

New Year Necessities Back to Basics: Fellowship Acts 2:1-13, 42-47

INTRODUCTION

Please open your Bibles to **Acts 2** (*read 2:1-41*)

Acts 2 is one of the greatest transition chapters recorded in Scripture. In **Acts 1** Christ prepares the way for the birth of the church, and in **chapter 2** it's born. In **Acts 1** the disciples are waiting for the Holy Spirit; in **Acts 2** He comes. In **chapter 1** they witness the ascension of the Christ of God; in **chapter 2** they experience the empowerment of the Spirit of God. **First, they are told to wait, and then they are sent forth.** It marks the end of the old age and the beginning of the new. Up to now, the Spirit was with God's people, but from now on, He would indwell them. **In the Old Testament era, people served God out of love along with a fear of the consequences of breaking God's law.** But from now on, they would serve God out of love for Christ with the energy of the indwelling Holy Spirit. All believers have the Spirit within them and are in an invisible union with each other and Christ. Paul referred to the church as a mystery because it was not revealed in the Old Testament (**Eph. 3:3-6**), but in **Acts 2** we see that mystery unfolding.

We continue our series **Back to Basics**. So far, we have considered Word (hearing God's voice) and Prayer (enjoying having His ear). **These two foundational truths point to the vertical aspect of our walk with the Lord.** This morning we begin to consider the horizontal aspect of our walk with the Lord, **namely fellowship.**

And what exactly is fellowship? Is it church members chatting outside after the church service? Is it young people hiking with one another in nature? Is it church friends getting together Saturday night at someone's home? **Fellowship is a great New Testament concept.** It denotes something vital to Christian spiritual health, and central to the church's true life. **Fellowship expresses the idea of sharing, of having something in common with somebody else.** This common participation takes on a double form: giving and receiving.

Let me give you a **definition**: "*Fellowship is a relationship of inner unity among believers that expresses itself in outer co-participation with Christ and one another in accomplishing God's purposes in and through His people.*" Fellowship is the enjoyment of common life in Christ (blessings and challenges). **Fellowship points to enjoying being part of His body.**

And fellowship happens within the context of the church. And what is the church? "*The church is the body of people called by God's grace through faith in Christ to glorify him by serving him in this world.*" (**Platt, Secret Church: The Body of Christ, p. 32**) I like this definition; it gives us a picture of the universal church of Jesus Christ. But can we narrow it down some? **Yes.** Here's a narrower definition of **church**: "*The local church is a gathering of those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, who are committed to meet regularly for worship, teaching, fellowship, and prayer, and who help make disciples of all people.*" (**Pastor Steven Cole**)

If you're a follower of Christ and have not committed to a church family, why not stop dating the church and commit to **meaningful church membership?**

Let me give you **three things** here this morning to think about, but even more than that, to respond to, to make a decision about. It's time for a heart to heart, if you will.

First, please note...

I. The _____ of church dating

In the book, **Stop Dating the Church**, the author writes the **following**: "*These days experts describe America as a nation of 'believers' but not 'belongs' and the numbers confirm it. According to pollster George Barna, while the adult population in the United States increased by 15 percent during the nineties, the number of adults who either didn't attend church or only went on major holidays increased by 92 percent.*"

That's the average person in our society. But what about the average church member. Did you know that the average church member who considers themselves to be "very faithful" to their church only comes 40 Sundays a year? That's 75%. Try applying that to any meaningful relationship you have?

Now, how can you tell if you're a if you're a church dater?

II. The _____ of a church dater

A. They have an _____ problem

You can tell if a person is a church dater, not so much by **looking** at their eyes, but by **listening** to their "I's." Their driving question is what's in it for me. **Should you consider what the church offers in light of the needs you and/or your family have?** Of course! And also consider that you may just be the answer to prayers for having what the church knows it needs to better reach those around her and those that are part of her.

B. They are _____ Christians

Here's the second question that a church dater asks: "*Why do I need the church?*" Now, they know that they ought to gather with the church and they may even attend a couple of Sundays out of a month. But they don't develop any relationships. **There's involvement, but there's no investment.**

C. They can always spot the _____ in the silver church cloud

They're short on allegiance and quick on criticism. I'll tell you, a church worth attending is a church worth defending. **The church needs your loving affection.** The church needs your loyal allegiance.

Is there any good news? Of course! *Please note...*

III. The _____ - to church dating

So, how do you do it? How do you move from this off and on-again dating relationship with the church to developing a life-long and eternity-long relationship with the church?

Let me give you two things.

A. _____

You've got to say, "**I Do.**" A wedding puts action to affection as bride and groom say, "**I do.**" Now, how do you know when a church is "the one?" How can you tell?

Please allow me to share with you 10 important questions to ask about the church where you'd like to join.

Here are the **questions:**

1. *Is this a church where God's Word is faithfully taught?*
2. *Is this a church where sound doctrine matters?*
3. *Is this a church where the gospel is cherished and clearly proclaimed?*
4. *Is this a church that is committed to reaching others with the Gospel?*
5. *Is this a church whose leaders are characterized by humility and integrity?*
6. *Is this a church where people strive to live by God's Word?*
7. *Is this a church where I can find and cultivate Godly relationships?*
8. *Is this a church where members are challenged to serve?*
9. *Is this a church that is willing to kick me out?*
10. *Is this a church that I'm willing to join 'as is' with enthusiasm and faith in God?*

The first keyword is COMMITMENT...the next one is...

B. Contentment

You not only say, "***I do***"; you've got to say, "***I will***." I will be faithful. I will serve. I will give. I will connect with others. I will tell others. **I will make my faith family a priority.** I am content with organizing my life and my family's life around God, God's people and what He wants to accomplish through them. Build and grow and raise your family in the family of God.

CONCLUSION

What can we take with us this morning? Christ and His body, the church, is essential, not just nice. Christ and His church should be at the center of every Christian's life. It's the core or center that should govern everything else. **John Stott put it like this:** "*If the church is central to God's purpose, as seen in both history and the gospel, it must surely also be central to our lives. How can we take lightly what God takes so seriously? How dare we push to the circumference what God has placed at the center?*" (**The Message of Ephesian: God's New Society, p.129**)

The church is important because Christ promised to build it, He loves His church and gave His life for her, and His church reveals Him to the lost world.