

Belong: Hardin's Commitment to its Members

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(Outlined by Kory Cunningham)
Ephesians 4:11-16

In this lesson, we will try to answer questions you might have about Church membership. I will be talking about Hardin's commitment to our members. Our passage of Scripture is one that Hardin Baptist Church has been using for over 31 years to truly build the body of Christ. At Hardin Baptist Church, we believe that it is not about us. It is about Him, and it is about them; those who are not here yet. That is what we really believe. If you are thinking about becoming a member, or if you already are a member, we want you to know we are committed to you. Ephesians 4 is one of our key passages here at Hardin.

Scripture

"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Based on this passage of Scripture, Hardin believes that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. That is our commitment to you as

a member; to keep the main thing the main thing, to the best of our ability. We believe the main thing is for this body to be growing down, up, and out. Last week, Kory taught that Hardin Baptist Church is not where we go, it is who we are. It is not about a place, it is about a people. We believe Hardin Baptist Church is a body of baptized believers who meet together to carry out the agenda of the Kingdom of Heaven. According to Jesus in Matthew, when He built His Church He gave us a kingdom agenda; not a Church agenda. The kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in the hearts and lives of His people right now, with a future manifestation. He said to His Church, I'm giving you keys to the kingdom. As members, we don't believe the keys were given to the pastor. The keys were given to the body of baptized believers, the Church.

While we were on sabbatical and the weather got so bad, my daughter's water froze. She was at work, and it had made a big mess. She lives in Nashville, and since we've been home, a buddy and I have been going down on the weekends to repair her house. My wife went with us this time, and she and my daughter went somewhere. Now, we don't know who did it, but later in the afternoon I went out to get in my truck to run an errand and I couldn't find my keys. I went back in to get them, but no one had them. The keys were in the truck, locked up! Toyota does not want anyone to get in my truck without the keys...we almost had to take the door off to get in the truck! I can't tell you what a helpless feeling it was to stand outside my truck, needing to go somewhere, but didn't have the keys! That truck was sitting there, ready to do what I needed to do, but I didn't have the keys.

As a member of Hardin Baptist, we realize we have been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and this Church is committed to take those keys and do what God said to do. We are going to loosen, and we are going to bind. The Bible says that whatever we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven, and whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven. In other words, you can be part of another group of people and you can make a difference, but the only group of people you can be a part of that will make an eternal difference is the Church of Jesus Christ. We do not buy into that belief that right now only counts for right now. We believe right now counts forever!

There are two sides to Church membership, just as there are two sides of a coin; heads and tails. When people talk about the Church, they talk about the member's relationship to the Church. We will call that tails. But we aren't going to start with the tails side of the Church. We are going to start with the heads side of the Church. The heads side is our commitment to you as a member.

John F. Kennedy asked us as a nation to ask not what this country can do for you, but ask what you can do for this country. We aren't going to ask what you can do for us, but we are going to share with you what we believe God has called us to do as the whole to its parts; and that's our commitment as a body to you, a member. There are many aspects of Church membership, but we want to summarize them in five thoughts, or categories, that Kory has prepared. If you are a member of Hardin Baptist Church, or you're thinking about being a member of Hardin Baptist Church, here is what the Church is committed to towards you:

- 1. Gathering**
- 2. Connecting**
- 3. Serving**
- 4. Giving**
- 5. Going**

Gathering

We could take you through the book of Acts and clearly show you that the Church gathered together on the first day of the week. Hardin Baptist Church is committed to gathering together as a body of believers on the first day of the week as well. We do not believe that Sunday is the end of the weekend. As the Church, we accepted that for years, and the body just dragged in on Sunday morning thinking it was the end of the week. For Hardin, the week ends on Saturday night, and Sunday morning starts a brand new week. We are committed to the belief that God has a plan for you this week, and we are part of that plan in your life. In the time that we gather together on Sunday mornings, we are going to do our best to get you ready for what God is getting ready for you for the rest of the

week. We believe this is not our day; this is the Lord's Day. It is not a day of work; it is a day of worship. It is not a day of football; it is a day of fellowship. It is not a day of feasting on entertainment; it is a day of feasting on the presence and the Word of God. We are committed to that here at Hardin Baptist Church.

When you come and gather with us on the first day of the week, there is going to be fellowship, there is going to be Scripture, there is going to be prayer, there is going to be worship, and there is going to be preaching. We are excited about this! I want to be clear because a lot of people struggle with this; when you come in, (even at 8am) I'm sorry, but this is not going to feel like a funeral. It is going to feel like a celebration! Hardin doesn't gather on Friday, we gather on Sunday at 8am, 9:15am, 10:30am, and 6pm, and when we gather, we remember Jesus Christ is not dead! If we were meeting on Friday, we might act like He was still dead. We might act like the early disciples, but we know that when the sun went down on Friday, the Son of God went down. But when the sun came up Sunday morning, the Son of God was already up! When we gather together on the first day of the week, we aren't going to gather in honor of a Savior who is dead, we are going to gather in honor of a Savior who is alive and sitting on the right hand throne of God, and we believe He could come back before this day is over! Therefore, Sunday is going to be a day of celebration for us, and we aren't going to apologize for that at Hardin.

Our worship with song, fellowship, preaching, and teaching of God's Word is going to be centered around being spiritual, and in truth. We aren't going to trust in our human power, we are going to trust in the mighty anointing of God's Holy Spirit. We are going to try to do what the early Church did. Paul told the Church at Ephesus, when you come together, use Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to make a melody in your heart to the Lord. One of the evidences of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is actually how you worship, not just toward God, but toward one another. We are committed to that.

The word, *Psalm*, comes out of the Old Testament. A Psalm was a poem sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. It literally means 'to twitch or to pluck.' When I read through the hymnal, or the song book, of the Old Testament, I picture David doing some twitching and plucking on

his harp. We don't have David, but we have Tony on rhythm guitar, Kenny on bass, and Shane on electric. Dickie and Alan are on drums, Kody on piano, and Fran on the keyboard. We have Matt on the microphone, and other people who love to join with them in leading us to worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth. We want this to be a time of celebration! We are committed to you in that regard.

Hardin Baptist Church is not going to get into the debate over the style of music. My wife loves bluegrass. She plays it in the barn all the time; she doesn't give the cows a choice. I'm sorry, that's not my favorite style of music. I can handle a couple of songs, but after a few hours, I want to get out of the barn. I know as a member you have a preference, but this body is not into your preference. We are into music; we are into a style that we believe glorifies God. Therefore, we are not going to pick between one genre of music, we are going to be balanced. We praise God for the hymns that was written 500 years ago, but we still praise God for leading men and women today to put words into song that we can use to express our heartfelt appreciation to God. We are committed to that.

When you gather with us, we are committed to leading you with the Word, feed you with the Word, and equip you with the Word. I want you to know that. I want you to know that from the beginning this Church has made it clear that the number one priority of the pastor is to equip the saints through the preaching/teaching ministry on Sunday morning. If you become a member of this Church, please know what this Church is committed to. Our first priority is to feed you, and to lead you, and equip you from the Word of God. We try not to serve spiritual fast food; we like home cooking. We don't like to hear someone else say something, and then just repackage it. We like our pastors to be in the Word and exegete it in an expository way. This means that most of the time we will take a book and go all the way through it; sometimes paragraph by paragraph, sometimes verse by verse, and sometimes word by word. We will always try to keep it in context. We hope when it comes out, it will be like coming over for steak. I mean listen, you can't go anywhere in this area and pay for a steak like you could get if you come to my house; me and the Big Green Egg, we can do steak! It's the same with HBC BBQ; you just can't beat it! They cook that all night long. That's what we want it to be like here. We want you to know that when you gather on the first day of the

week, the pastoral staff has spent the whole week, and even months, in preparation so that we serve you filet mignon, baked potato, and chocolate dessert! We want you to feast on God's Word because we know that you don't come to hear our opinions; you come to hear the Word of God.

In preparation this week, I read about Zedekiah; he was a little scared. He hadn't been listening to God's Word, and went to Jeremiah and asked if there was any word from the Lord? When you come on Sunday morning, our pastoral staff is going to say there is a Word from God! It won't be through a private personal revelation, but through a personal study of God's Word. We are going to preach the Bible, and let the chips fall where they may, and we are not going to apologize for it. We are going to preach this Bible from cover to cover, whether it is controversial or not. We don't think there is part of this Bible reserved for the spiritually elite and another part that's reserved for our membership. We believe the membership deserves the whole counsel of God. When you leave here on Sunday morning or Sunday night, we want you to feel ready for the rest of the week. We want you to know Jesus is alive and He is working in your life. That's our commitment to our members.

Connecting

The Church does not want you to fall through the cracks. You know, when we were smaller, it seemed like it was easy for everybody to get connected. As God has blessed us and our family has grown, it seems like it is easier for some people to fall through those cracks. How many of you can honestly tell me the name of the person in front of you? Gathering in a large group to celebrate the Christ, even at 8am, will not get you connected to this body. We are not only committed to the gathering, we are committed to getting you connected. I never thought the day would come when we would have to hire a pastor to help us get connected, but we are at that time. This Church has committed resources to having a pastor who helps get each member connected to the body. It is one of the best investments we've ever made. We are committed to Adult Bible Fellowships, which are here on campus. You're already here, why not get connected to another group of people right after this gathering? It is going to be a little smaller, probably from 15-35 people. See some people face to face and hear about some of their struggles.

You'll realize that some of those people are facing what you're facing. We build our Adult Bible Fellowships around the Word of God.

We are also committed to small groups off-campus. Some of us need to be connected to one of these smaller groups that meet on weeknights; we would love to get you connected because we know while everything is going great in your life, you can sit where you sit and be blessed. But when you have a problem, or an illness, and you need the Church, if the first person that shows up at your door is Bro. Ricky, it probably means you are not connected. I hope you understood that. The reason we want to get you connected is not so we can brag about how many people we have connected. We are not interested in numbers, we are interested in people. We want to get you connected because we care about you.

Several years ago I got the report that one of our Church members had been in a bad accident. We immediately headed to Nashville to be with them. While we were driving to Nashville, we started getting some calls. When we were almost to Clarksville, Marsha Adams called. She asked, "Bro. Ricky, where are you at? Is Celisa with you?" She said, "Why don't you all stop and have supper?" I was shocked. Marsha said, "We are all here." Everybody in this Church that family was connected to was already there! By the time I got there, I was going to be number 43 or 44. As pastor of this Church, I can't tell you how thrilled I was to be number 43 or 44. That is what we offer you if you get connected. You will have a group of people who really care about you. Trust me, I've seen it. You're going to love us as a whole, but if you do not get connected, there will be a time when we are going to fail to care for you, and you won't like us anymore. It doesn't matter if it is Adult Bible Fellowship, a small group, or a ministry team; we just want you to get connected.

Serving

We believe that every member of this Church is a minister. In the Greek, the word, *minister*, primarily means 'to be a servant.' It goes back to a word that means 'to have dirty feet.' In modern day phrasing, it means 'to roll up your britches legs and your sleeves and get dirty.' We believe every member of Hardin ought to be dirty. As I got to Church this morning, I put my coat on and saw a spot. I thought, how can I stand in front of the Church with a spot? It turned out not to be a spot, but if it had been, I

would have been uncomfortable. We have all been taught that Church is somewhere we are supposed to stay clean. When you understand that Church is who we are, not where we go, we will begin to realize we should all be dirty!

We believe every member is a minister and every member has a gift that they were 'reborn' with. Many of you have those kids that as soon as they were born, you knew they were musical, or athletic, or very intelligent. Well, from the moment they are reborn, every child of God is charismatic. They receive a special gift from God's Holy Spirit that one day will grow into full fruition and they will use it to serve the body. We are committed to helping you find a place to serve in this body; in your area of giftedness.

It is hard to believe, but 31 years ago a pulpit committee offered an invitation for me to come to preach a trial sermon. This Church graciously invited me to come and pastor here. In the beginning, it was just one pastor, but today, this Church is committed to four full-time pastors and five part-time ministry leaders. Our pastor's Executive Assistant, our financial secretary, our great custodial staff; we are committed to you, our members. We want you to find a place to serve because we believe it is more blessed to give than to receive. It is more blessed to discover that gift and use it, than to sit in a chair and be served. We are committed to helping you find a place of service.

Giving

At Hardin, we call this investing. We are not going to apologize for this. We are going to give and invest every dollar you put in the offering plate, or you bring by the office, or mail to us. We are not a Fortune 500 company. We don't measure our success at the end of the year by how much money we gained. We are not putting money in the bank to trust in for a rainy day. Our trust is in God, and we, as a Church, do not apologize for the way we invest God's money. We want you to know that right off the top, 9.75% of what you give goes to the Cooperative Program through the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Then, I could name individual after individual and ministry after ministry that we give to or invest with, and we do it cheerfully. This Church spends the money God gives you, which you give to us, cheerfully, because we know that you are a cheerful giver. This

Church is committed to being a wise steward of what you give. We are not going to apologize for taking up an offering for a mission trip. We are not going to apologize for asking you to be involved in the unique opportunity to train 60 pastors in the Amazon region of Brazil. As a Church, we believe the greatest investment you can make is not in the stock market, not in another farm, not in another home, but it is in the Kingdom of God. We are honored to be the vehicle that you trust with your investment.

Going

I will never forget when we came to Hardin Baptist, we started training our people to share Christ. We set a certain night to go out in to the community. We went out 13 weeks and we had 13 people saved; praise God! Guess how many we baptized out of those 13? None...all 13 of those people were baptized in other Churches. When we discovered they had a closer connection with another Church, we just encouraged them to go there. Does that blow your mind?

Why has it been so hard to join Hardin Baptist Church? It is because we are not into numbers; we are into people. We want to make sure that when you become a member of this Church, you are committed to what we are committed to. There was a time that it was really simple to communicate that, when there weren't nearly as many of us. But the reason this Church continues to grow down, up, and out is because this Church continues to go. I am not talking about going to Nicaragua, Arizona, or Brazil. I am talking about as a growing disciple, we believe we are to be making disciples. According to Matthew, the way we do this is by going. As we go home, or work, a ballgame, or school; making disciples is supposed to be on our minds. We do not believe salvation is about yours only, we believe it is about the salvation of others. God did not save you to be an end; God saved you to be a means. That is awesome!

We are committed to remind you from time to time that as you go, exhibit the fruit that you are growing as a disciple of Christ. But remember that as a growing disciple of Christ, you are not a museum. You are a Church, and as this Church walks in this community, we are the body of Christ. We are His hands, His feet, His arms, His shoulders, and we are His voice. We are committed to gathering, connecting, serving, giving, and we are committed

to going. As a member of this Church, we do not want to be a group of parts; we want to be a true body of believers.

We hope when you first came here that you felt welcomed and you came back. When you came back, you looked around and knew you were different. Some of you are different. If you don't know that, just let me tell you, you are different. We wanted you to feel accepted. I know sometimes you think why am I going there? It is because we not only welcomed you, but we accepted you as you are. We need you to know that you are needed. If you have come to faith in Jesus Christ and you have been biblically baptized (by immersion) because your sins are forgiven (not to get your sins forgiven); if you agree to our biblical confession of faith, we would love to have you become a member of this Church. We would love for you to belong, and make that formal statement.