

# The Old Paths

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## “Am I Forsaking?”

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**H**ebrews 10:23-25 is a passage well-known among those who love the Lord and have respect for the truth. As the inspired writer was arguing the case for Christ, and how He is “better” than angels, Moses, and all other things that had come before, he had to also encourage those brethren to continue in their duties to the Lord. They had been persecuted and treated cruelly. Yet, if they remained faithful, they were promised, “*in heaven a better and an enduring substance*” (Heb. 10:34). Among the things the persecuted Christians were encouraged to do was, “*Let us hold fast the profession (confession, NKJ, ASV) 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*” (Heb. 10:23-25).

Sometimes when folks read Hebrews 10:25, we forget that this statement is actually a part of a longer statement which started in verse 23. When we read the entire sentence, we see that “*not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*” is the result of holding fast our confession without wavering, and provoking one another to love and good works. When we forsake the assembling of ourselves together, we become

wavering in our faith, and our absence will not provoke one another to love and good works!

### “I Am Not Forsaking!”

Those guilty of this sin may say that they do not deny the words of Scripture, but they deny that they are guilty of sin. I have often heard, “Just because I do not come to church, does not mean I am forsaking.” To me, this is tantamount to a student telling his teacher, “Just because I wasn’t here at school yesterday, doesn’t mean I was absent.”

To “forsake” means, “*to leave behind, desert*” (Strong’s). Mr. Vine says the word “forsake” comes from the Greek word “enkataleipo,” and means, “*to leave behind ... abandon, leave in straits, helpless*” (Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary, p. 252). For those who say their absence is not an abandonment, remember that we have brethren responsible for “duty lists” in each assembly. Ask them how many times they have been left in “straits” because certain ones forsook the assembling of ourselves together in “just one service”!

Some may respond that just because they are not assembled with the saints does not mean they have forsaken, because they have not “abandoned God.” Friend, if being absent when one could be here is not an abandoning, then what is it? When one decides to stay home and not be present with the Lord’s people, to hold fast his confession, and to provoke one another to love and good works, how can it be anything but abandonment? When a

father or mother refuses to come home on certain days, have they not abandoned their family? Even if it is “only” for a night or two, have they not abandoned their family when they simply do not come home with no explanation or excuse, and expect all to be “normal” the next time they enter the house? Some may protest their “abandoning God” and may say they “love God,” but remember Hebrews 10:25 speaks of not forsaking our “assembling together.” One who willfully absents himself has abandoned the work! There is no other way to say it except, “Yes, you have forsaken”! It is evident we have double-standards when comparing our behavior in religion with our behavior at other times. How foolish!

### What My Forsaking Did

When Christians forsake (abandon, leave in straits, or helpless) an assembling of the saints, it is not without consequences. These consequences are felt not only by the one who sinned in contradicting God’s command, but it is also felt by the innocent “bystanders” (brethren). In what way are these consequences felt? Please read the following.

Christians are told to sing praises to God, and to teach one another in song (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). One place this singing takes place is in the assembly (Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12). How can I take part in praise to God and the instruction to one another if I am not here?

In our assembling, prayers are offered to which those participating say, “Amen.” Simply put, when a man says “Amen,” it means, “Let it be so.” He is stating that he wants the petition in prayer to take place according to the Lord’s will. If I absent myself from these assemblies, then how can I say “Amen” to the prayers? When one prays for the spiritual health and

strength of this congregation, I cannot say, "Let it be so." All my protests to the contrary will never take away the impression felt when folks notice my "empty seat" and become discouraged.

My forsaking the assembling of the saints declares to folks that I consider Christ's blood as unclean (ALT), profane (ESV), unholy (KJV, ASV), or common (YLT). (See: Heb. 10:29) Why do I say this? It is because Christ died for us, and His blood purchased His church (Acts 20:28). Therefore, when a group of Christians (redeemed by His blood, Matt. 26:28) of which I am a member, assemble as the church in a certain locality, my forsaking that assembling actually shows my wrong thinking toward the very ***blood of Christ!*** He died so that we can be forgiven and worship Him. How can I abandon or leave helpless this group of God's people, and at the same time claim to love them and be one of them?

Please read Hebrews 10:23-25. My forsaking did not provoke anyone to love and good works! In fact, my absence is quite discouraging to folks who are looking for me! In my absence, I was not here to encourage anyone. Therefore, edification is absent when I purposely absent myself from the assembling of the saints. The Thessalonians had many problems, but one thing that impressed the apostle was their edifying spirit. He said, "*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do*" (I Thess. 5:11). Am I edifying brethren as I should when I willingly absent myself from the assembling of the saints? (See: James 4:17)

### **What Of Sicknesses, Injuries, Etc.?**

Are there times when a Christian can be absent and yet not

guilty of the sin of "forsaking"? Absolutely! God even provided for such possibilities in the Old Testament (Num. 9:6-11). Examples today include that one could be sick at home, or in the hospital for some reason. Perhaps, we are well, but need to care for a sick loved one, thus we cannot assemble at a certain time. There might be an emergency at work, etc. Such circumstances change, and we again assemble as soon as we can. Yes, there are "chronic" health problems, too. In these cases, we deal with them as best we can, remembering our first duty is to God (Matt. 6:33; Jn. 14:15; Acts 5:29).

The above reasons for being absent are far different from the spiritual problems we observe when someone consciously absents himself because he doesn't like something or someone, or he thinks he doesn't need the brethren, etc. When such is the case, I am reminded of Hebrews 10:23-24, and the need for faithfulness and caring for others to provoke them to love and good works. These statements then lead us to the command to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as is said in Hebrews 10:25.

### **Conclusion**

I do not think it is a coincidence that immediately after saying we need to "hold fast" our confession, and need to provoke one another to

love and good works, through not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, the Holy Spirit then speaks of sinning willfully!! He says, "*For if we sin willfully 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. 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 hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*" (Heb. 10:26-29). That sounds serious to me!

I have sat with brethren who literally cried because their physical condition prevented them from assembling to worship God with the saints. Such ones often ask for prayers, and express their gratefulness when brethren come to visit. I have also sat and argued with some brethren over whether they "had to" assemble "every time". After all, they say, they have not "abandoned." They just don't think they need to be present every time! They were not happy to see me, and any tears that were shed were often my own after observing such obstinance.

What kind of spirit do you possess, friend? Are we forsaking? If so, repent today before it is too late! (II Cor. 6:2)

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