

Thoughts About the Assembly

Written by Jerry Johnson

Following baptism, there are few things that contribute more to spiritual growth than wholesome Christian association. The power of influence in and out of the assembly is critical to Christians of all ages. There is no doubt that our gathering together in public worship was intended not only to worship God, but designed for the faith-building and encouragement factor it is to all of us. No wonder we have the emphasis, "assembling ourselves *together*." In Hebrews 10:23, the apostle admonishes us to be steady, firm-unmoved and unwavering in our profession of faith, and all that faith-fulness implies. Too many begin the Christian life filled with enthusiasm, love and resolution, but they do not "hold fast." Their interest wanes from those first days; their goal becomes clouded and obscure. At times, even values undergo change, assuming a twisted and distorted shape, and Christian vision reverts to the attractions of this world.

Paul used similar admonition to the Colossians: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel..." (Col. B1:23). Christians must remain firm and immovable.

Luke writes of the early church, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

"And they continued stedfastly..."

The sense and significance of this is: "To persist in adherence to a thing; to be intently engaged in; to attend constantly; unremitting continuance to a thing; to be devoted to" (*Thayer*).

In this we have the answer to strength and growth. One translation says, "And they devoted themselves..." Another conveys, "They were regularly present..."

Christians must be faithful-always faithful. Certainly is this true in assembling for worship as named in Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:20,33, Hebrews 10:25. Our faithfulness to God in worship with other Christians honors Christ, and constitutes the absolute essence, the fundamental nature of our religion in the family relationship we enjoy, the concept of "brotherhood." When Jesus drew a picture of the judgment in Matthew 25, the blessing of eternal life was dispensed to the faithful, those who were reliable, dependable, and trust-worthy in his cause. They had proved that they were sound and faithful servants through life experiences.

Faithfulness in Assembling

As you remember, Hebrews 10:25 in the King James reads: "Not forsaking the assembling of

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ourselves to-gether as the manner of some is..." Others render the verse:
"Not ne-glecting our own church meeting" Berkeley); "not neglecting-as some habitually do-to meet together" Weymouth); "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some" ESV); "Not staying away from our meetings" (New English Bible). Thayer, the eminent Greek lexicographer, describes this assembling is: (a) "a gathering together in one place, (b) the religious assembly of Christians." Assembling is what we are not to desert or forsake. Notice here the obvious, that the "assem-bling" we must not forsake, will then constitute the "assembly" wherein we worship. Other scholars such as W. E. Vine and Arndt & Gingrich con-cur. The worship assembly itself is the expected end of our efforts to make our way to the meeting house-the *assembling o*
f verse 25. The command is to not forsake
"as-sembling
of ourselves
together."

The Charge of Guilt

Of what is one guilty if he deliber-ately stays away from the house of God...if by choice he prefers other activities rather than meeting with the church to worship, to commemo-rate the great gift of God in the death of His Son Jesus Christ? Much is involved when we cast aside the command of Hebrews 10:25. In one word, we sin. Note that verse 26 is joined to verse 25 with the word "For"

("For
if we sin willfully..."). This is the Greek word
gar,
which signifies to "assign a rea-son," here, a reason why we must not neglect assembling together. We often use the English word in this fashion, as, "...we do not war after the flesh: FOR the weapons of our warfare are not carnal..." (2 Cor 10:3-4). With this so, we may cor-rectly conclude from the context that we are guilty of sin to neglect assem-bling together as verse 25 enjoins.

Three Great Evils

The Hebrew writer implies three fearful and grievous sins of which a Christian becomes guilty when he chooses, for no legitimate reason, to disregard assembling. They are listed in Hebrews 10:26-29: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery

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indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who 1.) hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and 2.) hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and 3.) hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Introducing the consequences of the sin he names, the Inspired Writer notes, "For if we sin *wilfully...* "

Does this teach if we
intentionally
do something we
know

is sinful, there can be no forgiveness? No. It would seem that the passage does not speak of a single act of willful sin, for all sin (we are conscious of) in one degree or another has the consent of the mind. Is this not referencing a chosen course of sinning, ongoing and obstinate?.. .in such, there is nothing more heaven can do. All hope is lost.

When Christians sin through weakness, with repentance there "remains a sacrifice for sin"-there is forgiveness. But for the obstinate sinner who continues in his derelict way, although the sacrifice was there at one time, now, in his spirit of rebellious sinning, in his perverseness "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." It is not that God

will not

forgive (has no heart to forgive), it is that the sinner

will not

repent. This applies to the rebellious, obstinate, impenitent sinner in any sin, but is profoundly implicated when one rejects Jesus Christ in apostasy. Offending God But how does this involve forsaking the assembling of verse 25? Consider this: what could possibly be more offensive to God and His Son than to intentionally and studiously make an unjustifiable decision to abandon assembling with the saints for the memorial Supper? (Whether once or habitually.)

The Lord's Day gathering

is for the purpose of praising and honoring God. It has a focus on the table of remembrance, that monument to the graciousness of God in the gift of His only Son. What could offend Him more than for one to *choose* to replace this memorial with common, worldly *things-what could possibly offend Him more.*

A related consideration is the "cause and effect" model Jesus used in Matthew 5. In the matter of adultery, he preached against both the cause and the effect in verses 27-28, just as did Moses' law. Why? Because indulging in the "cause" (lust), the "effect" (adultery) would most certainly follow if given opportunity. Here in Hebrews 10:25-26, forsaking the assembling of ourselves together is often one of the first evidences of disinterest, with this "forsaking"

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frequently being one of the first steps taken by those who eventually leave the church. No wonder it is here called a sin, being such an identifiable factor of backsliding.

The Wickedness Portrayed

1.)

The guilty has trampled under-foot the Son of God (v.29).

In 2 Kings 9, Jehu showed his great contempt for Jezebel when he said to the eunuchs, "Throw her down.

So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: *and he trode her under foot.* "

In ancient times when an enemy was defeated, the victor would literally trample him underfoot, a symbol of victory as he would tread triumphantly upon him. When one intentionally and purposely forsakes the assembly of the saints (whether to prepare a meal, visit friends, vacation, attend to business or employment, enjoy the hunting or fishing camp, et al.), he has done to Christ what Jehu did to Jezebel. Do you believe you can do this to Christ and escape the displeasure of God?

2.)

The guilty has counted the blood of Christ as common, unholy.

Here, to

count

or

deem

means a conscious judgment resting on a deliberate weighing of the facts.. it implies a deliberate, contemptuous rejection"

(Vincent Word Studies).

The one forsaking has violated the blood of the covenant. He has abused and treated with reverence the blood Jesus shed on the cross. You see, the Christian is to drink the memorial of the blood of the covenant upon the first day of every week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25-26). If he neglects to do this, he has debased-made common and ordinary-the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for his sins. Too many Christians have not considered the seriousness of their sin of carelessness and indifference when failing to gather with the church for this blessing. The consequences are fearful.

3.)

The guilty has despised the Spirit of divine grace.

When we neglect assembling together, the word Inspiration uses here to describe us is

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enubrizo-despite-meaning that the Spirit of grace is insulted by our actions. Grace is held in contempt. The invitation to eat at the table of the Lord is scorned. Assembling with the church to observe that monument of grace is not a matter of choice. Is it possible for us to deliberately for-sake what we are commanded by God to do, implicitly committing these sins against God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.. .Is it possible to forsake "the assembling of ourselves to-gether" and escape the wrath of an insulted God?

-Jerry