

# Faithfully Assembling

By Grady Huggins

If we properly understand the purpose of our assembly, we should also understand its great importance. There should be no greater goal in our lives than those we are aiming for in the assembly—the glorification of God and furtherance of His kingdom. We cannot claim to have the Lord as our highest priority, if the assembly of His church is commonly pushed aside by other activities in our lives. We cannot be devoted to the Lord without being devoted to His church (**Matt 25:40**). And we cannot be devoted to His church without being devoted to the assembling of ourselves together. Assembly is an inherent part of what it means to be a local church (*ekklesia*).

The Lord commands us to “consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, *not forsaking our own assembling together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (**Heb 10:24-25**). In this article we will consider what it means to “forsake” the assembly and why it is so important to be faithful in our attendance.

Firstly, we must recognize that we are not simply warned against forsaking “the Lord’s Day,” “the Lord’s Supper,” or “the Sunday sermon.” We are admonished not to forsake “our own assembling together.” That applies to any time the saints gather for worship and edification. God never intended for the Lord’s Supper to be a checklist item that then frees us to leave our church family behind the rest of the week.

The early Christians did not just gather on the Lord’s Day, but every opportunity they had (**Acts 2:46; 5:42**). The same writer that exhorted us not to forsake the assembly was no less emphatic when he said, “encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today’” (**Heb 3:13**). Is this command any less binding upon us? Certainly the Lord’s Day is a special time God has set aside for us to remember the Lord’s death and resurrection, but we have an obligation to our brethren that extends beyond that memorial service. Thus when our shepherds set aside additional times for us to come together as a flock and encourage one another, we should be eager to take full advantage of that opportunity. It is our responsibility both to our brethren and to our leadership as members of a local congregation (**Heb 13:17**).

Furthermore, no mere inconvenience releases us from this divine obligation. Consider for a moment what hindrances the early church faced to their assemblies. An early Christian named Tertullian records, “*We are daily beset by foes; we are daily betrayed! We are oftentimes surprised in our meetings and congregations... You put Christians on crosses and stakes... We are cast to the wild beasts... We are burned in the flames*” (c. 195 AD). And yet in the midst of this persecution the Christians did not cease to assemble. Tertullian again writes, “*But you say, ‘How will we assemble together [if we do not pay tribute to avoid persecution]?’ To be sure, just as the apostles also did—who were protected by faith, not by money... If you cannot assemble by day, you have the night—the light of Christ luminous against its darkness.*” (c. 212 AD).

If the threat of execution was not considered a legitimate reason to avoid assembling with the saints, what excuse do we think we have? Is threat to our job, our grades at school, our position on the ball team, or our evening relaxation somehow a more justifiable reason to miss the assembly? If we would feel uneasy explaining our absence to the Lord Himself, then maybe our attendance needs to be

reevaluated. If our service to God is truly the highest priority in our lives, then nothing short of another divine obligation or a physical inability should keep us from fulfilling our responsibility to the Lord's body (**Eph 4:16**).

Finally, we must recognize that physical absence is not the only form of "forsaking the assembly." Assembling is about more than filling a pew or having our name marked on the attendance roster. We assemble to "stir one another to love and good deeds" and to "encourage one another" (**Heb 10:24-25**), and our responsibility to the flock has not been met unless we have actively participated in this effort. We must strive to be fully engaged in every aspect of our service. Forsaking the assembly by our mental/emotional absence can be even more detrimental to the Lord's work than physical absence.

In conclusion, the assembly is too important to be pushed aside by other concerns in our life. If the Lord is first in our hearts, there should be nothing we long to do more than worship together with the saints, build up the body of Christ, and have our own hearts stirred to greater service in His kingdom. Every time the flock is gathered we should strive to be in their midst. No obstacle should be able to drag us away from our responsibility to the Lord's body.

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