**The Importance of Assembling**

*by Stan Cox*

When God created man, he made him to be a social being. Throughout history, men have typically gathered together in communities. In fact, the institution of marriage was established by God as He determined *“It is not good that man should be alone.”* So, God said, *“I will make him a helper comparable to him”* (Genesis 2:28).

It is not surprising that God would create a means for men to commune together spiritually as well. For example, He called for the nation of Israel first to build a tabernacle, then a temple as a place to collectively worship Him. As Christians, the actual location is of little significance. Jesus told the Samaritan woman of this, in describing His coming kingdom. *“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father”* (John 4:21). In Christ, the location doesn’t matter, it is the community that is important.

In Ephesians 4, Paul explained that the local church is the organization designed by God *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (12). As we each do our part, we cause *“growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love”* (16).

It is important to be a member of a local church of Christ. Such brings opportunities to work together, worship together, and rejoice together. It brings one under the discipline of the group, and the oversight of men qualified to *“watch out for your souls, as those who must give account”* (Hebrews 13:17). As such, we follow Paul’s example, *“And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples”* (Acts 9:26). There are obligations to God, brethren and mankind that simply can not be accomplished without the joint cooperation of God’s people.

The Hebrew writer wrote of the benefits of gathering together with the saints, in Hebrews 10:24-25:

*“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

His words are novel in that they approach the topic of communal worship on the basis of responsibility rather than personal benefit. In other words, I am to gather with the saints that I may help them, not that they may help me. Consider the wisdom in this.

The typical attitude can be summarized as a “what can you do for me” approach to church attendance. People will choose which church they are a part of based upon what that church offers them or their family. Churches become retailers of spiritual wares, and the individual shops at the institution that best fits. This is a take, take, take mentality, with the emphasis on getting what I can from “them.”

God’s view is completely different. The way He looks at it, I am to gather with His people to find out what I can do for them! I choose which church I am a part of based upon the question, “Where can I do the most good for the Lord?” My view of the church is organic rather than institutional. The church doesn’t exist to serve me. Rather, I, as a member of the church, exist to serve others. This is a give, give, give mentality, with the emphasis on serving my brethren in any way I can.

God’s way works! A group of dedicated Christians, each one concerned only with how he can help others, results in great growth and edification. I supply the help I can, and in return I get the combined help of all my brothers and sisters in Christ. What wisdom is seen in God’s plan!

When I come to worship with my brethren, I have the opportunity to:

* **Raise my voice with theirs in praise to Him.** As we sing, by our words we teach and admonish, *“one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”* (Colossians 3:16).
* **Sit and hear God’s word proclaimed.** These messages serve to equip me *“for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:12).
* **Commune with them around the table of my Lord**, remembering His death, and proclaiming *“the Lord’s death till He comes”* (1 Corinthians 11:26).
* **Lay by in store** (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2), allowing me to support and participate materially in the important works of edification, evangelism and benevolence.
* **Pray together with my brethren.** We offer up supplications and petitions on behalf of one another, and communicate our common needs and desires to the Father in heaven (cf. James 5:14-18; Revelation 5:8).

Christians come to worship together because we love God, and love each other. These assemblies serve to stir us up to *“love and good works”* as we exhort one another.

Assembling with the saints gains importance when we face difficult circumstances. Each of us have burdens to bear, and tribulations. Fortunately, we have one another to lean upon, and as we gather together we have opportunities to laugh together, weep together, and encourage one another in our walk with Christ. This is God’s way!

**"They Hear Your words"**

*by Stan Cox*

Ezekiel 33 records an attitude toward the word of God that existed in that time, and in ours as well. The text (verses 30-33) relates God’s words to the prophet regarding the reception of his message by the people.

“...they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, ‘Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.’ So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them” (30-32).

Back in 1871, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown published a commentary on Ezekiel, where they attributed the following quote regarding this text to Jerome (4th century), “They praise thy eloquence, but care not for the subject of it as a real and personal thing; just as many do in the modern church.”

In Ezekiel’s day; in Jerome’s day; in the 19th century; in the 21st century; indeed in every age, among every people, there is the tendency to give lip service to God's word.

“Oh, how beautiful it is, how soothing, how wonderful. It’s beautiful music to our ears.”

“...For they hear your words, but do not do them.”

How about you – Do you hear God’s words? Do you recognize how important it is to submit to Him? Do you OBEY God's will for you?