

What It Means Not to Forsake the Assembling of Ourselves Together

Knowing Jesus Christ will eventually lead a person to desire the corporate experience of assembling with the body of Christ. There is a love in our hearts to gather face-to-face with other believers and saints. Many have gotten lax with this expression of our faith.

We need revelation and understanding of the importance of the assembly, and what constitutes this meaningful expression. If you are hungry for the Lord Himself you will love to gather with those who are hungry, too. The love and hunger we have for the Lord is the piece that holds the assembly together. In today's age this is becoming difficult to find. People gather for other reasons—to hear a sermon, to hear good worship music and singing (a band and choir), to socialize with others, to be entertained and so on. Many gather strictly out of duty, obligation and tradition. Others gather only in the name of their church or denomination instead of truly in the name of the Lord.

When people get lax and neglect the corporate assembly, pastors will often admonish their people with a particular verse of Scripture. Hebrews 10:25 is often wielded to make people feel guilty about not attending a religious worship service. The message is, “If you don't attend ‘church’—which for them means a two-hour service, or now a one-hour service, in a building on Sunday morning—you are ‘forsaking the assembly.’”

But is that what Hebrews 10:25 really means? Here's the full text beginning with verse 24:

“And let us consider how to spur one another to love and to

good works. Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another, especially as you see the Day approaching."

Notice the words, "consider one another" and "exhort one another" and "especially as you see the Day approaching." These verses are referring to gatherings where God's people mutually participate in exhorting each other. It is vital to the life of the body to do this until the return of the Lord. The "assembling together" are open-participatory gatherings where the body of Christ functions, and the members share the Lord "with one another."

Consequently, if none of your church gatherings allow for open participation and mutual exhortation from other members of the body, then you can't use Hebrews 10:25 to put the Lord's people under guilt and condemnation.

Now before anyone accuses me of sowing rebellion and disrespect in believers' hearts toward the corporate assembly, let me explain. I'm not suggesting that we turn all our gatherings into a free-for-all where anyone can share whatever they feel like sharing.

First of all, we need to understand that there are different kinds of Christian meetings with different purposes. There are worship services, prayer meetings, teaching or seminar type meetings, revival services, evangelistic services, healing meetings and so forth. In some of these types of meetings, usually one minister will do the bulk of the teaching, preaching and ministering. But it is my personal conviction that the most common meeting in the early church was the one described and outlined in 1 Corinthians 14:26 where there was participation from the body. Of course, in those early days the believers met mostly in homes, so the setting for 1 Corinthians 14:26 is more than likely in someone's living room.

Now before anyone jumps to unfounded conclusions, I'm not suggesting that it's wrong to attend a traditional Sunday morning church service in a building. Not at all. Actually, my wife and I prefer the larger corporate expression when the Lord is present and the Spirit of God is moving, but we need both. There is a current house church, or so-called "organic church" movement, that still falls short of the 1 Corinthians 14:26 expression. We've ministered in some of these house churches, and sadly, there is not a move of the Holy Spirit in most of them. In many of them people just sit around and share whatever is on their hearts. There is not the order of the Spirit and seasoned ministers to lead and direct the flow of the Spirit. Thus, there is a deadness that seems to prevail in many of these smaller house churches with minimum edification.

In a bigger building I find that you can still conduct 1 Corinthians 14:26-type of meetings, but you should place some limitations on who can minister and have some form of protocol as to what those assigned to minister should do if they have something from the Spirit. And there should always be an interpreter present. If not, you could have a mess on your hands. In other words, allow seasoned ministers or those who've been trained to minister according to the leading of the Spirit. Give them liberty with some limitations according to 1 Corinthians 14:27-31. From my experience this team ministry strikes a great balance, and adds an exciting dynamic to the corporate expression.

Love and a Common Sharing Is Most Important

Love, and a common sharing, however, is the most important component for assembling in these end of days before the return of Jesus. This worldwide virus alone has really been a litmus test of how believers care for one another. The left hates churches and wants their nationwide influence diminished. Signs of increased persecution are all around us. Christ, the hope of glory, in each of us will be our greatest resource in the days to come, and our unifying component, not

our church doctrine, pet peeves, our varying views on church government or our preferences for different ways of doing church or styles of music or worship. In the day of persecution, none of that will matter.

We love all believers regardless of their preferences or petty beliefs and doctrines that are non-heretical. We love everyone in Christ because He lives in each of us who has been born again.

Christians and Jews at some point in the near future are going to be blamed for what's wrong with America or any nation. A friend of mine recently posed these thought-provoking questions:

What if Jews and Christians and conservatives are believed to be holding back a nation from progressing to a great new economy and society? What if in our day Christians and conservatives are harassed on social media, what if their blogs and videos are removed because of their views, which are thought to be controversial or inciting people? What if people demonstrate outside church buildings and synagogues against the (hated) Jews and Christians? What if the State encouraged citizens to spy on and report one another they suspected of violating restrictions or laws? We are seeing some of this happening right now in America. And there's coming a time when many will not be able to buy and sell without the dreaded mark of the beast (Rev. 13:15-17) where people will have to swear allegiance to the State or be killed. Who will be your greatest resource in that evil day? It must be the true body of Christ.

As I said, we are already seeing signs of that persecution and disdain for true believers right now. Wake up, church! Soon they'll be taking our church buildings away, then our children. This is no longer inconceivable. It's time for the body of Christ to put away their petty differences and grow up

in love and in Christ.

There is no perfect church, but we cannot disobey the Scriptures and forsake the assembly, so we can consider one another in order to stir up love and good works. You cannot love the Lord and despise the assembly. Jesus and His body, and the Father and His family, are forever joined together. And He has commissioned us to make disciples of all nations. Find the best vehicle and the best way to fulfill this mission, while refusing to neglect the assembling of ourselves together, whether in a building, a home, a barn, a tent, under a tree or wherever. It's not important where you assemble, but that you do assemble with a great love for the brethren and household of faith and for the name of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.