

Faithful Assembly

- This is a lesson taken from one delivered on Nov. 14, 2010 with some additions and subtractions so as to enhance its overall point. Why, you might ask, couldn't you come up with something new and exciting without referring to an old sermon that most of us can't even remember? It is because of that fact, that most can't remember, that this lesson needs repeating. Do you remember last week's lesson? (*Sometimes I even forget when I'm the one who delivered it.*) Don't we sometimes need to be reminded about things that are necessary like a doctor's appointment, a vehicle inspection or certain birthdays? Absent-mindedness seems to be a character trait we all share, whether young or old, some more some less, unless you've been gifted with an abundance of intellect or a photographic memory. But even then, to forget things wouldn't be out of the ordinary. Being created as such forgetful beings might well be one way in which **God** has blessed us. How often have we depended on our "smart phones", computers, pocket calendars or even other people in our lives to remind us of certain events that, had they not, we might have missed them? In this way **God** has formed us, as **His** creation, so that we will understand how we can do nothing without **His** input in our lives. We depend on **Him**.

Act 17:28 For in **Him** we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also **His** offspring.

- That said, the only way we can grow spiritually as the family of **God** here is to be reminded of the fact that there is a need to be in each other's lives as often as is possible. How else can we remind and encourage each other and strengthen each other's faith, unless we're together?

Heb 10:23 Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for **He** is faithful that promised;) **24** And let us consider **one another** to provoke (*Gk.3948- incitement [to good]*) unto love and to good works:

- "One another" is to remind us that we are to be concerned for others over self and then that concern is to be reciprocated. It is evident that we live in a day and age where two parent incomes, although not always necessary, are often of such a necessity just to survive and time at that point can be of a precious commodity. When the church was first established and there were **Jews** in **Jerusalem** for the Feast of Pentecost "out of every nation under heaven" (*Act 2:5*), many were converted to **Christianity**. Those that didn't immediately return to their home countries were on an "extended" vacation, so to speak, and there weren't any Motel 6's to lodge them. Under the **Jewish** system of hospitality they stayed with fellow **Jews**, with such carrying over into the gospel era.

Heb 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels (*Gk.32- a messenger*) unawares.

- With this in mind, it was easier for the new **Christians** to meet as often as they did after Pentecost and on.

Act 2:46 And they, continuing **daily** with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat (*food*) with gladness and singleness of heart,

- But there is another reason for meeting together as often as possible, when the church meets.

Heb 10:25 Not forsaking (*Gk.1459- to leave behind*) the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see (*Gk.991- Thayer: to discern mentally, observe, perceive, discover, understand*) the day approaching.

- In the context, the assembly has to do with our public worship, and when we purposely “leave behind” our worship to God we are deliberately abandoning what He most deserves, our worship and adoration for giving Christ to die in our stead. Worship then is a “gathering together unto Him” (2 The 2:1).

‘The command, then, here is, to meet together for the worship of God, and it is enjoined on Christians as an important duty to do it. It is implied, also, that there is blame or fault where this is “neglected.”
Albert Barnes

- Concerning “as the manner of some is”:
 - (1) Some may have been deterred by the fear of persecution, as those who were thus assembled would be more exposed to danger than others.
 - (2) Some may have neglected the duty because they felt no interest in it - as professing Christians now sometimes do.
 - (3) It is possible that some may have had doubts about the necessity and propriety of this duty, and on that account may have neglected it.
 - (4) Or it may perhaps have been, though we can hardly suppose that this reason existed, that some may have neglected it from a cause which now sometimes operates - from dissatisfaction with a preacher, or with some member or members of the church, or with some measure in the church.

‘Whatever were the reasons, the apostle says that they should not be allowed to operate, but that Christians should regard it as a sacred duty to meet together for the worship of God. None of the causes above suggested should deter people from this duty.’
Albert Barnes

- And as the family of God, the local congregation should never tolerate the act of talking about others behind their backs and slandering a fellow Christian who Christ died for.

Jas 4:6 ...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

- Concerning “the day approaching”. This may well be in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD since Hebrews would have been written sometime in 68 AD. It was an event that, according to the signs Jesus gave to the faithful, would have been coming to light about that time. They understood those signs because of what was passed on to them through the teachings of the apostles who were with Christ when He gave them the warnings.

Mat 24:33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. 34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

- But since those things “were written for our learning” (*Rom 15:4*), not only did they pertain to the **Jewish Christians** of the first century who were living in **Jerusalem**, they pertain to us as we await the coming destruction of **all** of the physical universe.

2Pe 3:12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of **God**, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? **13** Nevertheless we, according to **His** promise, **look for** new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. **14** Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of **Him** in peace, without spot, and blameless.

- We don't know **when** **Christ** will return, we only know **how** to be prepared for that return. While on earth **Jesus Himself** didn't know when these things were to occur.

Mar 13:31 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away. **32** But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in Heaven, **neither the Son**, but the Father.

- As the church met regularly after her inception throughout the week for instruction and sharing of common meals they were in a constant mode of reinforcing their newfound, shared belief. And it was necessary due to the persecution they would soon receive at the hands of their own countrymen, the **Jews**. But have things changed? Yes we live in a different country and yes we have been blessed with the **First Amendment** where “congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”. But the **Constitution** is a manmade document that has a potential to change, depending on the majority rule of this country. Which brings us back to the point stated, which is that meeting throughout the week, for whatever reason as long as we are together, serves to recharge our spiritual batteries and encourages us to be together on the first day of the week for worship. Why else would **God** have given us the **Lord's supper** but to participate “**in remembrance**” of His dear **Son** (*Lk 22:19*)?

Reason vs. Excuse

- There can be a fine line between a reason and an excuse **only** when we make it so. How often do we, either intentionally or not, blur that barrier between the two. Ultimately the choice is in our own hands when it comes to the use of an excuse.

Heb 10:26 For if we sin willfully (*Gk.1596- voluntarily*)[*premeditated*] after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins (*Rhetorically speaking, what else could do a better job of cleansing the stain of sin than the blood of Christ?*), **27** But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

- Obviously there are legitimate reasons for not gathering throughout the week. Apathy should never be made out to be one of them. Note **Wayne Jackson's** questions and comments.

“Does the New Testament teach that Christians must be present at every meeting of the church?”

There are various extremes with reference to church attendance. Some appear close to contending that one may not be absent from any congregational meeting unless he

virtually is on his deathbed. Others—far more common in number—allege that corporate worship is entirely optional (except, perhaps, for a Lord’s day morning service), and so one may do as he/she pleases for any preferential distraction. The truth is somewhere between these extremities.

Is “Missing” a Service, “Forsaking”?

Surely it will be acknowledged that one could remain at home to care for the infirm. Too, aside from the primary Sunday obligation, it must be admitted that other service times are set by the elders (or leaders) so as to accommodate the spiritual needs of the majority. By implication, this will deprive a minority from assembling on occasion.

Moreover, it is a reality of life that not all people are suited, by virtue of education or skill, for a 9:00 to 5:00, Monday-through-Friday vocation. Some, who truly love the Lord and are devoted to His cause, have to work at other times. Shall we conclude that when they are forced to miss some of the services they are apostate [*traitor*]? That is absurd. Is the Christian physician who must rush to the hospital at 9:00 on Sunday morning to deliver your baby remiss [*of*] his duty—while you are not culpable [*responsible*] for being absent from the same service?

On the other hand, there are others who are shamelessly flippant about their obligation to meet with the saints. With but the slightest deterrent—be it a sports event, a family outing, or that I’m-too-tired rationalization—it matters little to them. The truth is, frequently church service delinquency is a heart problem. The Lord’s kingdom is not first in some saints’ lives (Mt. 6:33); it runs a distant somewhere else.

Mat 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Here is a provocative thought. Do the elders of the church have an obligation to “feed the flock” (Acts 20:28)? If so, do the “sheep” have a duty to yield to their persuasion (Heb. 13:17), utilizing the nourishment they provide?

Heb 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

[Is this to be considered a moot point since we don’t have elders yet?]

Quite clearly they [*the sheep*] do [*have such a duty to yield to authority*]. If, then, the elders [*leaders*] attempt to nourish the church at reasonably appointed times, and the Christian is not occupied with truly crucial responsibilities otherwise, does he have the right to frivolously decide whether or not he will follow their leadership in this regard? A spiritual person will reflect deeply about this matter.

To argue, as some occasionally do, “Prove to me that I must attend the Bible classes,” reveals a pitifully blighted condition of soul. Where else would a spiritually minded person want to be if he or she is able?

It is not up to the elders, ministers, or anyone else to micro-manage the attendance patterns of every other Christian within the local congregation. We are, however, on our honor to do the best that we can in our service to the Master. Flagrant, sustained truancy is another issue altogether. Such certainly could become quite possibly a disciplinary matter.'

Wayne Jackson

Heb 10:28 He that despised **Moses'** law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:
29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the **Son of God**, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite (*Gk.1796- insult*) unto the **Spirit** of grace?

Mat 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

- Any time we have opportunity to meet with the saints on any given, scheduled occasion and deliberately, without conscience, decide we would not want to go to the bother of exuding the effort and time to be together, when it is definitely possible, we have a **serious** heart problem. And that heart problem **will** “echo into eternity” (*Russell Crowe- The Gladiator*). How could any faithful **Christian** want to miss being in the presence of **Jesus** and fellow saints “**where two or three are gathered together in [His] name**”? We should rue the thought! And it is certain **He'll** remember even our thoughts when we are gathered before **Him** at the beginning of our eternal stay, whether it be in **Heaven** or in **Hell**.

Heb 10:30 For we know **Him Who** hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto **Me**, I will recompense, saith the **Lord**. And again, The **Lord** shall judge **His** people. **31** *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

- We have to ask ourselves, honestly, do I really care about the attendance issue or do I feel I'm okay with being here the sparse number of times I've attended so far? Because there are many in the **Lord's** church who desire to be in the assembly and who only **wish** they were in the shoes of those who couldn't care less.

2Co 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that **Jesus Christ** is in you, except ye be reprobates (*Gk.96- morally worthless*)?

Purpose

- There are those who make the excuse that “well I worked 3-11 Saturday and am too tired to get up so early Sunday morning” or “I've worked the night shift so I can't be there that early without some rest or I'll sleep during worship” and so they don't attend either Sunday gathering at all. The early church worked such hours but were excited to be together, even when persecuted for the faith. When we meet on **Sundays** (*and remember, Sunday is all day until midnight so the excuse “I have to work on Sundays” may not fly unless we have to work 10-12 hour days*) we meet to perform the five acts of worship. Prayer, singing, communion, giving and learning from a lesson presented.

Act 20:7 And upon the **first day** of the week, when the disciples came together **to break bread**, **Paul preached** unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

- It is evident that members of the early church had to work on the first day of the week, Sunday. When **Paul** arrived in Troas he stayed with the brethren there “seven days” (v.6) so that he could be with them for worship that Sunday. Members were coming and going throughout the day so it was necessary for **Paul** to continue speaking until midnight. That way each saint was able to hear his message since the written word was not yet canonized. This passage only mentions two of the five acts but it still shows purpose in their being together. They understood the greatest gift that could ever be given was the gift of life purchased with the blood of an innocent **Man**. It was as if the inspired words were a treasure to them.

So Where’s Your Treasure?

Mat 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. **45** Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: **46** Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

- What in life would you sell (*sacrifice*) for “the pearl of great price”?

‘The meaning of this parable ... is designed to represent the gospel as of more value than all other things, and to impress on us the duty of sacrificing all that we possess in order to obtain it.’

Albert Barnes

The Gospel vs. The Old Law

- Sadly, in the gospel age things haven’t changed from how some approach its demands from the way many approached the demands of the **Mosaic law**. They just go through the motions.

Luk 11:42 But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

- Were they right in giving a tithe according to the law? Yes, of course.

Lev 27:30 And all the tithe of the land, *whether* of the seed of the land, *or* of the fruit of the tree, *is* the **LORD'S**: *it is* holy unto the **LORD**.

- But the law wasn’t just a system of rules and regulations without having a purpose.

Mat 7:12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for **this is** the law and the prophets.

- The law also contained “justice” and “the benevolence of God” where people under it were to love God and care for their neighbors. But there was another aspect to the Old Law. It taught and exposed the destructive nature of sin.

Rom 7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10 And the commandment, which *was ordained* to life, I found *to be* unto death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*. 12 Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. 13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

‘When God said “no” to certain acts people were sometimes motivated to engage in what was condemned.

There are modern examples of what Paul described. Parents teach their children to stay away from alcohol and drugs; in essence, a law is made. In spite of this law and the warnings, what do many young people do? The young are also warned about sexual activity outside of marriage and even God prohibits fornication. Yet, the stance against sexual sin sometimes creates an interest in prematurely exploring this area of life.

A law or a rule against sin often draws people closer and closer to doing what is prohibited. It is like the parent who says, “Do not eat any of the cookies.” [They’ve just brought that child’s attention to the fact that there were cookies to be eaten.]

In other words, if law did not exist, man’s desire to sin would be lessened. If the existence of law increases the desire to sin, the lack of a law reduces the desire to sin.’

Brad Price

- And the works found in the Old Law evidenced those under it were in obedience to it just as works show our level of faith to the New Covenant even today.

Jas 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith **by my works**.

- Being assembled together shows the world how serious we are about our faith. When we show a lack of regard for our fellow members by avoiding the various study and fellowship events that have been meticulously planned we are saying our fellow members aren’t that important to us. What then, is that saying to the world outside the church?

Doctrine vs. Tradition vs. Commandment

G1319 ; *instruction* (the function or the information): - doctrine, learning, teaching.

G3862 ; *transmission*, that is, (concretely) a *precept*; specifically the Jewish *traditional law*: - ordinance, tradition.

G1778 ; an *injunction*, that is, religious *precept*: - commandment.

- One thing that should never be done in the church is substitute a tradition for a commandment or a scriptural doctrine. As Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees and scribes of His day for doing this, there's a risk of doing the same thing today. It only creates a thing we call "denominationalism" which God Himself abhors.

Mar 7:5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, Why walk not Thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? 6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. 7 Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. 9 And He said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

- We need to be careful when we say we are commanded to meet other than on the first day of the week. Now that doesn't mean we should then make excuses that we try and morph into reasons for not assembling together with those of like faith either. Even when scripturally appointed elders (*or those "pillars" not appointed*) mandate that we meet other than on Sunday for worship they may be stepping out of bounds without passages to back up what they are commanding. But when they **are** looking out for the souls entrusted to them (*as well any other "pillars" in the church*) and their hearts are right about such decisions, then they would be justified in setting such times for assembling throughout the rest of the week. But obviously with the understanding that not all of the congregation would be able to attend. It has been a tradition throughout churches of Christ that we meet on Wednesday evenings for Bible study, for instance, but where is the command for it? Heb 10:25 is an example concerning meeting more often when it states "and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching", but that is with regards to our being ready to face the final day of our earthly existence. Now that being said, are you ready for the moment you take your last breath to enter into the spirit realm?

#1. Have you heard?

Romans 10:14 ... "how shall they believe in Him **Whom they have not heard?**"

#2. Do you believe?

Heb 11:6 ... "for he that commeth to God **must believe that He is...**"

#3. Have you repented?

Act 3:19 ... "**Repent** ... be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..."

Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

#4. Have you acknowledged Christ as the Son of God, Who alone can save you?

Joh 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.

#5. Have your sins been washed away?

Mar 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

#6. If you've done all these things, have you remained faithful?

Romans 6:4 "...we also should walk in newness of life."

#7. Are you growing?

2Pe 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

Charli Yana

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