

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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“NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER”

PART ONE

by Lee Moses

“No man is an island.” So said John Donne. And, vastly more importantly, so say the Scriptures: “*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone*” (Genesis 2:18). “*Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour*” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). As will be seen, this is true religiously. Yet increasing numbers of people are claiming to be religious islands. Recent polls indicate that the percentage of people claiming to be religious remains fairly constant, yet the percentage of people who assemble regularly continues to diminish rapidly. People’s lack of attendance reflects their attitude toward attendance: eighty-nine percent of American adults believe faith activities at home constitute “a complete and biblically valid way for someone who does not participate in the services or activities of a conventional church to experience and express their faith in God.”¹ Sixty-nine percent believe watching a religious television show accomplishes this.² Yet God warns Christians otherwise. While instructing Christians how they are to be, He warns how they are **not** to be: “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*” (Hebrews 10:25).

What is “Forsaking the Assembling of Ourselves Together”?

The above question may sound simple—and it really is. Unfortunately, some probably make it more difficult than it needs to be. But let this prohibition be placed in its context.

The book of Hebrews was addressed

to a church on the verge of apostasy, probably the church in Jerusalem. These brethren were gradually drifting away from Christianity back into Judaism. To these brethren the Hebrews writer demonstrates the superiority of the New Testament over the Old, and especially of the High Priesthood of Christ over the old Levitical priesthood. Based upon Christ’s great High Priesthood and access in heaven for Christians (Hebrews 10:19-21), a threefold “let us” exhortation is given in Hebrews 10:22-25:

1. *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water* (verse 22).
2. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)* (verse 23).
3. *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* (verses 24-25).

The first two exhortations primarily speak of **individual** responsibility, while the third speaks of **corporate** responsibility. Every Christian has a responsibility to secure his own relationship with the Lord—the writer of Hebrews had already urged his readers to “*consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus*” (Hebrews 3:1). However, every Christian also has a responsibility to “*consider*” his fellow-saints as well, and

this consideration demands assembling together. This refers to the assemblies of the local church.³

So what does it mean to forsake this act of assembling together? To “forsake” it means to separate one’s connection with assembling; to abandon or desert it.⁴ Not all **absence** from the assembly constitutes **forsaking** the assembly. “Forsaking” cannot refer to being hindered from assembling by circumstances beyond one’s control, but to a willing decision to be absent. The writer of Hebrews knew this to be the “manner” or “habit of some.” Considering the language of the passage and the Hebrew Christians’ situation, the problem with the “forsakers” was ongoing.

Yet as a habit of absence from the assembly is a problem—and Divinely prohibited—so a habit of presence in the assembly must be cultivated. One intentional absence is not part of a habit of presence. Some ask, “Does missing an assembly once constitute forsaking the assembly?” The most common answer given is “No, forsaking the assembly requires a repeated pattern of missing.” However, when one **could** have been present for the assembling of the saints on an occasion and simply **chose** not to be there, he clearly neglected—one could even say “forsook”—the assembly on that occasion.

Although Hebrews 10:25 is the only verse that uses the particular phrase “*not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*,” the concept is reinforced throughout the New Testament.

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(continued from page one)

The Church and the Assembly

Consider what the church is. The Greek word that is translated “church” (Greek *ekklēsia*), literally means “called out,” and refers primarily to those who have been summoned, or “called out,” to an assembly. Certainly in the sense of the universal body of Christ, *church* has a much broader meaning. But in its primary sense, *church* is effectively synonymous with assembly.⁵ In addressing the Corinthian church, Paul writes, “*when ye come together in the church. . .*” (1 Corinthians 11:18, all emphases LM). Paul expresses the same thought in different words just two verses later when he writes, “*When ye come together therefore into one place. . .*” (11:20). As long as the Corinthian brethren remained faithful to Christ, they remained the church (cf. 1:2), regardless of whether they were physically present with one another. However, there were particular times when they were to come together “in the church”—in assembly.

God designed local congregations to function autonomously. The wisdom of this can be observed in many respects, one of which is that a church assembles locally. And a local church cannot

function if it does not assemble. When instructing how Christians were to deal with sins between each other, Christ instructed the offended brother, whose entreaties were refused by the guilty brother, to “*tell it unto the church*” (Matthew 18:17). This alludes to an **assembly**, and to all the members of the church participating in subsequent discipline.

By the way, when Christ promised in this context, “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (verse 20), He was **not** granting approval for a few brethren to neglect the assembly of the church in favor of a fishing trip accompanied by a short prayer service. Quite the opposite. He was teaching that He would be present with the church when it practiced discipline according to His doctrine, which required two or three witnesses to establish (cf. verse 16; Deuteronomy 19:15; 1 Timothy 5:19). Paul said much the same thing in First Corinthians 5:3-5, and said that discipline was to be carried out “*when ye are gathered together*” (verse 4).

Church discipline is not the only function of the church that requires the local assembly. The warning against “*forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*” is given in midst of the exhortation to “*consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*” (Hebrews 10:24-25). Properly encouraging one another to serve the Lord requires assembling. The public worship that the Lord demands requires the assembling of the local church. And every Christian has a function in and obligation to the local church of which he is a member:

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another (Romans 12:5).

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The effective functioning of the body calls for the different members of the body working together, and the effective functioning of the body requires assembling. Each member has the responsibility to assemble that the church might function as it should.

When the Lord adds us to the church, He adds us to the universal body of the saved (Acts 2:47). But it is with the expectation that we will be assembling as members of local churches as well. Make no mistake; if all the rest of the world should forsake the Lord, His word, and His worship, one person could still worship and serve Him faithfully. But where the possibility for assembling with faithful saints exists, faithful saints will assemble together.

All Christians, all the saved, all those who are heirs of eternal life—are in the church. Christ “*loved the church, and gave himself for it*” (Ephesians 5:25). The church is of inestimable importance. And being part of the *church* is inextricably connected with **assembling**. If we care about the Lord’s church, we will commit ourselves to assembling with a faithful congregation.

The Value of Church Attendance

God commands church attendance; but remember, “[*God’s*] *commandments are not grievous*” (1 John 5:3; cf. Matthew 11:28-30). God’s commandments are for our profit (cf. Deuteronomy 10:13). Attendance at the assemblies of the church is of great value to oneself. Recall the association of assembling with “*Consider[ing] one another to provoke unto love and to good works*” (Hebrews 10:24). This is not only an obligation that we have to others in assembling; it is also a benefit we derive **from** others in assembling. Remaining “*stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*” is very difficult without the encouragement of fellow laborers (1 Corinthians 15:58). Christ sent His disciples out by two, and we also do well to be helped in our Christian walk:

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how

can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

The association between those of like precious faith builds up each other: *“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”* (Proverbs 27:17). Commenting on the Hebrews writer’s command to assemble, early Christian writer John Chrysostom wrote,

“And let us consider one another,” he says, “to provoke unto love and to good works.” He knew that this also arises from “gathering together.” For as “iron sharpeneth iron” (Prov. 27:17), so also association increases love. For if a stone rubbed against a stone sends forth fire, how much more soul mingled with soul!⁶

Closely related to Hebrews 10:24 is Hebrews 3:13: *“But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”* As essential as personal prayer and Bible study is in resisting temptation and avoiding sin (cf. Matthew 6:13; 26:41; 4:4, 7, 10; Psalm 119:11), one’s association with fellow saints can provide invaluable encouragement against succumbing to temptation and against being “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” And note that this exhortation is to take place **“daily.”** Many brethren are deluded into thinking that meeting more than once a week is unnecessary. While this writer would not go so far as to say that this passage demands that the church assemble daily, it certainly does demonstrate that meeting three to four times a week is not too much. All Christians need to be vigilant, watchful, and prepared as they can be (cf. Matthew 24:42-25:13). Jesus prayed of His apostles, *“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil”* (John 17:16). Regularly assembling with the saints helps keep us from evil and the evil one, even though we remain in the world.

[To be continued next month].

1 “Society diverges on idea of need to attend church.” Available: <<http://www.truthbook.com/news/2008/03/society-diverges-on-idea-of-need-to-attend-church>>.

2 Ibid.

3 “A gathering together to or toward at some location, *meeting*”; here referring to a meeting “of a Christian group.” *Episunagōgē*, in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 382.

4 *Enkateleipō*, in Bauer, et al., p. 273.

5 *Ekklēsia* is translated “assembly” in Acts 19:32, 39, 41.

6 John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of John Chrysostom on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. and ed. Frederic Gardiner. Available <<http://www.eccl.org/eccl/schaff/npnf114.v.xxiii.html>>.

THE GOING PRICE OF A SOUL

by Lee Moses

A soul is worth more than the entire world and all its riches. There is one individual who has caviar tastes and a hot dog budget in this regard—Satan. Satan craves those valuable souls; but being the bargain shopper he is, he is usually able to find them at steep discount. Prices usually decline during times of recession; and during times of spiritual recession Satan picks up all sorts of bargains. Many films have been made about someone selling his soul to Satan, and Satan gives that person a great deal—worldwide fame and untold fortune—to get his soul. In reality, however, is most definitely a “buyer’s market” when it comes to souls. Satan actually does not have to give most people very much at all to purchase their souls for eternal torment.

Jack’s Soul: The Price of Brief Satisfaction

Jack is married with two children, and loves his family very much. He has worked hard for years to provide a house they can share together. But another woman comes on the scene, and begins acting “just a little too friendly” with Jack. It is not too long before he begins to respond in kind, and their flirting eventually leads to fornication. For a brief fling with another woman, Jack will give up everything that meant so much to him. Not only will he give up his precious family and home, he will give up his eternal soul of infinite value.

Sadly, many men and women sacrifice far more than ever occurred to them when they first succumbed to temptation. As they lose their families, or even should they remain together, they leave their children scarred from the experience.

Others may not commit literal fornication, but the proliferation of

pornography has made “virtual fornication” more common and serious than ever. And viewing pornography constitutes sexual sin; as Jesus said, *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Matthew 5:27-28). Even “adultery in one’s heart” can devastate one’s life. Many have lost their jobs because they viewed pornography while at work, and hurt their ability to be hired again. Sexual sin is addictive, leading one to commit more frequent and more grievous offenses against God. And sexual sin is against God (cf. Genesis 39:9). A child of God who engages in such mocks the grace of God (cf. Romans 6:1).

Satan must be thrilled with Jack, and with all the souls he is able to obtain for the low price of brief sexual satisfaction.

Jared’s Soul: The Price of Autonomy

Jared has never liked being told what to do. He has always wanted to be in control. He has never liked the idea of a God to whom he owes his existence and must give account. He has never liked the idea of any standard different from what seems good to him personally. While he has learned about God, he “did not like to retain God in his knowledge” (cf. Romans 1:28, 21). He identifies closely with the words of William Ernest Henley, who wrote in his poem *Invictus*, “I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul. . . I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.”

Whenever someone believes he is the captain of his own destiny with no need for God, he can be assured that Satan is the real driver of the ship. James warns,

... God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up (James 4:6-10).

If one refuses to submit to the authority of God, and particularly to that of Christ (cf. Matthew 28:18; John 12:48; Colossians 3:17), he has no chance to resist the devil. One who never will submit to God remains the slave of sin and of Satan (cf. Romans 6:16-18).

Jane's Soul: The Price of the Lustful Glances of a Few Men

Jane has always liked attention. And she has noticed that she gets plenty of it when she dresses revealingly—short shorts and skirts, spaghetti strap- and halter tops, low-cut dresses—they all show off what Jane knows to be alluring to men. She is not worried that her attire might detract others from noticing her warm personality, her bright intellect, or her once deep spirituality. Those attributes were never noticed so readily or obviously as her physical attributes are now that she dresses “sexy.” And she assures herself that she is just being “fun”—she would never engage in inappropriate acts with a man.

But by presenting herself in this fashion, she encourages men to look on her to lust; and thus, to “commit adultery in their hearts” (cf. Matthew 5:27-28). Jesus warned, *“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea”* (Matthew 18:6).

For the price of the lustful glances of a few men, Satan is able to get the soul of this woman; and as an added bonus, he gets the souls of those lustful men thrown in.

Conclusion

Just because the going price of a soul seems to be dipping down does not mean that one has to sell at market price. A smart merchant would never make it a practice to sell his goods at an overall loss. Yet Satan is able to entice the majority of people to sell their own most precious possessions—their souls—at low cost and eternal loss. When it comes to one's soul, there simply should be **no** price placed upon it—**ever**:

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:26).

JUNE CONTRIBUTIONS

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

- COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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