

Our Attitude in the Assembly

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Introduction.

- A. As we've mentioned before, one of the two great challenges before the Lord's church is the challenge of living peacefully with one another. There is no such thing as an assembly of one, but any time we get two or more people together, it soon becomes apparent that they are not the same. They have different backgrounds and different life experiences, and all of that leads to different ideas about what the church should do and how they should conduct themselves within it. When we come together, it soon becomes apparent that many of the ways we think about the assembly are different indeed, and those differences inevitably lead to conflict.
- B. One area where conflict often arises is the question of what sort of behavior is appropriate during the worship service. There are those who feel like the assembly these days has become one long parade of children heading to the restroom, mothers toting screaming babies to the nursery, and others wandering around doing who knows what, and they find all the commotion both distracting and disrespectful. On the other side of things, we have the parents of young children, who have to deal with the five-year-old who discovers an urgent need to go in the middle of the Lord's Supper, or the toddler who insists on wailing like a banshee. They want to know what, exactly, they're supposed to do in the assembly when these problems come up.
- C. No matter where we find ourselves in this spectrum of opinion, the key is not to worry about others and what they are thinking and doing, but about ourselves, and what we should be thinking and doing. Consider Paul's words in Philippians 2:3. We shouldn't look for ways to make the world revolve around us; instead, we should seek out ways to make our world revolve around others. This is the key to all Christian interaction, and it is no less important here. Let's look this evening, then, at how it shapes our attitude in the assembly.

I. Respect for God.

- A. The first component of this godly attitude urged upon us by Scripture is respect for God. The assembly of the Lord's people is not like a ball game. We are here because God has called us here, and, indeed, when we are assembled, God is gathered with us. Look at Jesus' teaching on this in Matthew 18:20. None of us can directly see God right now, but He is certainly here, and that means that we need to act like it. For most of us, a wedding is the most formal event we habitually encounter. We understand that weddings call for special conduct from us. None of us, for instance, would think of popping up, trotting down the aisle, and heading for the restroom right in the middle of the exchange of vows. We know that it's a special moment, and when we do anything to diminish that moment, it shows tremendous disrespect to the bride and to the groom.
- B. Friends, if we conduct ourselves with that level of decorum and respect during a wedding ceremony, shouldn't we behave with even more decorum during a worship service? Don't get me wrong; it's important to respect the bride and groom, but it's even more important here to respect the Creator. When we come together, it isn't a barn dance. It's a time to honor God, and we need to make sure we don't dishonor Him instead.
- C. Along these lines, friends, we need to remember that God does not just deserve respect. Indeed, He demands respect, and we need to make sure that we give it to Him. We need to be warned by the Hebrews writer's words in Hebrews 12:28-29. This verse is written in a general context, but it certainly applies to the assembly. A number of people in the Old Testament were struck dead for disregarding God's instructions concerning worship. God might not roast us on the spot today, but His nature hasn't changed any, and we know how He feels about those who deal casually and disrespectfully with Him. Brethren, it's a sin to treat God like that, and we need to change our attitudes accordingly. Otherwise, we may end up paying an unimaginable price.

II. Respect for One Another.

- A. Obviously, it is critical that we show respect for God, but it is nearly as important that we show respect for one another too. We all know it's wrong to intentionally trample on a brother or sister in Christ, but it's every bit as wrong to trample on them inadvertently because we were too absorbed in ourselves to pay attention. Let's look at the attitude that Paul urges on us in Romans 12:10. This is a command from God, and it is impossible to obey this command without putting some thought into the needs of the Christians around us. We need to be more concerned about the needs of one another than we are for our own, and this should come from the love we have for one another. This isn't *agape* love here, friends; this is *phileo* love, the warm regard that we have for one another, the kind affection that we feel, that makes us want to treat one another right.
- B. In the assembly, this shows up when we do our part to make the worship service orderly. Paul instructs us in this way in 1 Corinthians 14:40. Friends, as true Christians, we don't come together to whoop and holler and make a scene. Instead, we come to this assembly to worship, to teach, and to learn. Those are all things that require a lot of concentration, and we should do everything we can to avoid breaking that concentration by causing a distraction. When I'm up here in the pulpit, I can tell whether the church is listening to me or not,

and whenever there's someone parading up and down the aisle, for instance. Sometimes, it's inevitable that we are directly or indirectly responsible for distraction. The only young child who never disrupts services is the child who is never brought to services, and brethren, we always want our children—and our parents too—here. Whenever possible, though, we want to do everything we can to avoid distracting others.

III. Tolerance for One Another.

- A. Now that I've reached this point of the sermon, there is probably at least one young mother out there who feels horrible and has resolved never to bring her rambunctious offspring to church again. If that's they way you're feeling right now, please don't. I've only presented one side of the story so far. Scripturally speaking, although it is undeniably important to respect one another, there are times when we also need to tolerate one another. Paul makes this exact point in Ephesians 4:1-2. All of us have a vision of the way the world ought to be, and sometimes, when others don't line up with our vision, we get upset about it. We can't believe that so-and-so would do thus-and-such in the middle of the worship service! Friends, whenever a brother or sister succeeds in pushing all of our buttons at once, we need to learn to take a deep breath and just let it go. Unless we can point to some Scripture that they have unquestionably violated, it's really just not our problem. We don't know what their hearts are. We don't even know what their circumstances are, unless, that is, we've been paying more attention to them during the service than we have to the actual worship. As Christians, we don't have the right to appoint ourselves the Worship Police. Let's bear with one another instead.
- B. Likewise, we need to learn to be merciful to one another when a brother does make a mistake in the assembly. Jesus tells us how important it is to show mercy in Luke 6:36. Folks, I would imagine that every parent is going to have a child who causes a distraction that could have been avoided. For instance, when I was in about second or third grade, my parents started letting me sit with my friends instead of with them. One Sunday night, my friends and I started drawing funny pictures during the sermon, and it tickled me so much I started laughing. My father was not amused, and he came over, snatched me out of the pew, hauled me off to one of the classrooms, and applied his belt vigorously to my backside. I am sure that sooner or later here, one of our kids is going to do something similarly outrageous, and I am also sure that a lot of folks will put a mental black mark next to the names of the parents of that child. That's not fair. Ain't none of us perfect, and at one time or another, all of us are going to be spectacularly not perfect. Let's be merciful to one another.
- C. Finally, though, we need to learn how to be at peace with one another. Consider Paul's words in Romans 12:18. Friends, when it comes to our brethren, a lot of peace is possible with us. This isn't just the outward, hypocritical peace, either. This isn't smiling and saying hi to someone, and then going home and talking bad about their parenting skills. This is a peace that exists not just outside, but inside, so that we truly don't have anything against any one of our brethren. Let's be honest about this, too. There are many bigger challenges to maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace than a five-year-old who takes too many bathroom breaks. If we get all bent out of shape about that, how will we react when a real problem comes up?

IV. What We Should Do.

- A. On the basis of these Scriptural principles and attitudes, there are five things that we should do before or during the assembly. The first of these is that we should **CONSIDER WHAT WILL HAPPEN**. Many of the distractions that arise during the worship service can be avoided or alleviated with proper planning. For instance, if we know that one of our children can't go for an hour without a potty break, it's much better to deal with that before the service rather than during it. Let's think beforehand so we can be prepared.
- B. Likewise, we should **BE PUNCTUAL**. I know that this is a challenge for some of us. There are folks in this auditorium who have never been late for anything in their lives, but there are others who will struggle to be on time for their own funerals. If that's us, friends, let's work on it. The starting time for worship is not a secret. Sometimes our jobs interfere with us being here at half-past, and that's unavoidable, but if it's up to us, let's be sure to order our lives so that we don't add to the distraction of the late parade.
- C. Third, let's make an effort to **LIMIT UNNECESSARY DISTRACTIONS**. There's a difference between getting up from watching TV to use the bathroom or get a drink of water and getting up during the assembly to do the same. We have to consider not just ourselves and our needs, but also the needs of others and their right to worship without interference. Sometimes the distraction is unavoidable, but if we can, let's avoid it.
- D. If we're the distractee rather than the distractor, though, a different set of rules apply. First, we need to **PUT OURSELVES IN OUR BROTHER'S SHOES**. It's awfully easy to say what we would do if we were the one with the screaming kid or the runny nose, but it's a lot harder to actually do that when we're the ones in that position. Let's have compassion and understanding for one another instead of getting self-righteous.
- E. Finally, **DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF**. In the grand scheme of things, we need to learn that someone else's behavior in the assembly is not that significant. It's not worth getting upset about, particularly when we consider that there are people in this room today who would be lost if the Lord returned right now. If we want to spend some emotion on something, let's spend it on that instead.

Conclusion. If you are one of those people who isn't right with God, repent and return to Him.