

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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FEARING GOD WHILE SERVING IDOLS

By Andrew Dow

The northern kingdom of Israel was overcome by the Assyrians and taken into captivity. This occurred **“because the sons of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God ... and they had feared other gods”** (2 Kings 17:7). The Assyrians ripped the Israelites from the promised land and moved them far away. At the same time **“the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon and from Cuthah and from Avva and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel”** (1 Kings 17:24). The land that God gave to his chosen people was now being inhabited by foreigners.

While describing this great shuffle the author of Kings tells us some things about the new inhabitants of the promised land: **“they did not fear the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them which killed some of them”** (1 Kings 17:25). To appease Israel’s God, the Assyrian king sent a priest back to teach the new inhabitants how God was to be served. After being instructed in the way of God the text tells us that **“they feared the Lord and served their own gods”** (2 Kings 17:33) and that **“while these nations feared the Lord, they also served their idols”** (2 Kings 17:41).

The problem with these new inhabitants—fearing God while serving idols—is not unique. This summarizes nicely

the attitude of the newly freed Israelites who begged Aaron to make a god. They did not make this request for lack of fearing God. It seems that they even viewed the golden calf as a representation of God (Exo 32:4). They feared God but they served an idol. This is the same problem that the northern tribes faced when King Jeroboam constructed two alters at Dan and Bethel. Jeroboam knew God. These idols were not meant as a rejection of God, but as representative of God (1 Kings 12:28). They feared God but served idols.

The problem of fearing God while serving idols persists today. Despite our largely secular and materialistic culture it is clear that many people still fear God today. Church buildings (at least in the Bible belt) are found on street after street. Certain holidays are still held up as religiously significant. Although it may not always feel like it we are surrounded by a lot of God-fearers. The unfortunately truth is that many people who fear God today are still worshipping their idols. Lest you think I am picking on denominationalism or some brand of liberalism, I am not. I am asking us as the Lord's people to consider how we may be fearing God while serving our idols.

Are you a different person on Sunday than you are the remainder of the week? Is Christianity something you only do on Sunday? Do you claim to serve God but spend more of your time at work, at school functions, or sleeping? Do you serve God only when it is convenient for you? Where does God rank on your to-do list or among your priorities?

Fearing God while serving idols will not suffice. **“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person”** (Eccl 12:13).

ASSEMBLED OR DISASSEMBLED

By Andrew Dow

Each local church is expected to assemble. For instance, Paul considered it a foregone conclusion that the church at Corinth would be assembling on the first day of the week (e.g. 1 Cor 11:18, 33–34). Furthermore, the Hebrews' author anticipated that some would forsake the assembly of God's people (Heb 10:24–25). The church is not, however, always assembled. After all, if the church can assemble at certain times it must be that at other times it is not assembled. How can we tell the difference?

First, let me point out whether we are assembled or disassembled matters. The expectation inherent in Scripture is that individual Christians will assemble with their local church (see Heb 10:25). One can only avoid forsaking the church's assemblies if he first knows when the church is assembling. Furthermore, one of the final steps of church discipline is to take place when the church assembles (see Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:4–5). When are we to do these things if we do not know when we are assembled? Finally, women are instructed to remain silent in the assembly (see 1 Cor 14:34–35). How can we know when this is if we do not define when we are assembled and when we are not?

Second, let me point out two things: (1) just because a local church is all together in one place does not mean it is assembled and (2) just because some individuals of a local church are missing does not mean that it is not assembled. If every member of a local church happens to shop at Kroger at the same time they are not automatically assembled. There is something more to it than that.

Let me suggest that the determining factor behind when a church is assembled and when it is not assembled is the *intent of the congregation*. When the leadership of the church (with input of its members) determines that the local church intends to assemble on Sunday mornings at 10:30, that becomes an assembly of the church. When it is determined that the church will assemble a second time on Sunday at 6:00 PM that too becomes an assembly of the church. If the local church determines to assemble “**day by day**” (Acts 2:46) those also become assemblies of the church.

Any time the church determines to come together for the purpose of fulfilling its responsibilities to God (whether they include the memorial meal, a collection for the saints, singing, praying, meditating on the Word, engaging in church discipline, hearing reports about evangelism, etc.) it is an assembly of the church. We would do well to identify when we assemble as a church and make it a high priority to glorify God by assembling with His people.

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON:
Set Your Heart

PM LESSON:
Why Nehemiah?

“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)