



Heartbeat of a Healthy Church

Lesson 2: Having the Right Dedication

One of the greatest deficiencies in local churches today is a lack of dedication among its members and attenders. Dedication requires commitment, responsibility, allegiance, submission, and obligation. Our culture has bred people to be dependent rather than dedicated. The difference between dependence and dedication is astonishing. Dependence asks, "What is in it for me (WIIFM)?" while dedication asks, "What is in it for God (WIIFG)?" When shopping for a new church, Christians often evaluate what programs, ministries, and opportunities that will best fit them in their children (WIIFM). Rather, Christians should evaluate a church based upon the opportunity available to perform the work of the ministry, edify the body of Christ, and come to the unity of faith in the knowledge of Christ (WIIFG). As a pastor, I sometimes feel like a cheap used car salesman who is expected to give the perfect sales pitch to persuade people to join our church because they want to know why NESBC is better than the other churches. Is this right? Frankly, NESBC is not better than other churches. Our church is lacking in many ministries or "programs," has a small membership, and gaps that need to be filled. If a Christian looks at NESBC with a WIIFM mindset, it is not very glorious, but if they will look at NESBC with a WIIFG mindset, the possibilities are endless by the grace of God. This takes the right dedication.

Church membership is often balked at and ridiculed because modern Christians view it as archaic, an invention of government, an opportunity for manipulation, or even non-biblical. The purpose of this lesson is to investigate a biblical call to church membership.

When does a person become a member of the Church? The answer to this is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13. "For by one Spirit are (were) we all baptized (placed) into _____." The moment you were saved God immersed you into the body of Christ and made you a part of his Church. As we saw in the last lesson, this is often referred to as the universal church. We do need to understand that there is a difference between the universal church and the local church. Every believer belongs to the universal body of Christ. It is also important for the believer to belong to the local body of Christ (the local church). When a person is saved he should join together with the other believers in his locality, assuming there is a good church there, or find the closest Biblical church possible. In Acts 2:41-42, we read about people who believed in Christ the day the Church first began. These people gladly received God's Word and were baptized. Then they continued to do these four things (see Acts 2:42):

1. They continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine.

This means they continued in the teaching of the apostles. The believers would gather together to be taught by the Apostles. Do we have that teaching recorded in any one book today?

2. They continued steadfastly in fellowship.

The word fellowship means "a sharing in common." They came together because they shared many things in common. They shared a common life and a common Lord. Who better knows how to live in the world as a Christian than the people you attend church with?

3. They continued steadfastly in breaking of bread.

They came together to remember the Lord's death by observing Communion. Paul emphasizes this necessity of the church in 1 Corinthians 11.

4. They continued steadfastly in prayer.

They came together to pray. They met often for "prayer meetings." Many Christians fail to realize the power God displays when his church prays.

The people described in Acts 2:41-42 became the local church that was in Jerusalem. By Acts 5:13, local church membership had become a choice and not an automatic result of salvation. These people did not want to join themselves to this local assembly because they were unbelievers and did not want to be a part of this church. As people believed (Acts 5:14) they were added to Christ's body, and they became a part of the local church in Jerusalem.

There are those who would claim that there is no command in the New Testament that says, "Thou shalt join a church." To be fair, there is no command in Scripture that says, "Thou shalt drink water" either. Those who claim "church member" is not in the Bible must also admit the word "Trinity" does not appear either. There is sufficient example by the New Testament church that demonstrates they practiced church membership. We should strive to follow these examples. The early churches had some kind of a record of membership. We know that a careful record was kept of the number of believers (see Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4). Also special records and rolls were kept (1 Timothy 5:9 - "taken into the number" or "put on the list"). What list? Church members! In the first century, church membership had nothing to do with keeping records for a 501c3 tax exemption status. It was a sign of dedication to identify one's faith.

1. Church membership means biblical partnership (Philippians 1:5).
2. Church membership means identification with doctrine (Acts 2:41-42).
3. Church membership means commitment (Romans 12:4-5).
4. Church membership means service (Ephesians 4:12; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Romans 12:6-8).
5. Church membership means correct accountability (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11).
6. Church membership means dedication to pastoral care (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:17).

