

June 14, 2020

Lasting Consequences of the “Shut-Down”

From March 22 to the present, we have had but one service per week, that being the Sunday a.m. worship period. Because of the COVID-19 fears, several have chosen to stay at home, and worship “on-line.” I am thankful for modern technology which enables people to “live stream” worship services, and I am thankful that many who miss the worship assemblies seek opportunity via “zoom,” the internet, etc., to “join in” such services and benefit from the sermons preached, the prayers prayed, the songs sung, etc..

But it is **not** the same! When we assemble ourselves “*together*” (Heb. 10:25), when we interact in close proximity with “one another,” when we teach and admonish “one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Col. 3:16), when we come “*together to break bread*” (Acts 20:7), etc., we receive edification and strength far beyond what occurs when we simply turn on our computers in the privacy of our homes and “live stream” what takes place somewhere else. For those who are shut-in, and for those assisting loved ones who are unable to attend public worship, being able to “live stream” has its advantages, but it is a poor substitute for being able to assemble together to worship God “*in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24).

Far be it from me to say “the pandemic has passed, and there are no dangers to coming together in a worship assembly.” And some, because of on-going medical conditions are more vulnerable than others and must be extra careful lest they be either a carrier or a receiver of this virus.

Yes, there are dangers in coming together. But there are also dangers in **not** coming together! The command to “*consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*” (Heb. 10:24) serves as a prelude to the command to not forsake “*the assembling of ourselves together*” (Heb. 10:25). Yes, we can “*provoke unto love and to good works*” by phone, text, or letter, but it is much more effective when we are actually **with** the persons whom we are seeking to encourage. Yes, we can sing spiritual songs in private, and we can pray in private (and we should), but nothing should take the place of “*the whole church*” coming together “*into one place*” (I Cor. 14:23) in a collective effort to worship God, and to edify one another.

But what really concerns me by continuing (for the sake of physical safety) to miss the Bible study and worship assemblies of the church (even for a justifiable cause) is the fact that with the passing of time it gets **easier and easier to miss!** In other words, it can become a habit, and we can lose our desire to actually come together to worship God, and the thought of coming together loses its appeal! The Psalmist said “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord,*” Psa 122:1, and we, too, should be glad when “*the house of God*” (the church, I Tim. 3:15) comes together to worship God, but when it comes to the worship assemblies “*absences does not make the heart grow fonder!*”

Then, too, for those of us who have come together each week for one hour, it could cause us to wonder “is it really important that we also assemble on Wednesday night and Sunday night?”

Conclusion: I am thankful that several of us have been able to meet once a week, and I am appreciative of those who have taken advantage of these opportunities. And I don’t want to

appear critical of those whose health conditions have prompted them not to come together for these services, but who nevertheless **wanted** to be present. There are times when “*the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Matt. 26:41), and the Lord certainly understands. But the fact remains that we have an “*adversary,*” the devil who “*as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour,*” I Pet. 5:8. And he, like many politicians, will never “let a crisis go to waste!” You can be sure Satan is using the COVID-19 pandemic to help further **his** cause. Let us make sure that you and I do not become lunch meat for that “*roaring lion!*”

—Bobby Witherington
