

Church Partnership at The Gathering September 18, 2016

"I Will Be a Unifying Partner"



Last week we talked about the importance of functioning partners in the local church. Today we want to talk about the significance of unifying partners in a local body.

In the book of Ephesians, the word *unity* appears 3 times, and in the passage we read a few minutes ago from chapter 4, the word *unity* appears twice. To build a membership or church partnership that brings glory to God, we have to pay attention to unity in our church.

So what does it take for people like us to be unifying members of the body of Christ and a local church called The Gathering?

1. Unifying Partnership Requires An Obsession with Your Calling

Ephesians 4:1 ESV

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called....

Paul is urging us to walk, to live, in a manner that is worthy of the high calling that we have received from Jesus Christ.

According to the New Testament Scriptures...

You and I have been called to belong to Jesus Christ.	Rom 1:6
We are called according to the purposes of God.	Rom 8:28
and called into the fellowship of the Son of God.	1 Cor 1:9

Called to peace.	1 Cor 7:15
Called in the grace of Christ.	Gal 1:6
Called to freedom.	Gal 5:1

Called to hope.	Eph 1:18
Called through the gospel.	2 Thess 2:14
Called to eternal life.	1 Tim 6:12
Called to be holy.	1 Pet 1:15
Called as "children of God."	1 Jn 3:1

We have been called out of darkness into His wonderful light. 1 Pet 2:9
We have been called by Jesus to bless others. 1 Pet 3:9
We have been called by the Father to eternal glory in Christ. 1 Pet 5:10

Paul is urging us in Ephesians 4:1 to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called, and I am suggesting to you this morning that the only way we can do that is to understand that God called us to be saved by grace alone through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, which are also gifts of His grace, and even our response of faith is motivated by and inspired by and driven by the Spirit of God.

So there is nothing I can do to be called by God into repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, it is a gift of God, not by works, but once I've been called and I've responded to the call to believe by trusting in Jesus, then I must walk in a manner worthy of that calling, I must become obsessed with my calling as a follower of Jesus and live out that calling every single day of my life by the grace of God and for his glory.

Unity is not possible in a church unless we understand that our church has been called into existence by God the Father to bring glory to Jesus the Son.

So what does it take for people like us to be unifying members of the body of Christ and a local church called The Gathering?

First of all it requires an obsession with your calling. Second, it requires

2. Unifying Partnership Requires A Commitment to Strong Character

Ephesians 4:1-2 ESV

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love....

We have been called by God through the gospel to believe in Christ and then serve as his ambassadors. And *that*, Paul says, requires strong character. It requires humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and love.

In an article for The Wall Street Journal, a researcher (Jonah Lehrer) noted that most of us are nicer as we're climbing the social ladder. But once we get closer to the top, we start acting like a "beast."

A business professor concluded, "When you give people power, they basically start acting like fools. They flirt inappropriately, tease in a hostile fashion, and become totally impulsive."

The researchers ... asked members of a "high-power group" about speeding. The group concluded that it was okay for them to speed, but that it was important for others to follow the posted limit. Their rationale was that powerful people are more important and had a good reason for speeding.

Folks, we are not interested in power-hungry people like that becoming partners at The Gathering. We need men and women with strong biblical character....

Ephesians 4:2 NLT

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

A unifying partner at The Gathering has an obsession with her calling. He has a commitment to strong character. And...

3. Unifying Partnership Requires An Affection for Spiritual Unity

Ephesians 4:3-6 NIV

³ *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Notice, please, that believers do not *create* unity. Rather, we *preserve* the unity already established by the Spirit of God when he called us to one hope. Nevertheless, one must have an affection for the work of the Spirit of God if you are going to work toward spiritual unity in the body of Christ. So, Paul really presses his readers to work hard at maintaining the oneness in Christ that binds all believers to each other.

At the turn of the century, Blockbuster reigned supreme in the video rental industry. If your family craved a movie night, someone likely had to drive to one of thousands and thousands of Blockbuster's stores and rent a DVD. When the founder of a new startup called Netflix met with the CEO of Blockbuster to propose a partnership, he was laughed out of the office.

Only 10 years later, Netflix became the largest source of streaming Internet traffic in North America, with over 20 million subscribers. Blockbuster declared bankruptcy.

At a time when everything is up for grabs in our culture, and in our churches, we must make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. If we don't we will become morally and spiritually bankrupt.

4. Unifying Partnership Requires A Collaboration with Gifted Leadership

Paul moves now from what all Christians have in common to how Christians differ from each other. He is discussing variety and individuality and diversity within the unity of the Spirit.

He says in Ephesians 4:11-12 ESV ¹¹ *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,* ¹² *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ....*

There are several lists of spiritual gifts in the Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 112, and 1 Peter 4. God has given each believer at least one spiritual gift, a gift of grace, and this gift is to be used for unifying and edifying the body of Christ.

But here, in Ephesians 4 the emphasis is not so much on spiritual gifts as it is on gifted leaders. Jesus gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers.... In order to have a strong, healthy church that is loving, growing, serving, and multiplying, you have to have gifted leaders strong in character with an affection for spiritual unity.

Would you allow a surgeon to remove a tumor at the base of your spine simply because she was a very nice person? Of course not!

Would your primary reason for purchasing a brand new car be based entirely on the way the salesman parted his hair? Of course not!

You have high standards when it comes to surgery or spending \$30,000 on a new vehicle. You have ideals and principles that you won't compromise.

So why should we compromise when it comes to spiritual leadership in the church? God says he has gifted certain people to lead the church, and only people with leadership gifts should lead. So, let's find our gifted leaders with strong character and appoint them and follow them as they follow Christ.

Furthermore, our unifying partners should demonstrate

5. Unifying Partnership Requires A Steady Growth in Spiritual Maturity

The gifted leaders that God gives to the church are supposed to equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up . . .

Ephesians 4:12-13 ESV

¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ 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....

That's the goal! Spiritual maturity and unity of the faith! Then he describes what maturity looks like in verses 14-16.

Ephesians 4:14-16 ESV

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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.

Partners at The Gathering should be growing steadily in their faith, speaking the truth in love, growing up in every way into Christ, building up one another in love, instead of being tossed about by every wind of doctrine and the deceitful schemes of the devil.

A commitment to the spiritual unity of the body of Christ will go a very long way in the spiritual maturity of the church.

Notice the little phrase in Eph 4:16 which says,
Ephesians 4:16 ESV
...when each part is working properly.

To make disciples and bring more glory to God, we have to work together and make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We have to pay close attention to these blueprints for unity in our church. We need partners who are committed to spiritual unity.

And so, if someone is interested in becoming a partner at The Gathering,

First of all, we invite you to attend this 4-week sermon series, or listen to them online, or read the sermons on the website,
Second, we ask you to read the articles and watch the short videos on our church website before you come to the Seminar, and then,
Third, attend a Partnership Seminar.

Go to the website today and register for one of the seminars.

Doing the work and coming to the seminar does not commit you to anything. You may decide this is not for you, and that's okay. But in order to become a partner, you have to do the work and come to the seminar and have been baptized as a believer.

And If I was going to ask you to sign a response card today (and I'm not), it might say something like this:

Because I am a church partner, I will seek to be a source of unity in The Gathering

*by acting in love toward everyone in our church,
by refusing to gossip,
by showing up for worship on Sunday,
and by following the gospel-centred leaders in our church family.*

I know there are no perfect pastors, church leaders or church members anywhere.

*And I'm not perfect either!
I will serve as a unifying partner by discovering my spiritual gifts and learning how to serve with a servant's heart.
I will do all I can in the power of the Holy Spirit to maintain unity in our church for the sake of the gospel and the Kingdom of God.*