

August 8, 2021

## Attendance in Worship

On the first Pentecost following our Lord's ascension to heaven, the apostles were "*baptized with the Holy Spirit,*" even as Jesus had promised (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4). Being thus "*endured with power from on high*" (Luke 24:46-49), they began "*to speak with other tongues*" (or languages, Acts 2:4-6) as the Spirit "*gave them utterance.*" In fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21), the apostles received the out pouring of the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the good news (the gospel) of salvation in Jesus Christ. On that day 3,000 precious souls "*gladly received*" the word and "*were baptized*" (Acts 2:41). From that point forward all who were "*saved*" through obedience to the gospel, were "*added*" by the Lord "*to the church*" (Acts 2:47). In Bible days the "*saved*" and "*the church*" were one and the same. Whatever resulted in salvation also resulted in one becoming a member of the church. People did not do one thing to become a part of the "*saved*" and something else to become a part of "*the church*" (the Lord's called out ones).

And it is also a matter of great significance that members of the church in the first century assembled together to worship God and to edify one another. Acts 2:41 reveals that those who "*gladly received the word*" were baptized, and the very next verse states that "*they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers*" (Acts 2:42). In view of the fact that the "*breaking of bread*" involved disciples coming "*together*" (Acts 20:7), then it is evident that this verse (Acts 2:42) speaks of worship activities engaged in by first century converts when they assembled together.

Yes, in the first century the Lord's people met "*together*" to worship the Lord. This fact is too well documented to be either doubted or denied by any informed person. For that matter, a moment's reflection on the nature of the church's **work**, and the Christian's **need** to be "*rooted*" in Christ and "*established in the faith*" (Col. 2:7) should convince every honest person that faithfulness and regularity in Bible Study and Worship is an absolute necessity.

### But Some Become Negligent!

Please consider Heb. 10:23-25: "*Let us hold fast the profession 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.*"

According to these verses, we as Christians should: (1) "*Hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,*" (2) Consider "*one another to provoke unto love and good works,*" (3) Exhort "*one another,*" and (4) Not forsake "*the assembling of ourselves together.*" Included herein are three positives and one negative — three things we **should** do, and one thing we should **not** do. Moreover, as we obey the one negative item ("*not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*"), we are made more able to obey the three positive requirements herein set forth. In fact, if we **disobey** the one negative requirement (that is, if we do forsake the "*assembling of ourselves together*") we automatically disobey the three positive requirements! Those who forsake (willfully absent themselves from) the assemblies of the church cease to "*hold fast*" the profession of their faith; they do not show proper consideration for the spiritual well being of

fellow Christians, and they fail to exhort “*one another.*” In a sense, it is a “package deal” — if Satan succeeds in persuading the Lord’s people to forsake the assemblies of the church, he thereby also succeeds in causing them to neglect the positive requirements set forth in the same context!

However, notwithstanding the fact that the sin of “*forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*” leads to other sins, the inspired writer declared that “*the manner*” (the “habit,” custom,” W.E. Vine) “*of some*” is to forsake the assemblies! “*The manner of some*” today is identical to “*the manner of some*” in the first century. However, many of the Hebrew saints were increasingly being placed in **physical** danger if they persisted in being faithful to the Lord. It was not simply a matter of losing a little sleep, missing a TV program, or giving up some recreation. They faced a mounting persecution, and it is evident that the epistle was written in order to prevent their apostasy, and to encourage them to press on, lest they “*be wearied and faint*” in their minds (Heb. 12:3). At least, they had a plausible excuse. Some today forsake simply because they do not have enough love for the Lord to get out of bed, drive a few miles on good roads in an comfortable automobile, and sit with others of the same spiritual family in an air-conditioned building to praise the very One who sustains them every day of their lives, and Who sacrificed His Own Son in their behalf!

### **Other Commands Are Also Broken!**

Christians are commanded and authorized to assemble together in order to: (1) pray, Acts 2:42; 12:5, (2) Break bread, Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7, (3) Contribute of their means, I Cor. 16:1-2, (4) Praise God in spiritual songs, Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16, (5) Edify one another by continuing “*in the apostles’ doctrine,*” Acts 2:42; I Cor. 14:26; I Thess. 5:27, and (6) Discipline unruly members, I Cor. 5:4-5. Those who forsake the assemblies of the saints also break **all** these commands! Moreover, for one to deliberately choose to be elsewhere when the church assembles, is to manifest: (1) a lack of respect for God, (2) A preference for the company of others over that of the Lord (Matt. 18:20), and fellow saints, and (3) a lack of concern for **their own** spiritual well being.

### **Things Assembly Forsakers Can’t Do:**

Those who forsake the assemblies of the church *cannot*: (1) Pray for the success of the church without being hypocritical, (2) Honestly say they were made stronger by their absence, (3) Honestly say they have glorified God by their neglect, or (4) Blame anyone else if the affairs of the church do not please them, or if the church fails to grow both spiritually and numerically.

### **Conclusion:**

Someone has observed that “the shores of time are strewn with the wreckage of those who started out to live the Christian life and failed.” One reason why so many have “failed” is because they ceased to assemble with the frequency, fervency, and regularity which ought to characterize the person whose paramount desire is to avoid hell and to gain heaven. Beloved, please do not say “it can’t happen to me” (I Cor. 10:12)! To a greater extent than many of us realize, our spiritual health depends on faithful attendance. Heaven, among other things, will be a place of worship (Revelation 4:2-11). Bluntly put, those who forsake the “*singing*” here (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) will be “*weeping*” hereafter (Matt. 8:12; Matt. 24:51; Matt. 25:30). Consider ye well!

\*\*\*\* —B . Witherington

### **Why Faithful Christians Regularly**

### **Attend Public Worship:**

Over the years this writer has met numerous Christians who overcame many obstacles in order to be present. He has met people who traveled 50 miles (one way) in order to attend **all** the services of a gospel meeting held by the church of which they were members. He has known ladies whose husbands were not Christians, who were antagonistic to the gospel, but who regularly arose, got the children ready, and went to worship. He recalls a brother whose wife was not a Christian, and who seemingly was jealous of God, but who made it a point to attend every worship service, attend every business meeting, every special class, and who could be depended on to participate in home Bible studies on evenings when the church was not assembled. Why, we ask, do so many make so many sacrifices in order to worship God with regularity. They do so because:

**1. They love God** If one loves God with all his heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37), it is a natural response to want to worship God and do all within his (or her) power to please, honor, and glorify God. Cf. John 14:15,21,23.

**2. They have their affections set “*on things above*”** (Col. 3:2). They earnestly long for heaven, and they are naturally attracted to those Bible study and worship services by which one is strengthened in the inward man and made more fit for heaven.

**3. They love their brethren in the Lord** (Col. 2:2; John 13:34,35), and they want to be an encouragement to them in their quest for heaven (Heb. 10:23-24).

**4. They love the church and want to see it grow**, and they know that assembly-forsaking members discourage fellow saints and hinder the church’s growth

**Conclusion:** Many other reasons could be cited, but the reasons herein mentioned are sufficient for a faithful Christian to look forward to being present for the worship assemblies of the local church, and for him (or her) to say as did David, “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord,*” Psalm 122:1. —B. Witherington

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