

Effective Households

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Effective Households

When the Bible speaks of a 'house', it is not just referring to the buildings we live in. Our 'house' describes everything about us; our family, goals, direction, motivations and history. Joshua made the statement, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'. Josh 24:15. Joshua was second in charge to Moses and took over the leadership of Israel when Moses died. We read in Judges that 'the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua'. Judg 2:7. After Moses died, Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for their elders, heads of houses, judges and officers. He reminded them that their fathers in ancient times had lived beyond the river and had served other gods. Josh 24:1, 2. He was referring to Ur of the Chaldeans where Abraham's father had been a moon-worshipper. This is where Baghdad is to day and it lies to the east of the river Euphrates. Abraham was taken from 'beyond the river' and led through the land of Canaan where his descendents greatly multiplied. Josh 24:14. Joshua also made mention of the 'gods of Egypt' where the Israelites had lived for 400 years. And finally, he spoke of the 'gods of the Amorites'. He challenged the Israelites, saying, 'If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers




served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living'. Josh 24: 15.

There were more than 400 years separating Abraham and Moses but the cultural influence of life 'beyond the river' was obviously still evident. We are all the fruit of multiple generations of people who have made decisions and moved from place to place. As our forefathers changed location and employment it affected relational and cultural opportunities for those who followed. So, it is important that we appraise 'the gods of our fathers' because that is the history which has defined us today. If the 'gods of our fathers' are the influences which have been passed down through many generations, the 'gods of Egypt' are those things in our immediate past, in the last few years or the previous generation. Some people say that Egypt is a symbol or a metaphor for 'the world' which is building its 'pyramids'; its towers, agriculture and industry. And that is true. But as far as God's people are concerned, 'Egypt' is mostly referring to recent cultural influences which are impacting us now.

As the Israelites were coming up out of Egypt, they grappled with their recent history. It was just behind them. They could remember the garlic and leeks. Num 11:5. They could also remember the hard labour of course, but at least it was something they knew and

understood. This is our dilemma as well. We all know the saying, 'The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know'. So, we look back over our shoulder and say, 'Well, at least that was familiar. At least we knew it. Why are we here?'. The Israelites said to Moses, why 'have you taken us away to die in the wilderness'? Ex 14:11. As they looked back over their shoulder they remembered 'the gods of Egypt' but they may not have been gods in the sense of deities. A lot of the Israelite nation would have been 'agnostic'. Some statistics suggest that 'believers' amongst the Israelites coming out of Egypt were very much in the minority. Many brought their family idols with them. They also brought treasures and cultural artefacts with them because they intended to transpose the culture of Egypt to the place where they were going. Joshua also made mention of the 'gods of the Amorites' in whose land they were living. These gods represent our immediate situation; the influence of our goals, aspirations and cultural framework. It is the impact of our families, employment, church, sports club or community group.

I am suggesting that our 'house' has three prevailing and constant influences. They are our historic lineage; our recent history. And, they are the impact of 'the world'; that is our society, community, family and present environment. When Joshua challenged the people, he said, 'If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for




yourselves today whom you will serve'. For many people it is disagreeable to serve the Lord. It is disagreeable to have a Christian house. The Israelites answered saying, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve the other gods'. Josh 24: 16. The people had intent. They didn't want to serve other gods. They recounted how the Lord had brought them up from Egypt, from the house of bondage, how He had performed great signs, had preserved them in their sojourning and driven out the people who lived in the land. Then Joshua said to the people, 'You will not be able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God ... if you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good for you'. Josh 24:19,20. 'Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst and incline your hearts to the Lord.' Josh 24:23.

As we learn from this story in the book of Joshua, our 'houses' can be defined by many things. The Lord also has a definition for our houses so that they can bring forth fruit and have an effect on both society and the church. I can find four kinds of houses in the Scriptures. The first is a pastoral or shepherding house, which is a caring, tending and supporting house. The Scriptures say that men like Stephanus cared for the needs of the saints. 1 Cor 16:15. We also think of Onesiphorus who

often refreshed Paul and was not ashamed of his chains.
2 Tim 1:16

The second is an evangelistic house, or a house of outreach that is reaching out into the community. I think of a man like Philip, who was called Philip the evangelist. Acts 21:8. A converted Jew called Jason may also have had an evangelistic house. Acts 17:4,5. We know he was targeted by the priests for welcoming Paul into his house after being converted by his preaching in the temple. We can assume he would have also brought people who were seekers into his home, hoping to convince them as he had been convinced. Both Philip and Jason would have shared the gospel with those who came to their houses. They were not necessarily people who stood preaching on street corners but they were ones to whom people were drawn. People migrated to their houses and they were shown hospitality. Many people were converted because of their love. The Scripture refers to the 'households' of these men. Were they married, single, old or young? Was it Jason and his wife? Or was it Jason and his mother and father? Was it Jason with his wife and his children? Or was it Jason and the tenants in his house? We do not know. But we do know they were effective households for the ministry of the gospel. We also read of the households of Simon the tanner, Lydia and Titus Justus. Acts 10:32, 16:40, 18:7.




The third kind of house that I can find in the Scripture is a teaching house. It would seem that a teaching house can become the platform from which a church can grow. A woman called Nympha, a man called Philemon and a couple, Priscilla and Aquila, had what appears to be teaching houses. Col 4:15. 1Cor 16:19. Phi 1:2-7. They obviously brought people into their houses and had Bible studies. They shared the Scriptures and they considered the scope of the things that were being preached and taught. In fact, the Scripture makes mention of the church in the houses of Nympha as well as Priscilla and Aquila. That is very interesting. We see the progression from a man or woman with a burden and motivation to make their houses effective. They were places where people came to share the Scriptures. Their houses evolved to a point where people began to gather and hear the word preached and taught. A church was established in these homes as a platform from which the word could spread out into that town or area.

Finally, there is a house of prayer. Interestingly, a house of prayer is not just a praying house. It is also a house of worship which becomes a house of prophecy. In the book of Acts, the house of prayer became a house of refuge. Jesus came to the house of Martha, Lazarus and Mary to find refuge, to wait upon the Lord and to be ministered to. After Jesus rose from the dead and

ascended, Peter was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. When the angel opened the prison doors, Peter went to the house of Mary (not Mary the sister of Martha). I'm inclined to think that Mary's house had the upper room where the disciples gathered to wait in prayer for the Day of Pentecost. Mary, the mother of Jesus and James, was there with all the other women. Acts 1:13, 14. What an amazing house this was! It was the house where large groups of people came to pray and probably fast. It was also the house from which John Mark, Mary's son, became the ministry travelling companion of Barnabas and Paul. Acts 12:25. When Peter walked out through the prison doors, he went straight down to the house of Mary. Acts 12:12. The Scripture accounts in the book of Acts, that they were all praying. The little maid servant went to the door and after opening it, exclaimed, 'My heavens, it's Peter!' and shut the door again. She ran in and said that Peter was at the door. They all told her not to be stupid; she must have seen his angel. Peter was left at the door! He must have been quite bemused at the thought that he was probably being chased by prison guards and the little maid had locked him out of the house of refuge.

Wives need to be empowered in their homes to step forward and minister in the grace that is theirs, according to the special kind of house that is theirs. It's interesting to note that Priscilla is always mentioned before Aquila; the




woman before the man. That is significant culturally. It would have been quite jarring in those days. We need to give some thought to the kind of house that we have? If we want to, if it's not grievous or disagreeable to us, we can choose to have a house which serves the Lord. Like Joshua we can say, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'. Of course, that will be me and my wife with my children, until they reach a certain age. And then, if it's disagreeable to them to serve the Lord, they can choose whatever they like. Even if our children choose in their adult years not to serve the Lord, we can give them a good start by having a godly house. But at present, 'my house' is all who live under my roof until a certain point, because it is a certain kind of house. And so is yours. Not only will we serve the Lord, but our house can begin to take a specific shape. I think the nature of my house was quite difficult for my children when they were growing up because it was like Grand Central Station with people always coming in and out. It was probably a pastoral house. My children's personal space was being invaded without them understanding what was transpiring. Nevertheless, that was the nature of my house. I believe young people who are living in a house together, or a divorced or separated man or woman, can seek to serve the Lord with a certain kind

of house. Of course, fellowship, community and hospitality pervade all houses.

In the book of Numbers, we read that the Israelites were commanded to camp in family groups. 'The sons of Israel shall camp, each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' households; they shall camp around the tent of meeting at a distance.' Num 2:2 . To the east was Judah, Issachar and Benjamin under the standard of the Lion; to the south was Reuben with Simeon and Gad, under the banner of the Man; Ephraim with Manasseh and Benjamin were under the banner of the Ox; and Dan with Asher and Naphtali camped under the banner of the Eagle. Each of those four banners or flags typifies a certain aspect of the ministry of Christ. In the book of Revelation, they are called the four living ones which represent the four faces of Christ who is the living One. Rev 4:7.

I am so excited and motivated by the thought that every house can be effective for the gospel. I want to leave you with the thought that we can all have a house that serves the Lord. That is a marvellous thing. The frustration of many people is that their individual sonship and their household is not effective in serving the gospel of Christ. But we don't need a cue or someone to tell us what to do. We just need to camp by the standard of our own banner according to the nature of our household. We need to gather on the



north, south, east and west of the tent of meeting. For us today, we gather around the communion table and come together family by family. And then, we go back to our houses and throw the doors open wide.

Some commentators say Justus Crispus was a Gentile; but others say he was the Justus upon whom the 'lot' didn't fall when the disciples were choosing a replacement for Judas. It was between Mathias and Justus, and the lot fell to Mathias. Wouldn't it be interesting if this Justus was the man to whom the lot didn't fall? We would note with amazement that he happily got on with doing his work? I have observed many people to whom the lot doesn't fall, and I have noted that they don't happily get on with doing their work. Why don't we all throw our doors open? In showing hospitality to strangers, we may well be entertaining angels unawares, as the Scripture says. Heb 13:2.

What kind of house would you like? What is your aspiration? If you're not sure, try something! Invite people in. Think about who you are. Can you share the Scriptures? Does your household pray together? Do you care for people? At the very minimum we can all show hospitality. We can reach out to our friends and to those in our work places and community. Will we say, 'As for me and my house we will serve the Lord?'