

Belong: Members' Commitment to the Body Acts 2:42

March 2nd, 2013

Bro. Kory Cunningham

I want to open up with a snapshot of the early Church. I want to look at what they were doing when it comes to being the Church. Acts 2 gives us a picture of how the early Church was devoted to one another.

Scripture

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The Early Church

I love what it says in that first line, "...and they were devoted." I think that is really a picture of what we see the Church being. It is a group of people who have been redeemed by Jesus. In Acts 2, we see Peter preaching a sermon and the Spirit cuts to the heart of 3000 people in conviction. They repented and were baptized, and now they are new believers. What do they do? They devote themselves to one another. They devote themselves to being the Church. When we see this snapshot, we see a

people who gather together, and if you read through the book of Acts, I think we see them doing the five things that we have been laying out for us to do. They are gathering, connecting, serving, giving, and going. They are devoting themselves to those things. I think we should be devoted to the same things.

Why are we doing a series about membership? It is because we believe membership truly matters. We believe membership is biblical. But we want to be really up front with membership. Church membership is not for the casual; Church membership is for the devoted. In this passage, we see these people are not casual; they were devoted to King Jesus. Church membership is for those who are devoted to King Jesus and His Kingdom, above all else. It is those who have been cut to the heart, have been redeemed by Christ, and who feel a longing to be a part of something bigger than themselves. It is for those who have denied themselves, taken up their cross, and are now following after Jesus. Church membership is for those who have Jesus as their Lord and are devoted to Him, and from that comes a devotion to His people, which we see in this passage in Acts. They were devoted to one another.

Some of you have been going through this series and you realize Church membership isn't right for you right now. That is okay. Church membership might not be right for you right now, but we are going to pray that maybe it will be in the future. But we want to give you an opportunity for those of you who say yes, this is what I want, I want to be devoted and do those five things.

Member's Commitment to the Body

Last week, Bro. Ricky looked at what you can expect from the Church as a member, looking at the whole. If you join, you should expect certain things from the other people in this Church. You should expect things as a part of the body, but you should also expect things from the whole. You should expect certain things from us in our gathering, connecting, serving, giving, and going. This week, we are going to flip that around. What does the whole (the Church) expect from you? Think about your human body for just a moment. Paul loved using the human body as an example of the Church. When it comes to your body, it is sort of a two way street. Your

parts have responsibility to the whole, and your whole has a responsibility to your parts. Your stomach has expectations for your body; it expects your body to feed it. If it doesn't, your stomach will start growling. It will let you know it needs food. As an individual part, your stomach has expectations of the rest of the body. You need to send food down the throat because you are hungry. In the same way, the body has expectations for the stomach. That expectation is that as I put food in my mouth and down my throat, the stomach is going to digest the food, which is what it is supposed to do. Your parts have an expectation of your whole body, but your whole body has expectations from each part; that they all work correctly and do their part.

The same is true with the Church. In the last lesson, we discussed that as a member, you should expect certain things from us as a body of believers. In the same way, as a group of believers, we expect certain things from you as a member of Hardin Baptist Church. In summary, here is what the body expects of you:

- 1. Gather**
- 2. Connect**
- 3. Serve**
- 4. Give**
- 5. Go**

By now, you should be able to rattle those off. That is what we expect of you if you become a member here. I want to go through those five things and look at each of these areas of what we expect from you as an individual.

Gather

We expect members to gather regularly for corporate worship. That is a basic expectation for all members at Hardin Baptist Church; we expect you to be here. We understand there are certain circumstances that could prevent you from being here sometimes. We are not saying you have to be here every single Sunday. We are saying that to be a healthy Church member, you have to gather regularly with us. Our gathering is an expression of who we are as Christ's body. We gather for preaching,

singing, and celebrating the ordinance like the Lord's Supper. We gather to watch baptisms, to pray, to fellowship, to encourage, and to do all those things that we are supposed to be doing as the Church. As a member, we are expecting you to come and participate in those. We are not just expecting you to gather, we are expecting you to engage at the gathering; there's a big difference. You can just show up and then leave, and not really get anything out of the gathering. But what we expect is for you to engage at the gatherings. When you come here, we are expecting you to engage during the preaching of God's Word, not just tune out, but to think about what God has to say to you right now; you come with expectations.

Yesterday, I went to preach at DNow (Disciple Now) in Huntingdon. I preached four sermons, and I was just worn out last night. I put something on Twitter about having a great time preaching at DNow and said I couldn't wait to preach four more at Hardin. Immediately, Mary Moreland commented on it. She said, "I can't wait to see what God is going to say through you." I thought, that is exactly what it means to come and engage. She's coming with expectations; she's excited to come here because she is expecting God to speak through His Word. That is what we expect for members to do; come excited to hear the preaching of God's Word because God is going to speak through His Word.

We expect you to engage in singing. One of the elements in singing is that we don't just sing to God, but we sing to one another. In the corporate gathering, we address one another in singing. You're telling God how deep His love is, but you are also telling the person beside you how deep God's love is. They need to be reminded of that, and they believe it just like you do. We want you to engage and celebrate with us during our corporate worship time.

Another aspect of our corporate worship is that we want you to be a stirrer. We want to stir each other up. In Hebrews, it says to come together and "stir" one another to love and good works.

When we come in this place, we should be greeting one another. In the Bible it says greet one another with a holy kiss. We are not saying that is what we should do because that was their culture, but we should be shaking hands. Tell someone that it is good to have you here, because that

person might not have been welcomed anywhere this week. We want to welcome you here because you are our brother or sister in Christ.

We want you to engage at the gathering, engage in God's Word, and engage in singing; stirring one another up, and greeting one another so we can be built up in love. We expect members to gather regularly for corporate worship.

Connect

When I say we, I am referring to the body. We expect members to connect in smaller groups in order to care and encourage others. We expect you to come to corporate, large group gathering, and a smaller group. Our Adult Ministry Leader, Chris Allen, loves to talk about going from 'rows to circles.' He's passionate about getting people who are in rows (pews) also in circles, (small group setting) because both are extremely important. It is extremely important for you to come to corporate worship, and it is extremely important for you to be in a circle of people who you can live out the gospel with. The verse we read said they attended the large group, (temple) and small groups (broke bread in their home.) They had this large group with apostles teaching, singing, and prayers, then, they had small group that was about fellowship and encouragement and accountability. We want to see every member come to be a part of a smaller circle. We want you to be part of a group because we believe that in those circles we can really encourage one another to grow up in relationships with one another. It is really linking arms together.

This body has created opportunity for you to connect. We have Adult Bible Fellowship (ABF) groups that meet at every hour during Sunday services. We have small groups that meet off campus on the weekends, and through the week. We have Bible studies, serving teams, and all sorts of opportunities for you to connect. We have offered various opportunities, but we expect you, as a member, to take a step into one of those opportunities and connect with a circle of believers so you can encourage one another along in your Christian life.

There is a guy named Scott Bidwell who moved back into town a couple of weeks ago. I got the chance to talk with him, and I loved what he had to say. He doesn't know how long he will be here, but he is ready to plug in. Here is a guy who understands that he is a part, and he needs the whole. The whole also needs him as the part. Scott didn't say that, but right after service he and his wife went to an ABF class; they took a step to get connected. Afterward, a person in that ABF group invited them to their home for dinner and they said yes. A lot of people would have said no, but they wanted to connect so they took another step and connected with a family. Then, he called and we met for breakfast one morning. Scott is saying that he wants to connect.

At Hardin, we have all sorts of way you can connect, but we can't connect for you. As a Church, we are saying we expect you to connect, and we expect you to take the steps to connect. Get connected to a group of people who know you and can live life with you.

What are those steps? A great step is the second Sunday of every month we have a class called **Next**. **Next** is right after the 9:15 service, so you can go in and ask questions about connecting. Another way would be to go to an ABF; I promise they will welcome you. Or, go to the website and click on **GroupLife**. Go to a serving team and ask how you can join their team. There are all kinds of ways to connect. Take the step! My Tuesday nights on my calendar from now until forever are booked. That is when my small group meets. Every single week it is inconvenient, or something comes up; there's a reason why we shouldn't meet. When we go, it is always messy and it is a little costly, but you know what? It is absolutely the most glorious thing we have been involved with! I've got six couples who are praying with me. They are praying for me and I'm praying for them, and we are reading the Bible together. We are asking questions about how we can follow Christ more deeply. We are living out the gospel together. I know connection is hard, I know it is costly, but at the same time, it is glorious. If you are a member, we have an expectation that you're going to connect with a smaller group of people to really do life together. What do you do in that connection? What is our expectation? When you connect, you are a caregiver and you are an encourager. Those are two things we expect you to do in that small group. You are going to care for the people in that group.

Last week you heard a story about individual members who had trauma in their life and the Church took care of them. How do you think that happens? It is because individual members were the ones who were caring. If that is going to work, it is got to be you caring for other individuals. That is how it works; it is a two way street. We want you to be a caregiver. I remember back in January when we had Garnett, our third child. You know it is crazy when you have older kids and then have a new baby. For two weeks, our ABF brought meals to us; every night there was a new meal. The way we were cared for was really incredible. Tim and Michelle Bundren just had a new baby a few weeks ago. So now, it is me and Katie's turn to be the caregiver, so we've been calling offering to keep their other children.

You are going into a connection for what you can give to it, not what you can get out of it. You are an encourager and you know you need to encourage the people in that group. You know they are down sometimes and life is hard sometimes, and you are going into that circle because you want to encourage other people on that serving team, or that small group. When you connect, we expect you to be a caregiver and an encourager.

Serve

We expect members to find their gift and serve, or serve until they find their gift. Some of you know what your gift is and you are probably already using it. When you came to Hardin, you knew that you are a teacher so you asked how you could become a teacher. Some of you know you were supposed to be on the greeting team, so you joined Guest Services. You see, you knew your gift and it was really easy for you to serve. But some of you have no idea what your gift is, and that is what has kept you standing back rather than stepping forward. If you know your gift, use that gift and serve, but if you don't know your gift, serve until you find your gift. I think the best way to discover your gift is to start doing something. Take a step somewhere, and if you don't have a personality that likes to greet people, we will know that right away and we will move you along somewhere that fits your giftedness. Or, take a step and join a serving team, if you don't like that one, we will help you find your area to serve, but don't wait around. Imagine if a middle school boy wanted to join the track team and he goes to the coach and tells him he

wants to join. The coach asks him what event he wants to do, what he's good at, and the boy doesn't know. What if the coach told him to go sit on the bench, figure out what he's good at, and then come back and tell him? He would be a bad coach. But what if the coach suggests some activities to him? He suggests long jump, but the boy isn't good at that. So he suggests a sprint, and he isn't good at that, either. But when he crosses the finish line, he keeps running, and all of a sudden, the coach figures out that the boy would be good at long distance running. The coach suggests that he be their distance runner and the boy excels at this. The only way he found out what he was good at was by trying a few different things. By finding out what he was bad at, he found out what he was good at.

If you know your gift, use it and serve. If you don't know your gift, just start serving. Through serving, I think the Lord will reveal what your gift is and you will use that gift for the benefit of the body. We want you to take a step forward; we are expecting you to do something. That could be on Sunday mornings, Wednesday nights, or outside these walls in the community serving on a ministry team. We just want you to be part of the body serving others, in some way. We want to be very up front in saying that we are a serving Church. It takes an army of volunteers, an army of servants, for all the various things to work just on a Sunday! We need more servants to come and help with all the things so we can do more. We are a Church that serves, and likes to serve, so we expect you to fall right in line and love to serve like we do. We think it is an absolute joy to get to serve.

Give

We expect members to invest in the mission of this body, and by God's grace, we can advance the Kingdom. We are expecting members to give. To put it simply, God has given this body a mission to do, and that mission costs money. That doesn't sound very spiritual, but it is absolutely true. It is funny how much Jesus talked about money. He viewed it as a spiritual thing, whether we worship God or things. What we expect from members is that they would be intentional investors. We expect you to put some thought into your giving. Think through how you are going to give. Think through how much you are going to give. Think through your budget; what does your budget say about Jesus? Does Jesus have a line in your

budget where you are actually working through intentionally giving to the kingdom of God?

I have noticed that our budget reveals a lot about our values. You can see what you love by looking at your budget. As a Christ follower, we love Jesus supremely, and we want that to be reflected through our budget. We want to give to the Kingdom. In Matthew 20, Jesus says, "lay up for yourselves.....for where your treasure is there your heart will be also." Wherever your money is going, that is where your heart is. Jesus says you can't love God and money. Giving is that it is an act of worship. We say that every time we take up the offering. At the same time, when we give, we are destroying idols in our life. When you say I want to be generous toward the mission of Christ, you are also saying I'm not going to use all of the resources I have to buy the things I think will make me happy. In one sense, we are killing idols when we worship God by investing in the Kingdom of Christ.

So, how much should you give? In the Old Testament, we had the law, and it said 10% belonged to the Lord. That went to support the priest and the temple. Then you had free will offerings where people would give above and beyond 10%. Now, we are not under law, but we are under grace. Are we still supposed to give 10% since we are under grace and not under law? So, does grace require more of us, or less of us? Does grace cause us to want to give more, or less? I would say that grace causes us to want to give more than what the law would simply require. We don't want it to be duty or law; we want this to be generosity. We want it to be something you love to do because you're investing in the Kingdom of God. I love what Randy Alcorn says about giving, "For the Christian, 10% should not be the ceiling of giving, but the floor; not the finish line, but the starting blocks." It is not saying I gave 10%, so I did my part; that is being legalistic. It is saying, how much of my money do I want to invest in the Kingdom? That is a question between you and the Lord. Be intentional about it, make a plan, go before the Lord, and ask Him what he would have you give. "Excel" in this grace of giving, as Paul says in II Corinthians 8:7.

We see that the Church went above and beyond in the New Testament when it came to the simple thing of giving. To be very truthful, your giving

affects our going. The way we give affects the way we go. We can only go as much as your giving allows. The more we give, the more we go. The less we give, the less we go. That is why we are not ashamed to say we want our members to intentionally invest and give because we want to go. We want to see disciples made in this community, in this state, in this country, and in this world. We want disciples to be made of all nations. Be an intentional investor in the Kingdom of God, and invest because you get to; not because you have to.

Go

We expect members to scatter throughout the week to make disciples. As a member at Hardin, we expect that as we leave here and scatter throughout our homes, our community, and at our work, understand that we have been commissioned as a Church in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples of all nations. We expect you understand that you are a part of that. One of your tasks throughout the week is to be a disciple maker so that as you go to work, you're making disciples. As you look at that in context, he is not saying go somewhere and make disciples, he is saying make disciples as you go. Through your everyday life, go and make disciples. When you go to work, make disciples. When you go to CrossFit, make disciples. When you go to the MSU game, make disciples. When you sit on the bleachers and cheer for your kids, make disciples. When you are at home wiping a snotty nose, make disciples. Everywhere you go, make disciples. That is what we feel Christ has commissioned us to be and do; be a people who will go and make disciples. We believe the gospel isn't just for us who have got it right now. It is for those people who have yet to hear. What they need is for you to be the gap between them and Jesus; to be the messenger that tells them the glorious message of the gospel. We expect you to invest in people and in relationships. Try to get to know your neighbor, so that maybe through some way, you can have an opportunity to share the hope that is within you. Invest in people; invest in relationships with coworkers and friends. Invest and give your life away so that you will have an opportunity to share the gospel.

We want you to invite people to come to Church. We've given you a great opportunity through the upcoming sermon series, Route 66, to invite people to come and hear the whole Bible in 66 weeks. That is a great time

to invite people to come and experience the gospel. In those investment relationships, when the right time is at hand, we expect you to be a person who realizes that you have the great privilege of getting to tell other about Jesus Christ. If you are a member here, we expect you to understand that you are a disciple maker. We want you to be about making disciples.

Conclusion

As we think about members and prospective members, we want to be up front with what we expect from you and what you can expect from us. We expect you to gather, connect, serve, give, and go. Those are what we are expecting from you, and in all those areas, you can expect certain things from us. To put it simply, we expect you to be the Church. The Church members in Acts were devoted, which caused them to gather, connect, serve, give, and go. We also want to be a Church that is devoted to Jesus and to one another.

Will you be a part of something bigger than yourself? Will you choose to belong to this Church called Hardin? Jesus loves this Church with all his heart. Will you belong to us? We realize some of you are not ready; you're still very new. That is perfectly fine. We are not saying if you don't become a member, we are going to shun you. We want you to be here, to stick around. We know there are some of you who have been with us for a while, and we want to give you an opportunity to join us formally. We would like you, formally, to be that expression of who God has made you to be through the Gospel, and that is His body, which we call the Church.