

# RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

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September 2012

Dear Friends,

“What do you guys do for church?”

This is one of the questions we are asked at Ransomed Heart. It often feels like a “loaded” question, booby-trapped; if we don’t answer the way the asker wants, we sense we’ll be tarred and feathered. It reminds me of what happened in the early years of our marriage, when Stasi and I would visit her family....

Like many newlyweds, Stasi and I would often spend time with her family – dinners, weekends, the usual thing. And every single time we drove away we would get into a fight. Usually because I would want to “make a couple observations” about her family dynamics, and Stasi would feel the need to defend them. (Some of you married folks know exactly what I’m describing; this is a powder keg.) Now, I’m sure my posture wasn’t pure as a dove, but the tension that flared up was because of Stasi’s sense of loyalty – “It is *not* okay to question my family.”

This is how many folks feel about church, or The Church, or “going to church” – their love and loyalty rises up in immediate defense, and all questions feel like betrayal.

Which is what got us into trouble.

Because from time to time here at Ransomed Heart we have raised tough questions or made observations about church culture, and a number of good people have gotten the impression that we are anti-church. Sadly, quite a number of church leaders have gotten this impression. (Actually, what is more often the case is that they have *heard* we are anti-church, and their loyalty for the church has been awakened against us.) Honestly, it feels a little like Stasi and me in my ’68 Volkswagen, pulling away from a “family dinner.” Lots of misunderstanding, and the whole thing booby-trapped. I really understand. In an age like ours, when the pagan world is increasingly hostile to Christianity, it feels like we all ought to be locking arms and not criticizing one another.

So let me say this clearly: We are not anti-church. Not at all. We go to church. We think you should, too. We also feel that like any healthy family system, open and honest conversation about our “family culture” in church is normal, and necessary.

I won’t sugarcoat this. A number of you have told us that things got so tense in your church situation you had to leave. We teach that the heart is central, and that the sanctifying work of Jesus Christ reaches the human heart. This is sometimes not well received, though it is deeply rooted in Scripture. We teach that an intimate, conversational relationship with Jesus is available to every Christian; we teach that we really do have an enemy, and that spiritual warfare cannot be overlooked or ignored. For some crazy reason, this has gotten some of our friends into trouble in their churches.

But I want to be quick to say two things: First, if you have found your church situation intolerable for these reasons, don’t just “quit church” – find another where genuine fellowship is available.

Secondly, on a more hopeful note, many churches have found that our message fits right into their mission and beliefs, and they are using our materials with great success. Phenomenal success.

This is the acid test, by the way – Jesus said, by their fruit you will know them (Matthew 7:16). The occasional wingnut aside, the fruit of our teaching is intimacy with Christ, greater surrender to him, thriving marriages, engaged fathers, freedom from addiction, thousands coming to salvation through Jesus – my goodness, what church doesn't want that happening in their fellowship??!!

So, a few months ago we created a resource clarifying our position on church, and how the Ransomed Heart message is causing churches to thrive in the very ways they long to thrive. The message is called *Love the Church*. You can order CDs for free, and give them to your pastor or church leadership so that they might know *we are on their side!* (The resource is also available as a free download on our website.) You'll find Love the Church in our store at [ransomedheart.com](http://ransomedheart.com).

I wanted to encourage you this month that it is possible to see this message thrive in your church, see it set many people free to know and love God more deeply than they ever thought possible!!

I also want to ask your help in passing this resource along – help us take down the tension and misunderstanding, so that we can carry this beautiful work forward with our brothers and sisters in the church.

So, where *do* we go to church? That's what most folks want to know when they press the question. Actually, the staff at Ransomed Heart attends four or five different churches here in town, which is very healthy; it prevents a closed-system. Some attend an Anglican church, others a small bible fellowship, others a "seeker-friendly" church, and others very large church with a more "charismatic" feel; some have tried house church.

What's really ironic about the word on the street being that Ransomed Heart is anti-church is that we actually teach and practice a far deeper commitment to Christ than one hour Sunday morning. Of course you need fellowship; of course you need good teaching, and the sacraments; you need a place to worship, serve and grow. At this late hour the last thing you need is isolation. Please – do not isolate yourselves. Find a fellowship where you can thrive and help others thrive. The point is not the size, or the denomination – the point is their commitment to Christ and his teachings.

Listen to *Loving the Church*; it will enrich you far better than a short letter. But I do hope you found this helpful, and hopeful.

Offered in love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.

PS O yes, for a far better description of what we mean by a "good church," you might want to read or recommend chapter eleven in *Waking the Dead*, called "Fellowships of the Heart."