

The Old Paths

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“Forsaking The Assembling”

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The fact that God’s people are a “called out” group is something understood by Bible students (I Pet. 2:9). The word “church” comes from the Greek word, “ekklesia” which means the called out. When men and women become Christians (Acts 2:38, 11:26), they are a part of the Lord’s church (Acts 8:3), having been added to it by God (Acts 2:47).

The Christian And The Church

One thing the Bible makes clear is that after one has been added to the church by God, this person then has a responsibility to join himself to a local body. Paul did this in Acts 9:26-28. Though baptized in Damascus and added by God to the “universal” body (Acts 2:47), he went to Jerusalem, and tried to “*join himself*” to the local body of Christians in Jerusalem. At first, they refused him, (and had that right to refuse him) because they didn’t believe he was telling the truth. But, after Barnabas explained the situation, and “vouched” for Paul, he was then accepted by the brethren at Jerusalem, and “*was with them coming in and going out...*” In other words, he shared in fellowship with the Jerusalem church. This one once refused by this body of Christians was now, “*recognized as a Christian and an apostle*” (Barnes’ Notes, Vol. 10, p. 165).

When it comes to a local body

of believers, part of the responsibility this group has is to assemble and worship the God of Heaven (Jn. 4:24). The church at Corinth “*came together ... into one place*” and worshipped God (I Cor. 11:20a). The church at Jerusalem did the same thing. Remember, that they “*continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (Acts 2:42). The church at Troas met for a similar purpose (Acts 20:7), as did the churches of Galatia (I Cor. 16:1-2). Coming together for the purpose of worshipping the God of Heaven was a high priority among God’s people in the first century. In like manner, it ought to be a high priority for Christians today!

Hebrews 10:25 In Context.

In spite of these facts, it seemed some in the first century had a problem in assembling with the saints. Based upon the daily persecution and hardships facing Christians, some had decided to forego meeting with the saints to worship God. They had forsaken the assembling of the saints. A record of this fact is found in Hebrews 10:23-27. Here, we read, “*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. 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 indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

Please pay careful attention to these verses. First, the Christians are encouraged to “hold fast” their profession, or “confession” (NKJ) without wavering. Evidently, there was a danger of them wavering. This danger is explained in greater detail in verses 32-34. These Christians were further encouraged to “*consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.*” In a time in which Jewish Christians faced persecutions from the Romans and from their own people, they needed to be encouraging and helping each other. Unfortunately, the “*manner of some*” was to leave their brethren, and not be associated with them. These people were condemned for such actions.

In times of hardship, persecution, and daily problems, how could they help each other? One way was by assembling together! Hebrews 10:23-27 notes that through assembling together, they held fast to their confession, and didn’t waver. They provoked one another to love and good works. They also exhorted each other. When people refused to meet with the saints, then these things were not done. One thing we sometimes forget is that Christians are “in this together”! When we are willfully absent, how can we help each other, and how can we help ourselves? No man is an island. No man can make it in this world by himself. Paul made this clear when he said, “*For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*” (Rom. 14:7). Jesus declared that one’s life influences others when He said, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matt. 5:16). Seeing that this is true, may we have a deeper appreciation for what it means when the saints assemble to worship God. Yes, our purpose is first to God, and wor-

shipping Him *"in spirit and in truth"* (Jn. 4:24). But, there is also a point to be made that such activities as assembling TOGETHER helps this local body. When one or several think their presence, their prayers, their voices, their encouragement are not important, then there will be problems! There will be problems individually in the life of the person who thinks that way, and there will be problems the local body must face as we try to make up for the void that is left by that absent soul, which is impossible!

Sins Associated With Forsaking The Assembling Of The Saints.

Some have taken the position over the years that forsaking the assembling of the saints (Heb. 10:25) is no sin. They say to simply leave God's people, or to refuse to assemble until you feel like it is not wrong.

Such a position contradicts Scripture. We know this because the text says, *"NOT forsaking the assembling of ourselves together ..."*. For someone looking for the "thou shalt's" and "thou shalt not's" in the New Testament, this is a "thou shalt not"! Furthermore, in context, the writer speaks of sinning *"wilfully"* and the consequences of such action (Heb. 10:26). Forsaking the assembling of the saints is a willful sin for which there are serious and sober spiritual consequences! In this context, we see the word "assembling" being used, not "assembly." Assembling is a verbal noun, and *"implies an often recurring act on the part of the same persons"* (Vincent's *Word Studies*, Vol. 4, p. 502). Yes, the "assembling of the saints" to worship God must take place on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), but this passage did not limit our assembling to Sunday only!

Though there are some who

think little or nothing about not assembling with the saints, there are several other sins associated with one's forsaking the assembling of the saints, besides the sin of violating a "thou shalt not."

When one forsakes the assembling of the saints, he cannot "speak" and "teach" brethren through the singing of praises to God (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). He cannot pray with the brethren, nor "Amen" a prayer which asks God's blessings on the sick, the brethren assembled, etc. He cannot partake of the Lord's Supper when he is not there (Acts 2:42), nor can he give of his means as is commanded of God (I Cor. 16:1-2). When one fails to assemble, it shows there is someone or something he prefers over God, which violates Matthew 22:37-40 and 6:33. One who will refuse to assemble with the saints fails to show a proper example to his children (Eph. 6:4). How can we expect our children to please and follow the Lord's commands when they do not see their parents doing it? Furthermore, remember that we have an influence upon fellow Christians and those in the world (Matt. 5:14-16). What message am I sending to people when they know I am a Christian, and see me out mowing the yard, playing, working, loafing, etc., during times when I ought to be assembled with the saints?

Answering Common Questions

Sometimes, people will ask vari-

ous questions related to this subject. Some are valid, some are just trying to excuse their behavior. Dear ones, examine yourselves, and see where you fall. Someone might ask, "What If I Am Sick?" Brethren, if you're incapacitated in some way, or have a contagious disease; if you have a fever, etc., then please stay home. Someone who is so sick that they cannot get out of bed should not be in services. At the same time, THINK: Would the condition I am allowing to keep me home from services keep me home from work, too?

Someone else asks, "What If It Is An Emergency?" If there is an emergency, then truly we cannot make it. I have had two such "emergencies" in the last 5 years which kept both my wife and I from assembling with the saints. However, one does not have emergencies every week.

A most common question is: "What If I Have To Work?" If we are speaking of an American under 21 and living at home, I deny that they HAVE to work. Their work is a help at times, and produces "fun" money, but it's not a necessity. Their schedule can be arranged to serve God first, or they can find another job. To those who are earning a living and providing for a family (I Tim. 5:8), please note that U.S. law states that employers MUST allow their employees time off to worship God. However, at times YOU must take the initiative and ask for that time. Therefore, even on 7-day swing shifts, we can still make it to the worship service if we try!

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