

Belong: Moving from an Attender to a Partner

March 9th, 2014

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I Corinthians 1:1-9

I read a story while preparing for this lesson. It was about a lady who wanted to go to Florida on vacation for a couple of weeks, and she was going to stay at a local campground there. I realized I had heard this story before, so it must be true! Now, this lady was an old fashioned lady and she was concerned about the facilities at the campground. She started to write a letter to the campground to ask about their toilet. She was just so old fashioned and proper that she could not write the word 'toilet' in the letter. She needed that information before she got there, so she thought and thought and finally decided that instead of writing the word toilet, she could write 'bathroom commode.' When she got to the part to ask about the bathroom commode, she just couldn't do it, so she just shortened bathroom commode to BC. She licked the envelope, folded it, and sent it off. The owner of the campground got the letter a few days later, and for the life of him, he cannot figure out what she is asking about when she said 'the BC.' He spent quite a bit of time thinking about it, then put the letter in his pocket. He carried it around a couple of days and finally some folks in the campground help him understand what she is talking about. They said she was asking about the local Baptist Church. After fully believing that's what she was asking about, he sat down and wrote this letter back to her. The letter said something to this effect:

"Dear Ma'am,

Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. I am so happy to let you know that we have a BC nine miles north of the camp. It seats 250 people at one time. If you are one of those folks who go regularly, I want you to know that many people make a whole day of it and actually take their lunch with them

when they go. My wife and I don't go that regularly, but the last time we went, it was so crowded we had to stand up the whole time. We want you to know that money is being raised to add more seats to the BC. I sure hope you come and stay with us at our campground. I want you to know, the first time you have to go, I will be more than willing to go with you, sit next to you, and introduce you to all the folks at the BC. They are a friendly group."

At Hardin Baptist Church, I hope we have never miscommunicated about what it means to be a part of Hardin Baptist Church. We have taken the discussion of the importance of Church membership and belonging to a group of people whose agenda is not their own, but of the Kingdom of Heaven, very seriously. In this series, we have discussed the why, the what, and the how of biblical Church membership. Then, we talked about the Church's commitment to its members. In the last lesson, we discussed what we believe a member's commitment is to the Church. I think the first three sermons covered just about everything we want to say about belonging to Hardin Baptist Church, but in this lesson, we are going to talk about moving from being an attender to being a partner. A lot of people have been asking what you have to do to join Hardin Baptist Church, so we are going to open the door of membership to you; clearly, openly, and boldly. We are going to ask you to make a commitment this morning to move from being an attender to being a partner with us here at Hardin Baptist Church.

Scripture

"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the Church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that

was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Partnering with Hardin Baptist Church

We have already said that we believe Church is who we are, not where we go. As we open the door of membership, please hear us say afresh; Hardin Baptist is not a place you go, it is who you are. Therefore, our whole existence is about being, not doing. We do not believe that doing determines being, but that doing reflects being. Therefore, everything we do, as a body of baptized believers, is a reflection of who we believe we are; the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a reflection of our doing, our gathering, our connecting, our serving, our giving, and our going. That is not performance; that is a result of our identity being the people of God.

- **Our Mandate**

Hardin Baptist Church has been given a mandate. Neither the staff, nor the Church, got together and decided what we are going to. We have a clear mandate from the Bible, and that is to make disciples. As a Church, we will never vote on that. We have been called to make disciples of all nations; not just in Hardin, or Calloway County, or Marshall County, or Western Kentucky, or this nation. It was not suggested to us by God; it was given to us as a command. Many churches call that the 'Great Commission.'

- **A Part of the Whole**

When we look at membership at Hardin Baptist Church, we do not see membership as having privileges, but we believe membership is a privilege. As we accomplish our mandate, our goal is to be like Him, not like you. I don't mean that negatively, I mean it positively. As we open our door to

new members, you have to understand that individually, you are a part; but collectively, we are a whole. As an individual, you are to be who God has designed you to be. He didn't design us to be like you; He designed us to be like Him. Therefore, our goal is to grow up into Jesus Christ, who is our head, and we want to be like Him.

A lot of members don't realize that as a member, they are a part of something bigger than themselves, and they struggle with that. We are a part of the body of Christ. In I Corinthians 12, Paul made it clear that the body is not an eye, or a foot; the body is a body. God has designed you, as a member, to be a certain part in the body of Christ. Let's suppose you are a foot. If you aren't careful, as a member in your individuality, you will only see things from the perspective of a foot. The body is not a foot; the body is the whole body. Our goal is to not be like you, a foot or an arm, we praise God you are the way you are, but we will not model our Church after you. We will model our Church after Jesus Christ, who we are all trying to grow into.

It's important to note that Hardin is not merely one body part of the universal church that is comprised of all believers everywhere, but rather, Hardin is a local expression of the full body of Christ with individual member who form a complete expression of Christ's body. Therefore, Hardin Baptist Church, being part of the universal church, is a localized expression of the body of Christ in His fullness, and we need you to take your place and fulfill your part in this local expression of Christ's body.

Your Place at Hardin Baptist Church

A psychologist discovered a long time ago that one of the basic needs of the human soul is the need to belong. In my school, they had a pyramid that pictured the basic human needs. At the bottom were warmth, shelter, water, and food. Above that was the need for safety, and then above that was the need to belong. This psychologist believes that unless your basic needs are met, unless you are safe and free from fear, you will never belong. There is actually a part of the brain that has a sensor that alerts you to danger, and when that sensor goes off, you fight, flight, or freeze. Psychologist believe that as long as we sense fear and are not safe, the

only part of our brain that functions is the survival part of the brain. This part of the brain is a little lower than the top part of our brain. It is in the top part of the brain, especially the front part, where all of the thriving of a human being takes place. This psychologist discovered that once we are safe and we begin to belong, we can actually begin to feel good about who we are. When we are living out how we have been designed to be, we will find the ultimate place of thriving as a human being. I thought that was so awesome that a psychologist discovered what God taught in His word 2000 years ago! You will never be all you can be as a part until you find your place in the body of Christ.

We are opening our door and saying to those of you who are attenders; we hope that we have made you feel welcome. That's the reason you came back. Once you came back a couple of times, you began to realize that we accepted you as you are. I know what you were thinking...you know you are a little weird and you thought that would keep us from liking you...but there are a bunch of weirdoes that come to this Church!! That's why we accept you as you are!

There is another question you are asking, and this question keeps many from moving from attender to a partner; am I really needed? Sometimes folks come to a Church that has four services and they see a lot of chairs, faces, and ministry, they hear the good report about the Church, and they just feel like they may not be needed. That's not true. This Church needs you. That is why we want to ask you, passionately without apology, to move from just being an attender to being a partner.

- **We are Saints**

Paul begins this passage, "*Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus...*" He is trying to let the Church at Corinth know that he wasn't doing it because someone else wanted him to do it; he was only doing it because He was called by God. The reason he was doing what he was doing was because of God's call in his life. In verses 2-9, Paul was writing to the Church of God in Corinth, then, defines the Church there as those who are sanctified in Jesus Christ, and those who have been set apart from a life of sin to salvation in Christ. They have been set apart from being selfish and self-centered to those who now have Christ and are serving Him as the center of their being. He said they are called "*saints.*"

“*Saint*” is our identity; it is who we are. The Church isn’t a group of sinners who are saved by grace; that isn’t in the New Testament. There are only two kinds of people in the world, sinners and saints; not lost sinners and saved sinners. Now saints can still sin, but saints cannot live a lifestyle of sin anymore because the old person is dead and they have been made brand new in Christ. If we wanted to translate this word into English, we would translate it this way: *the holy ones of Christ*. If you struggle with the word saint, you would really struggle with that! Paul is writing to the Church at Corinth, who has been set apart as the holy ones, but notice that he is not just writing to the Church at Corinth, he is writing to the saints everywhere.

- **We Need Your Gifts**

Hardin Baptist Church realizes that we are part of something bigger than ourselves; this is not the only place you could join. Some of you drive by some great churches to come here. We are humbled and honored that you come. You might have expected me to say that we really don’t know why you are here, but we know why you are here. We know why you are driving by some of those other churches, and it has nothing to do with which one is better. God has designed the Church in each locale to meet the needs of that locale. We believe the reason you are here at HBC is because of God’s plan for you and your life. When you become a member of this body, we believe we are going to join hands with other brother and sister churches in Christ to spread the gospel. We know there is no way that HBC alone can take the gospel to every nation, every people group, every tribe, every tongue, and every language. But we are going to join hands with other churches and do our best until He comes.

Paul was thankful for the Church at Corinth. To be honest, we are thankful for the Church at Hardin because we feel like we have been graced. We do not believe this Church has been built on human merit, human personality, or human effort, but we believe we are here by God’s grace. We define grace as “God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves so we can now do what He did,” and that is to be obedient to His father. We are a church of grace and because of that, (as Paul said to the Church of Corinth) we have been enriched. He said that they are not lacking any spiritual gift. We do not believe we lack any spiritual gifts at Hardin Baptist

Church. We have some attenders who have gifts that we need, but we never have access to those gifts as the body as long as you just attend and then leave. We cannot be who God has called us to be without you. If you accept our invitation to become a partner with us, we don't have just an eye on the past and an eye on today; we have our eye on the future. We believe our Lord is coming back. You need to know that your pastor is waiting for Jesus to come back. That doesn't mean I sit out on my front porch and do nothing with my eye to the sky. It means that you and I are actively engaged in being the body of Christ because we believe it's going to be over one day, and when it's over, the only thing that matters is what you did with Jesus Christ. None of our conversations about all those other things, unless it led to the conversation about Jesus, mattered.

- **We are Called into Fellowship**

Verse 9 says, "*Faithful is God who called you into the fellowship of His son, Jesus Christ.*" Scholars debate whether this is talking about being called into a personal relationship with Jesus or called into the fellowship with Jesus Christ, which would be the Church. It doesn't matter which way you interpret it, because when God called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ, Christ came with a family. I have heard my son, Kory, say this before, but his son, Finley, didn't have a choice about having Crider as his brother. Poor Garnett; he's got a Crider and a Finley and he had no choice in the matter!

As Christians, we don't have a choice in this matter. The Bible doesn't say you were invited to join the fellowship. I am so tired of Christianity being presented as an invitation you can decline. That's not what this word means. This word, "*called*," means 'a summons to respond to.' The King of Kings, the Creator of the Universe, has summoned you and me into a relationship with His Son, as well as into a relationship with other brothers and sisters who make up the body of Christ. It is not in a mystical way, but in a visible way, right here in Hardin, Kentucky. You and I have been summoned into a fellowship. This word, "*fellowship*," started out to mean 'companion.' It's where we get our word, **communion**, from. It means 'to have in common.' Then, it began to mean 'a community.' By the time the New Testament was written, this word had evolved into meaning 'to be a partner.' When you think of membership at Hardin, I want you to think

of it this way; 'membership means I am a partner.' It means you are in a partnership.

For example, when Damon Eastwood moved back into this area, he worked at Westside Veterinarian Clinic. He put in a lot of hours and got paid for the work he did. There came a time where the other vets wanted Damon to be a partner, and things changed for Damon when he became a partner.

I worked for my dad and my papaw all my life and they paid me really well. I didn't mind when we planted the crop and it didn't come up because that just meant I got to re-disc and replant. I got paid twice, and that was glorious! When Celisa and I got married, each one of them decided to give me a share of their share. Suddenly, Cunningham and Cunningham went to Cunningham and Cunningham with Ricky. They never changed the name, but all of a sudden, I'm not getting an hourly paycheck anymore. For the first time, it started really bothering me how much fertilizer Dad was putting on the crops. Did we really need it all? Did we really need to plant all those seeds? Every time they spent money it wasn't their money anymore, it was my money. I never realized how important the price of corn was.

- **We are Shareholders**

Many of you are attenders; you are consumers. It doesn't really matter to you, but when you become a partner, it matters. It matters! You quit saying 'they,' and you start saying 'we' and 'us.' You don't look at what they are doing anymore; you look at what we are now doing. Therefore, when you become a member, (a partner) you realize you have been summoned by God and he has given you a share in Hardin Baptist Church. You have a share; you are a shareholder. You are shareholder, so you will share with others. You share with others out of what gifts you have; not gifts you don't have. You have to share as you have been gifted, as a 'knee,' or 'elbow,' or whatever your gift is. As a partner, you realize you are a part right now, and you are going to share with others; you are valuable! All of a sudden, in the safety of a body where you won't be criticized, you will be given freedom to explore your gift. You will be given freedom to ask that question you have always wanted to ask. It doesn't matter what that question is; this group will not forsake you. We will be there for you no

matter what you do. All of a sudden, you begin to flourish as a part, and we will flourish as the body of Christ. HBC as a whole cannot flourish unless our parts are flourishing. We need you to be a partner!

How to Become a Partner

Some of you are already members, but you didn't realize what membership was. You joined back when I was immature and didn't know a lot. I am asking you to move from an attender to a partner. I need you to have a conviction about your call. Do you have a conviction that you have been called by God to be a part of this Church? When you drive 20 miles, or you drive by three other bodies; when you gather, connect, serve, give, and go, do you have a conviction that you are not here just by your choice, but because of God's choice? I want to ask you to make a commitment to your conviction.

If you are convicted this is where God wants you to be because He summoned you here, and not because someone invited you, then would you make this commitment: As a partner of Hardin Baptist Church, I'm going to commit to gathering, connecting, serving, giving, and going. The reason you are part of HBC is so we can make disciples of all nations. As we grow down, up, and out together, we will do that by gathering, connecting, serving, giving, and going. Then, I'm going to ask you to confess your call publicly. I can't tell you how many people have said that they have had a call in their heart to join for months, or weeks, or even years. That is really great that you know that, but it would be cool if you would let us know that too. Would you publicly confess that you are a partner and not just an attender in what God's doing through His body at Hardin? Then, let the world know Hardin believes, even as a body, that we don't see ourselves as a big church. We see ourselves as part of something bigger and that is the Kingdom of God. We need partners that will tell the story!