

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

March 26, 2020



Dodger Stadium. We were supposed to be here tomorrow for a Dodgers-Giants game but . . .

“not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together..”

There are some earnest brethren who feel we are sinning when we obey government edicts that prohibit gatherings, regardless of the reason. Since the church at Folsom has followed these instructions, some feel we are obeying the government instead God. These are brethren who love the Lord and I respect their fastidiousness about attending assemblies. I would readily agree with them if these were laws imposed against freedom of religion. If that was the case, then the church at Folsom would be assembling as usual. But that’s not the case. These rules against assemblies are applied across the board. Christie and I have tickets to a Dodgers-Giants game tomorrow at Dodger Stadium in LA. Obviously, we bought these before the Caronavirus came onto the world stage, but the laws against gatherings apply to sports teams as well as churches, theaters, and concerts and all other gatherings. There is no effort to keep churches from doing what everyone else is doing. If these influential entities in the sports and entertainment world are bound to the law, why shouldn’t churches be bound by the same law?

Predictably, the verse that is often quoted to support the idea that we should be meeting as usual is Hebrews 10:25. If you’ve been a Christian very long, you’ve heard this verse quoted many times. It goes like this: *“...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near”* (ESV). When I think about this verse, it goes something like this: “Forsake not the assembling,” because that’s the way I remember it being quoted. But none of the translations begin with a capital letter; most of them start with “not...” which should cause us to read at least one verse before so that it’s a complete sentence. So let’s look at verse 24, along with 25: *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”* This describes *why* we are meeting and why we shouldn’t abandon our gatherings. But that’s not all; it begins with “and” so if we want to get the full sense of v. 25, then we need to see what comes before the “and.” Here’s v. 23 — *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”*

When we put that all together, we get this:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

This provides a complete — and very different — picture than what we get from reading verse 25 out of context. Alone, verse 25 warns us to not make a habit of missing the gatherings of the body. That’s important. But the verse has a much richer meaning when read in context. It’s especially helpful when we realize that the people to whom the author is writing were fearful of meeting together due to the threat of persecution. This background is important to a clear understanding of the letter. The Hebrews were not only abandoning services, they were drifting away from Christ. The author says, “don’t let go of your confession of Christ, the promises are still alive; instead of staying away from each other, get together, and encourage each other to get to work — stir each other up! Don’t make a habit of staying home!”

Since we *don’t* want to stay home but *want* to gather whenever we can, so that we can *encourage* each other and *stir* each other up to good works, the warning in this text is not applicable for the large majority of us. And it certainly does not forbid us from following government directives that are designed to save lives.

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