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OUR GATHERINGS

Pledge

As members of this church, we pledge:

**To ^a forsake not the assembling of ourselves together,
but to ^b gather consistently to ^c exhort and ^d edify one
another;**

^a1 Cor. 12:12-27; Hebrews 10:25; ^b1 Cor. 16:2; ^c2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 4:18; Heb. 3:13;
^d1 Cor. 14:12, 26; Eph. 4:16, 29

Scripture

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Lesson

Dying Embers or Blazing Fire?

The story is told of a couple named Fred and Hattie who were a members of a church. As their lives grew busier with work and recreation, they found themselves using Sunday mornings to do other things. Before they knew it, they were hardly present with their church family.

And even when they did come to church, things felt a bit...chilly.

One wintery Saturday evening, Fred and Hattie were at home warming themselves by the fire, when they heard a knock at the door. It was their pastor, standing there in the snow.

“Well, come on in, pastor!” Fred welcomed the shivering preacher into his living room. “Warm yourself by the fire,” Hattie said, taking the pastor’s coat. The pastor smiled and sat by the blazing, crackling fire.

“How are the children?” he asked.

“They’re fine, fine,” Fred and Hattie said.

“And the chickens?”

“Oh, they’re fine, too!” came the reply.

The pastor nodded. He took a pair of tongs from by the fireplace, pulled a log away from the fire and set it by itself in the corner. Fred and Hattie looked confused.

After a long silence, Hattie spoke. “How’s your wife?” she asked.

“She’s fine, fine,” the pastor replied.

He took the tongs again and pulled another log away from the fire. Now the fire was only half its original size, and the room grew a bit darker.

After an even longer stretch of silence, Fred spoke. “And your children?” he asked.

“Oh, they’re fine, too!” the pastor replied.

Once more, he took the tongs and pulled a third log away from the fire. Now the fire was nearly out. The logs were but faintly glowing embers, and room was dark and chilly.

“Well, this has been a wonderful visit,” the pastor said, standing up, “but I really must be going.” He took his coat from Hattie, walked out the door, and left Fred and Hattie shivering in their living room.

The next morning, Fred, Hattie, and their children were all in church. As they greeted their church family, sang in worship to God, listened to the preaching, and observed the Lord’s Supper, they felt a warmth they hadn’t felt in a long time.

Members of the Same Body

Sitting in that cold room with the fire logs separated from each other, Fred and Hattie had learned an important lesson: unless members of a church are often together, a coldness and deadness will settle in.

The Bible offers an even more striking picture of the relationships believers should have with each other: the church as a *body*.

“The human body has many parts,” writes the Apostle Paul, “but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12, *NLT*). Paul extends the analogy even further to show us how ridiculous it is for any one member of the body/church to think that he or she can operate independently.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” (1 Corinthians 12:14-21).

The Need to Gather

Unless we understand the nature of the church—it is like a *body*—we can hardly understand the importance of *gathering regularly* as a church. The church continues to be like a body on Monday through Saturday. But it is when the members of the church gather physically that it is seen most clearly for what it is: a group of people who are trusting and following Jesus who have organized themselves to bear witness to his saving power.

In our highly individualistic culture, we tend to see church as something that exists mostly for our own personal, individual benefit. “I need church because I find it uplifting.” In that case, why shouldn’t we just listen to sermons and uplifting music in our own earbuds?

It is true that the Bible affirms our importance as individuals. But the individual must be seen in light of the whole church, and the whole church in light of God and his glory. Each member of the church must be committed to being present when the church gathers, not only for their personal edification, but also for the health of the church body and the glory of God.

What It Means to Gather Consistently

When we pledge “to gather consistently to exhort and edify one another,” we are pledging to . . .

- make the main gatherings of our church a fixed priority in our weekly schedule.
- avoid scheduling events that conflict with this gathering.
- be not only *physically* present, but also *spiritually* present—that is, actively engaged with each other when we gather, exhorting and encouraging each other.

Putting the Pledge to Work

1. Honestly discuss what have been the most compelling reasons you have considered *not* attending church.
2. How would you evaluate the statement, “I love Jesus, but not the church”?
3. What practical steps can you take to make gathering at church on Sundays a more fixed part of your schedule? If it already is a fixed part of your schedule, what practical steps can you take to make Sundays less hectic, more focused, and refreshing?