

Stop Dating the Church

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I. *Can this Relationship Be Saved: What We Miss When We Date The Church*

Key Thought: God has established His Church that through her we may have a relationship with Him which is defined by passion and commitment.

Questions to ponder:

1. Are you one to think that most churches are out-of-touch or out-of-date?
2. Are there so many activities in your life and the life of your family that joining a church seems a bit out of place?
3. Is your life so transient that developing a union with a local church seems ridiculous?
4. Does your relationship with the local church have all the appearances of a faithful, settle relationship, but in reality are you just flirting with the church so you can keep your options open for something better?

If you answered yes to these, you may be in jeopardy of missing a powerful relationship with Christ through your local church.

Truths to Transform:

- A. Every Christian is called to be passionately committed to a specific local church. The church is the key to spiritual health and growth for a Christian.
- B. The Church, both corporately and locally, is the visible “body of Christ” in the World.

Can you Spot a Church Dater?

America is known for being a nation of “believers” but not “belongers.”

1. The church dater’s attitude toward church tends to be “*me-centered*.” (What can the church do for me?)
2. The church dater is satisfied with being *independent*. This person is careful not to get involved and pays no attention to the larger purpose for us as a vital part in a specific church family. We go through the motions but do not invest ourselves.
3. The church dater tends to be *critical*. Short on allegiance and quick to find fault.

When you date the Church:

1. You cheat *yourself*.
2. You cheat a *church community*.
3. You cheat *your world*.

Your Life is Bigger

There are 6 billion people on earth who need to hear the Gospel.

- The church is the vehicle that Jesus chose to take the message of the Gospel to every generation and people.
- Paul David Tripp: “In reality, you are part of something immense, something that began before you were born and will continue after you die. God is rescuing fallen humanity, transporting them into His Kingdom, and progressively shaping them into his likeness-and he wants you to be a part of it.”
- We can be a part of this work when we commit ourselves to the church’s work in the world, and by this commitment we put ourselves in the best possible place to allow God to do His work in us.
- The church community is where we learn to love God and others; where we are strengthened and transformed by the Word of God, where we are taught to pray, to worship, and to serve; where we can be most certain that we’re investing our time and abilities for eternity; where we can grow in our roles as friend, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers.
- The church is earth’s single best place-God’s specially designed place- to start over, to grow and to change for the glory of God.

II. He Still Calls Her His Bride: Seeing the Church from Heaven’s Perspective

Key thought: The Church is the Bride and Body of Christ and those who are reconciled to God to be His Church should love, serve, and submit to her Groom.

Passage to Ponder

Ephesians 5:24-32 NIV

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--30 for we are members of his body.

31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

32 This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Truths to Transform:

1. The Church derives from the Greek word “ekklesia” which means the “called out ones.” Thus, you have been called out of darkness to have a new identity in Christ.
2. This call comes with an eternal love and provision from God.
3. Christ loves you supremely. He is tender, patient, and committed. He nourishes, cherishes, sustains, and protects His Bride.
4. Christ also gives gifts to His Bride. They are called “grace-gifts” (*charismata*).
5. Christ’s identification with His Bride is so real that he views us as His own Body. Our union with Christ is so real that He extends His life to us. This is what the New Testament calls “in Christ.”
6. Considering the Ephesians’ passage coupled with the Genesis 2 passage, do you think that one reason God created marriage was to illustrate His love for the church? Paul even lets us know that He is talking about Christ and the Church.

To Love What He Loves:

- A. The greatest reason why we should love the Church (both the global body of Christ and the local fellowship) is because Jesus loves the Church.
- B. The greatest motivation for being passionately committed to the Church is due to fact that Jesus is passionately committed to the Church.
- C. Do you think of God’s local bride as being a spotless beautiful bride? Most view the Church in a negative view or by wrong perceptions, as a particular building, a bickering denomination, a fraudulent televangelist, or some embarrassing scandal that hits the news.
- D. Our hearts are not normally drawn to the Church, but maybe it would change if we looked at the Bride of Christ the way Heaven looks at his body.

What Heaven Sees:

Ephesians 3: 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. The Church is the place where the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the heavenly realms and to those who are called the Church.

Ephesians 2:18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

2. The Church is a family. The power of the Gospel is not only changing individuals, but is also creating a whole new kind of humanity. In the midst of a

strife-torn world- a world divided by gender, race, class, and political ideology- the Church is a household where people who once hated God and each other become God's children and members of one family.

Ephesians 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

3. The Church is a Body. The Church is so close to the heart of God, so central to the work in the world, that He calls us the body of Christ. As we express our union with Him through service, worship, and love, we become the physical manifestation of our Savior on the earth.

Decisions To Make:

1. Will you be just a "believer" or a "belonger?" The NT is clear that no one who is saved and forgiven of sin can live their life by themselves. You must be joined to the body you were redeemed to be.
2. Do you respond to Christ as a faithful spouse or an adulterer?
3. Do you have a firm commitment to the Wisdom of God revealed through the Church or is it up for debate?
4. Do you have a firm commitment to the Body and Family of God or could you reject them on any given day?
5. Is your love so passionate and committed to the Body of Christ that you will schedule your life to serve the place you have been called?

Scripture demands that you develop a passion and commitment to your Lord and to His Church because He has a passion and commitment to you as the Church.