

Stop Dating The Church

And Fall In Love With The Family of God

Joe and Grace met through a mutual friend. From day one, they seemed to be the perfect match. Grace was everything Joe always wanted. She was beautiful, outgoing, caring - always there when he needed her. For the first six months they were inseparable. Joe could hardly think of anything but Grace. But now, three years have passed. Joe still enjoys the comfort and familiarity of being with Grace, but the spark is gone. He's not sure he finds her as attractive as he once did, and he's beginning to resent all the time she wants to spend with him.

One night, when Grace asked if they could define the nature of their relationship, Joe blew up. He said, "We're together aren't we?" "Why isn't that enough for you?" Obviously, Joe isn't ready for commitment, and it's unclear if he ever will be.

I'm sure that most of you have witnessed relationships like this, helped a friend out of one, or maybe have been in one yourself. I think we can all agree that it isn't a good place to be. Well I share that story with you to tell you that there are many "Joe's" walking around today. And Grace? She isn't a girl. Grace is the church.

Friends, I'm convinced that a relationship that we, ourselves would never tolerate, is precisely what we may be offering to Christ and his church. A relationship where we set all the terms; where there is no commitment on our part and expectations from us; but at the same time a relationship that we want at a beckon's notice to meet our needs and satisfy our desires.

What I am trying to say is that we need to quit dating the church. It's time to stop dating and enter a committed relationship with Christ and his church. You know I think that most of us here today would agree that we should avoid directionless relationships that are romantic and physical but in which the people involved have no intention of moving toward commitment. That's a train wreck waiting to happen. We understand that when it comes to physical relationships. We would surely to our very best to steer our daughters away from men who were only interested in what they could get from a relationship, but who would never be willing to make a commitment. And while that may be the message we try to preach to our teens, it may also be the very relationship that we, ourselves, sustain to the church. We like attending on weekends, we like the social benefits, the get-togethers, the activities, but like Joe in our story, we're not ready to settle down and commit, we want to keep our options open. We're like a lover with a wandering eye, always on the hunt for something better. Would you want to be with a person like that? Do you think it's any different for Christ and his church?

When one scans the religious landscape today, he will find countless believers, but not many belongers. He'll find innumerable consumers, but not communers.

So here's the purpose of this lesson this morning. I want you to look in the mirror and see what you see (James 1:21-25). Could it be that you're a "church dater" and maybe didn't even realize it. Could it be that you're one who wants something from the church, but is unwilling to commit to the church?

You can usually identify a “church dater” by the following quick profile.

1. They are often “me-centered.” They go to church for programs and activities. And the driving question is “what can the church do for me and my family.” But are you there to be called upon and counted upon?
2. Church daters are often independent. They go to church because that’s what they’re supposed to do, but they’re careful to avoid getting involved too much. They don’t want to get tied down. They don’t want others depending on them. They want no ties, no responsibilities.
3. Church daters are often critical. They are short on allegiance and quick to find fault. You’ll hear them say things like, the people aren’t very friendly, the singing or preaching isn’t very good, it’s not like my home congregation, etc.

And so we look at the imperfections, avoid commitment and continue to date the church. But folks God has something better in mind for us than dating the church. And just like the man who refuses to commit to his long time girlfriend, while he thinks he is doing what is best, he is actually robbing himself of other blessings.

Let me tell you that the church is of no small importance. It is a part of the eternal purpose of God (Ephesians 3:10-11). It is also a manifestation of the wisdom of God. The relationship that the church sustains to Jesus is described in terms of marriage (Ephesians 5:22-27). I think it is probable that God didn’t get his inspiration for loving the church from marriage, but that one reason God created marriage was to illustrate his love for the church. Isn’t it amazing that God has not only saved us, but he has invited us to participate in his master plan of saving the lost. Through the local church, we take part in his eternal plan to rescue men and woman from their sin and totally transform their lives (Ephesians 1:22-23).

For some, I know that the idea of committing or recommitting to a church stirs up unpleasant feelings and memories. Perhaps you’ve seen or been a part of a church that was torn apart by greed, arrogance, bickering, and a lack of moral integrity. If that’s the case, then I would invite you to view the church from heaven’s perspective. From heaven’s perspective, the church is a city set on a hill where people who once hated God and each other become God’s children and a part of one big family.

But what do we do with all the foibles and shortcomings of the church? If we maintain our heavenly perspective, even the faults become an opportunity for us to love and serve and to practice Christ likeness. Actually, since none of us are perfect, we don’t have the right to disown the church. We too, have our own set of imperfections to deal with. Jesus is the only one who has the right to disown or give up on the church and he hasn’t and he won’t.

Friends, we have a choice today. We can go through life and refuse to commit to the church and refuse to fall in love with her. We can defy God’s divine wisdom and eternal plan and view the church as a burden. Or we can decide to stop dating the church, fall in love, and commit ourselves fully. When we do this, we’ll find that committing to the church is not a burden, but a gift. It doesn’t tie us down; it anchors us against the storms of life.