't done right by the church.

"When I was a young adult," she said, "I got away from church and never started back. I raised my son without the benefit of

the church, and I really came to regret that. And now I'm old and sickly and can't even go to church."

She wanted to put her membership in, send an offering from her small monthly check and have us pray for her. I made sure we did these things as she requested. But I never forgot her statement: "I haven't done right by the church."

I will tell you, my friend: If the church is the Body of Christ as Scripture says, then how we treat it is how we are treating Him. And that's a scary thought.

He takes personally our treatment of the church.

God help us to get this right. {eoa}

*After five years as director of missions for the 100 Southern Baptist churches of metro New Orleans, **Joe McKeever** retired on June 1, 2009. These days, he has an office at the First Baptist Church of Kenner, where he's working on three books, and he's trying to accept every speaking/preaching invitation that comes his way.*