

BETTER TOGETHER – WORK IS BETTER TOGETHER

SEPT. 25 – Pastor Randy

Ephesians 4:11-16

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. **Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.** This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. **He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.**

During this series of messages, we have already learned that, just like each part of the human body has something to contribute to the body as a whole, so it is with the Body of Christ. Each member of the Body of Christ, the church has something to contribute. Today, I want to point out that it is not enough for us "to do our part". We must work together. Working alone can have disastrous effects:

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. - Eccl. 4:9-10

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1. The church has a work to accomplish.

Work is a four-letter word but it is not a curse word. Work is good for us. Some Christians mistakenly think that work is a consequence of the fall, but that is incorrect. Work is a pre-fall structure. In Genesis, God's creative acts are described as God's work. The we read that this God who is a worker created us in His image. Therefore, it should not surprise us that God put Adam and Eve in the garden to "work it and to keep it."

2. The work of the Christian is to "build up the church".

Our work is to build the church so it becomes larger and stronger. We need to work so that the church will be deep and wide. In Ephesians 4:11-16 Paul's concerns are with the strengthening of the church. In this context building up the church refers to helping the members to grow in the knowledge and faith. It results in believers becoming more "mature in the Lord". The result of strengthening our faith is that we won't be easily misled or deceived by false teaching. It results in us becoming more like Christ in our character and conduct.

Even though in this passage Paul does not speak of the need for the church to grow larger, to grow numerically, this does not mean it is not an important part of our God given work to build the church. The content of the Christian faith compels us to share it with others and to influence them to believe. The NT church was a missionary community.

3. The work of building up the church is done BETTER TOGETHER.

Body parts don't just work differently, they work together. It is not enough for each part to work according to its giftedness. They need to

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WORK TOGETHER, to WORK WITH one another. You could have all the members of the worship team use their talents to play and sing but it wouldn't sound to good if they all played or sang a different song. When my son began to play the keyboard on our church worship team he had to learn to play differently than how he was accustomed to playing on his own. When playing a piano solo, you play all three elements of a musical piece; the melody, harmony, and rhythm. When playing as part of a band you play only the part that is needed.

When the community I was pastoring in was devastated by a flood many people came rushing in to help right away but the problem wasn't that there weren't enough volunteers willing to help, but that there wasn't the proper coordination of the workers. We had to delay the response of some volunteers to insure for the proper planning necessary for our relief efforts to be effective.

In 1 Corinthians 3:3-9 Paul addressed the great challenge to teamwork: Competition among the team members.

"...for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world? When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

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I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building. 1 Corinthians 3:3-9

Paul was addressing a situation that posed a threat to the building of the church. These Christians were aligning themselves with their favorite minister. Some were saying "I am of Paul" and others were saying, "I am of Apollos". Their behavior reveals a natural tendency resulting from man's sinful nature. The tendency to separate ourselves into "us" and "them" categories. In this case it was not along racial, ethnic or cultural lines, although that did occur in the early church (see Acts 6). We don't know if they were aligning themselves with Paul or Apollos due to the personalities of these leaders or the spiritual gifts of these leaders, but in any case they had allowed a competitive spirit to infiltrate their church.

Paul's response attacks the attitudes which hinder working together, turning co-workers and companions into competitors. Paul's words remind us that what gets us working together is the same thing that keeps us working together; a common purpose and a common goal. In order for any group to work effectively together the team members must have a goal or purpose that is greater than their individual interests. I spoke with Bill Englehart this week about his experience as a pro baseball player. He said that during Spring training there might be intense competition among team members but once the season started

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the internal competition ceased because they were united in their definition of a victory.

Our great common purpose or goal that brings us together and motivates us to work together is two-fold.

1. WE WORK AS A TEAM TO BRING GLORY TO GOD!

Paul's first response is to put a check on the way they are talking. You say, "I am a follower of Paul or Apollos" but Paul and Apollos are servants and followers of the Lord, not men. Paul was saying, "So I guess you no longer belong to Jesus and believe in Him, since you are choosing to make your identification with me or Apollos. Paul went on to argue that they were giving the glory and credit to men which belonged to God. Anything we do is only made effective by the power of the Spirit working in us and through us. God deserves the credit, God deserves the glory, because God is the cause of any and all growth.

Paul wanted them to understand that the work of the Kingdom can never become about the particular personalities or gifts of the workers because if it does it will no longer be about God. Once it becomes about bringing glory and praise to yourself, to a particular leader, or to an organization, it will cease to bring glory to God.

2. WE WORK AS A TEAM TO BUILD GOD'S KINGDOM; HIS CHURCH

Paul had started the church and Apollos was developing the church. They had different gifts and different roles, but one common mission. Paul wrote that neither the one who plants the seed nor the one who waters the seed are better than the other. They are both important. They are both necessary. Neither of their jobs is effective without the

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other. Churches that have not been planted can never be developed. Churches that are planted but never developed will die or turn into something other than a church. Paul and Apollos exercised different roles but were part of the same work. A win for Paul was a victory for Apollos and a win for Apollos was a victory for Paul. Paul wrote, “We are God’s servants working in God’s field.” Paul and Apollos worked together to see the church built up. A healthy, growing church was a victory for Paul and Apollos. An unhealthy, dying church would have grieved both of them. At the end of 1 Corinthians 16 we discover that Paul urged Apollos to go to Corinth at the request of some of the people. This clearly shows that he did not view Apollos as his competitor but as his trusted companion in building the church.

I love verse 9. Paul words were communicating as forcefully as possible the message, “Apollos and I belong to God, you belong to God, we all belong to God! Working together for God also has the power to deepen the bond between the workers.

Yesterday our church partnered with three other churches to serve the community around Pennypacker Elementary school. There were many different roles to be filled and functions to be performed in a coordinated manner. Teen Challenge is a Christian ministry affiliated with the AG whose mission is “rekindling hope, renewing life, and restoring families by reaching out to men and women with life-controlling problems.” Rick Dodridge is the executive director. They conducted an outreach in Germantown a week ago and ended up with leftover hotdog rolls. Rick, knowing that yesterday was our Hope4Philly outreach called me and offered to donate their rolls. When I called

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Solomon Jones, the lead organizer for the Hope4Philly outreach, it turns out that they had 2000 hot dogs but only 1000 rolls. If Rick's attention was only focused on his ministry at TC he wouldn't have thought to call or have been willing to make the offer.

Chosen 300 needs churches to partner with them in order to meet the needs of the homeless population of Philly. Chosen 300 relies on churches to WORK WITH them. In order for us to WORK WITH them we will need a team of people. Not a group of people, but a team. It requires individuals who are not just willing to contribute, but to WORK WITH other people.

We can accomplish God's work BETTER TOGETHER, but we first must surrender our desire for recognition and praise to the greater good of His glory. We must also humbly recognize that by working with others we can accomplish more than by working alone.