

# EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

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

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## SOME THOUGHTS ON CHURCH SIZE

By Andrew Dow

How big is too big when it comes to the size of a local church? Is church size merely a matter of preference? Some certainly treat it this way. When given the choice between two otherwise faithful congregations some prefer the "larger church feel" while others prefer the "smaller church feel." I suppose that there is nothing wrong with preferring one over another, but discerning Christians should be careful not to allow their preferences to override what is true.

**First, we should realize that a church's size does not always equate to its faithfulness.** Some, even if they do not do so verbally, may be guilty of measuring a church's spiritual success by its size. Many presume that "larger churches" have grown because "they've given up the old path." Others suppose that "smaller churches" do not grow because "they're inactive in the kingdom." The converse is also true: some presume "larger churches" or "smaller churches" are more spiritual because of their "largeness" or "smallness." This simply is not the case.

God's thoughts about David seem fitting: **"Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"** (1 Sam 16:7). Just because a

church meets our preferences does not mean it meets God's standards! We should be far more concerned with a church's faithfulness to God than the extent of its membership.

**Second, however, churches should not be content with their current membership.** “Large” and “small” churches alike should be striving for numerical growth. It seems like too many churches excuse their stagnation by explaining that God is more concerned with spiritual growth than numerical growth. This may be true, but it does not change the fact that God is concerned with numerical growth as well. The book of Acts counts the church’s membership from **“three thousand”** (2:41), to **“five thousand”** (4:4), until they could only be described as **“multitudes”** (5:14).

Perhaps a caveat should be added here: numerical growth which occurs when Christians move to the area and place membership is not the biblical concept of numerical growth. This kind of growth can be a great blessing and can strengthen a church, but it is not the goal. The church at Jerusalem didn’t grow because five thousand Christians moved to the area; it grew because the church in Jerusalem taught and converted five thousand non-Christians. The kind of growth we should be striving for is growth that comes from teaching our friends and family the Gospel. In fact, this kind of growth should be expected.

**Finally, let me suggest that a church should not divide when it reaches a certain size.** In certain circles (and at certain times in the past) it is viewed as a given: *when a church reaches a particular level of membership it is time (some say) to split off and start a new group.* At what

point and how this happens may vary, but this is not an uncommon way of thinking. If I may be blunt: this is a wrong way of thinking.

There is not much biblical evidence concerning how to handle a church that gets very large—therefore I would not say that every instance of a church dividing is wrong—but the evidence we do have is fairly straightforward. The church at Jerusalem experienced astronomical growth (cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; etc.). Instead of dividing the church into a “Northside,” “Southside,” “Eastside,” and “Westside” they continued to meet together in **“in the temple courts”** (Acts 2:46; cf. 5:42). This example seems to illustrate the principle that Paul set forth: we should be **“of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose”** (Phil 2:2). To divide a church after it reaches a certain level of membership is counterproductive to the work of the Lord.

If I may venture to suggest an alternative approach, more often than not churches in the same geographical location should unite to work together as one church. Too often local churches struggle to find elders, deacons, and preachers. At the same time they are trying to maintain buildings, buy worship and class supplies, and support the Gospel elsewhere. Sometimes this is happening in three or four churches at one time in the same city or area. How much more work could be done in the Kingdom of God if these churches worked together for God's glory rather than struggling separately.

**Conclusion:** It can be easy to become improperly consumed with a church's size. Wherever our personal preferences fall on the scale—whether we like “large

churches” or “small churches”—we should never all this to dictate how or where we carry out the work of God. To the contrary we should seek a church that is faithful to God. We should prefer a church that is never content with its current size but is always seeking to add more souls to its number. Finally, we should seek to always maintain the principles of unity in the local church by staying together and working together.

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**AM LESSON:**  
The Book of  
First Peter

**PM LESSON:**  
Are You Walking By  
Faith or by Feeling?

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