



Thoughts from the Bible and Books

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More Membership Matters

Last fall I gave several reasons why membership matters (you can re-read the October 2005 TBB online for extra credit). I've been thinking lately of some more reasons why membership matters.

But first let me tell you what to do if I convince you that becoming a member of your local church matters. There will be an eight week new members class starting September 17 during the 11:00 a.m. Sunday School hour. The class will be led by two of our elders, Evan Vanderwey and Bruce Jeffries, and one of our newest members, Brad Beals.

Now to the convincing. Joshua Harris (of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* fame) has written another book - *Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Family of God*. Harris (now a pastor at Covenant Life Church in Maryland) opens the book by telling the story of Jack and Grace.

Jack and Grace fell in love and dated for several years. After a while the sparks began to flicker less intensely and the flaws shone more brightly. Jack started to have second thoughts. Finally, Grace couldn't stand the indecision anymore. She wanted some definition in their relationship. This made Jack furious: "We're together aren't we? Why isn't that enough for you?" Jack wanted relationship without commitment.

We all know guys like Jack. They're frustrating, especially if you're the Grace in the relationship. But how many of us are Jacks treating the church like Grace? How many of us date the church, looking for passion and relationship, but avoiding commitment?

Here's what Harris says reflecting on the similarities between couple dating and church dating:

The message of that book [*I Kissed Dating Goodbye*] was that singles should avoid directionless relationships that were romantic and physical but had no intention of moving toward commitment. The irony of this was that even though I had stopped playing the dating game with girls, I was perfectly happy to keep playing it with the church. I liked attending on weekends, and I enjoyed

the social benefits of church, but I didn't want the real responsibility that came with real commitment. Like Jack in our story, I wasn't interested in settling down. So though I gave the appearance of commitment,

I mostly just flirted with different churches and kept my options open.

Flirting is a very real temptation, whether its with guys, girls, or churches. Flirting allows for sparks of passion and fun with low risk and low commitment. But with low risk and low commitment come low rewards. Think of your marriage (if you're married). Being married isn't always easy. But there are things you would have never known about yourself and things you would have never grown up in and out of were it not for the commitment that mar-

New Members Class

Starts September 17th for eight weeks
 11:00 a.m. Sundays in Room 204
 Teachers:
 Evan Vanderwey, Bruce Jeffries and Brad Beals.

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riage demands. We stunt our growth, short circuit our sanctification, and short change our fruitfulness when we refuse to commit—be it to friends, spouses, or churches.

Of course, the analogy is not perfect. Belonging to a church is not exactly like a marriage. Our membership vows don't say anything about "to death do us part." People move. People change. Churches change. And people change churches—sometimes for good reasons, sometimes for bad. But that's no excuse for flirting. I would rather have someone commit to another church than flirt with our church and one or two others.

"But," you may ask, "Why do I have to become a member to make a commitment?" Good question. Why does membership matter. Off the top of my head I could only think of thirteen reasons.

- How does anyone know you are making a commitment unless you become a member? I suppose you could call the office and tell us that you would like to be registered as a permanent adherent. But that's kind of telling your long-time girlfriend "I love you so much, I'd like to live in the same house with you for the rest of my life." Why not just tie the knot?
- How can you make a commitment without committing to something? In becoming a member you make promises to the church and the church to you. Without those promises all we have our good intentions, but no formal commitment.
- Whenever Israel got serious about God, they renewed the covenant. They publically declared their allegiance to each other and God's word. They re-remembered themselves.
- It's harder to get plugged into ministries and growth groups without taking the new members class.
- We don't know what our commitment is to you without knowing your commitment to us. Your elders pray every two weeks for everyone in this congregation. It's very difficult to know if you are part of the everyone unless you become a member. (Note: If you are only here for six months and don't want to become a member or you have good reasons for not joining a church [those reasons do exist but they are rare], you could still call the church office and ask to be

placed in an elder district. We try to pray for and care for our adherents too, and we appreciate knowing that this is your home church.)

- Membership will test you. Not the class, but the commitment. You will discover the warts and hairy moles of our church. But that's when love proves its worth.
- Membership will test us. We haven't done an official survey, but my guess is that we have a lot of sinners in our congregation. So, if you're a sinner too, sometimes you will be hard to love and sometimes it will be hard to love each other. Sounds like marriage doesn't it?
- There are certain privileges of membership: you can't serve in church office and you can't vote at congregational meetings.
- Joining the church will allow others in the church to know who you are, that you are here, and that you intend to stay.
- A commitment of membership, like the commitment of marriage forces us (hopefully) to stop thinking only of "what's in it for me?". We move from consumers to community.
- A commitment of membership helps sever the root of independency that chokes out spiritual life. It is not good for man to be alone and it is not good for a Christian to be churchless.
- A commitment of membership means that we stop looking around at how happy we could be with other churches at start looking for how we can make a difference where we're at. (Reminds me of that classic poetry: "If you can't be with the one you love, honey, love the one you're with.").
- The church is the only institution that will last for all eternity, so why not join now and get used to it.

Ah, dating. I've been there and done that. May the Lord bless all of you who are still there and doing that. I don't miss it one bit (I know, I still need to "date" my wife). I'm thankful all the indecision, and awkward pauses, and DTR (define the relationship) moments are a thing of the past. I'm glad I stopped dating and got married. Don't get me wrong. You don't have to stop dating and you don't all have to get married. But "Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love With God's Family"—that sounds like a good idea for all of us.

- Kevin DeYoung