

“ESSENTIAL”

by Al Diestelkamp

Words have meanings! Ever since the emergence of the coronavirus epidemic, we’ve been hearing the word *essential* used frequently by politicians, scientists, reporters, and neighbors. It’s a good word, but the way it is being used during this crisis leads me to borrow a memorable line from a once-popular movie: “You keep using that word; I do not think it means what you think it means” [*The Princess Bride*].

I was pretty sure I knew the meaning of the word *essential* before I looked it up in the dictionary, but I wanted to be sure. The definition includes words like *absolute*, “*necessary, indispensable, and required.*” Since my dictionary is over sixty years old, I googled the word just to make sure I hadn’t missed a change in its meaning over the years. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* defined the word as an adjective meaning “*absolutely necessary; extremely important,*” or as a noun referring to “*a thing that is absolutely necessary.*”

Some of the recent governmental mandates declaring certain businesses or individuals as “*essential,*” (and by implication declaring all others “*non-essential*”) would be laughable if they weren’t so sad. The question that remains unanswered is, “*deemed to be essential and non-essential to whom, and by whom?*”

We all recognize that some essentials can and should be suspended under unusual circumstances, but they must not be suspended indefinitely. Food is essential to life but even our Lord fasted forty days and nights before enduring intense temptation from the devil (**Matthew 4:1-2**). The apostle Paul’s instructions to husbands and wives clearly imply that sexual intimacy is essential in a healthy marriage, but the apostle Paul indicated that it was permissible to consensually forego it “*for a time,*” only to “*come together again*” to avoid temptation (**1 Corinthians 7:4-5**).

It should not surprise us that many of the “*powers that be,*” and even much of the world place assembled worship in the “*unessential*” category. All of our lives we’ve heard people say, “*I can worship God by myself – I don’t have to go to church.*” While private worship is good and should be encouraged, it is never a substitute for assembled worship.

There is a good reason given by the Word of God for assembling with other Christians. We often quote **Hebrews 10:25** to prove this point without reading the verse right before it which reveals a God-given reason for assembling together – that being to “*consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.*” While an online meeting may be a temporary measure under unusual circumstances, it is a poor substitute at best and does not fulfill the essential practice of coming together as a church in one place (**1 Corinthians 11: 18, 20**).

Readers may mistakenly think that I am being critical of decisions to suspend in-person worship assemblies during the height of the coronavirus shutdown. Such is not the case. What I am concerned about is a willingness to be satisfied with accepting the claim that in-person assemblies are not essential and to be comfortable with so-called “*virtual assemblies*” (an oxymoron). The essentiality of in-person assembling demands that we find a way to make any suspension of such very temporary.

— via **THINK ON THESE THINGS** bulletin
Volume 51, Number 4
October-November-December, 2020

EDITOR’S NOTE: I concur with brother Diestelkamp’s remarks in this article, especially when he refers to the governmental mandates being “*laughable if they weren’t so sad.*” When liquor stores were deemed “*essential,*” while church assemblies were not, then you know that our governmental officials were up to no good! Thankfully, President Trump deemed all religious services as “*essential,*” and for that I am thankful. The excuse given for making liquor stores essential is that it put an undue burden on one who might be addicted to alcohol and needed time to get sober and clean! SERIOUSLY?

354802