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The Importance Of Church Attendance

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"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" (Heb. 10:23-25).

This text is a large order for the greatest of preachers and yet simple enough for babes in Christ to understand. It is a two-fold exhortation.

First, we are to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. This means we are to keep on believing in Jesus of Nazareth as Saviour and Lord and never give up the good hope that is in Him. It is the same exhortation Peter gives when he says, "...hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:13). Hope is a child of hard times. Hope has to live in a wicked world. The very word "hope" implies present trouble. It means something better in the future. If the present benefits of salvation are all that we will ever have, there would be no place for hope, and salvation would not be a blessing but a curse.

Salvation is free because it is priceless, and we have nothing to pay—it is free because Jesus paid it all—but the working of it out in daily living is a costly thing. It means a life dedicated to God and separated from the world—and these two

things go together. There can be no dedication of life to God apart from separation from the world. God and the world are incompatible. John says, "...If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). Someone has said that you might as well talk about a heavenly devil as a worldly Christian. And this is the truth so far as living the Christian life in our daily walk.

Now the basis for this exhortation is that God is faithful who promised. God has made promises in His Son, and every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ can pin his faith and hope to Jesus Christ with the assurance that God will keep His promises.

Second, is the exhortation to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Here is a vital question for us to consider: "How may I stir up my fellow believers, my brethren in Christ, to love and good works?" Does it matter to you how your brother lives? Do you take the position that it is none of your business what your brother or sister does? This is the spirit of Cain who asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We certainly are—everyone of us—our brother's keeper and to say it does not matter to us what becomes of our brother or sister is to be guilty of great sin.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Now the text we wish to emphasize is a clause taken from this second exhortation: "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." Here is a bad habit; a prevalent sin, but how few are awake to the seriousness of it. Even the most faithful do not think of it as a sin. It would create a sensation if the pastor should tell of the sins told him about various members of the church. Bad language, untruthfulness, and drinking. A lost man was quoted as saying that if he ever made a change he would not be found in some places he finds some of our prominent members in. I question the accuracy of his statement that they are prominent members. How does he know? He is never here to see who is prominent. But to give occasion for the enemies of the cross to blaspheme is a terribly wicked thing—and woe to the member who does.

But the point I wish to put to the front right now is that I never hear of failure to attend church spoken of as if it were a sin at all.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE

1. It is a command of God. It is not a mere piece of advice. It is not something that is optional; it is as obligatory as the command of God can make it.

It is not merely the wish of the pastor; it is the command of God who cannot be trifled with. To hem and haw and offer excuses is to make reply against God. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Here God and man are put in sharpest contrast; God in His infinite greatness and holiness and power and wisdom; and man in his infinitesimal smallness and ignorance. In the Greek there is strong emphasis on the "thou" — "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" It will be a happy day for some of us if God will brand that text upon our hearts so that we will never be able to forget it. If God leaves us alone to criticize Him and object to His commands, it will be absolutely fatal to us. And He may do that. Acts 14:16; Romans 9:18. O man, who art thou anyway? And who is God?

As an individual, man is only one of the more than two billion, 500 million human beings now inhabiting this globe. And what is this globe we call the earth? It is but a speck in that part of the universe we know about. This earth is so small that if the sun were hollow, you could pour into it 1,200,000 earths like ours and still there would be room enough left for them to rattle around in it. Also, the sun is very, very small as compared to Arcturus and some of the other stars whose diameters have been recently measured. And there are now known to be more than 225 million of these great worlds we call stars, and God made them all. Will you defy Him and say His commandments are grievous?

It is this God who made this vast and stupendous universe and who made you and me, and who holds our very breath in His hand, who is the author of my text, and He says, "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together."

2. It is one way we encourage one another. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another ..." Of all the people who need help and encouragement, it is those who love the church and want to see it prosper in its work for Christ. The church is a workshop for Christ, and all the members need to be at their post of duty. The church is a school of religious instruction, and all members ought to be faithful scholars.

The church is a lighthouse for Christ and every member needs to let his light shine before men that they may see his good works and give glory to God. It is a sin to put our light under a bushel or under a bed, and that is what people do who try to hide the good they do. Of course, we are not to parade our good works to receive praise of men, but we are to do them before men that God may be praised. If the motive is wrong in displaying it for your own glory, it is just as wrong to hide it through pretended humility.

If I give for the support of the church, or if I do anything else for its good, and nobody knows about it, how can it be any encouragement to anyone?

To neglect church attendance—and I mean regular attendance—I mean attendance at all services—is the most ridiculously senseless thing anybody can possibly do.

It is like employing a foreman and not furnishing him with any workers. Or like appointing a general and not giving him any soldiers. Or like hiring a shepherd and not giving him any sheep to feed. Or like having a leader without any followers. Or like employing a teacher and having no pupils to be taught. Or like a doctor with no sick people to be ministered unto.

Now, the pastor has these several relationships in his spiritual ministry. He is a shepherd, teacher, minister, captain, and leader of spiritual forces, but what can he do without the forces? What can a pastor do without deacons? What can a Sunday School Superintendent do without teachers? What can the preacher do without hearers?

Every church member ought to feel it as binding on him to be in his pew as the pastor does to be in his pulpit. There is nothing that so takes the spirit out of a preacher as to face empty pews. It is not the opposition of the outside world that breaks the preacher's heart; it is the absence of those who once made a pledge to God.

I suppose no name stands out as representative of devotion to Christ and consecrated courage than that of Paul. He was, approximately at least, all that any faithful minister might hope to

become. He often stood alone in the midst of foes, and yet no man was ever more dependent upon the sympathetic help of his associate. You know how he lamented the departure of Demas. His words seem to drip with tears as he says, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." And about the last word he ever wrote he said to Timothy, "Do your best to come before winter."

Writing to the Corinthians, the great apostle Paul says this: "When I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia" (II Cor. 2:12-13). Paul had a wide open door at Troas, but he was so depressed at the absence of Titus that he could not preach. Where is the God-called preacher who does not understand the meaning of the absent Titus? Titus may be a deacon upon whom the pastor depended. Titus may have been one with no official position, but some godly woman whose regular attendance has come to be expected and if she is absent, it throws the pastor into a state of depression. The absence of the faithful makes the preacher feel as though the church were empty.

3. There can be no church without it. The word "church" means assembly, and an assembly is a congregation of people. And if the members do not meet together, there can be no church.

You can have a church without money—for the members can meet in the homes or under the branches of trees, or even in the open, but you can't have a church without the members coming together. I say all this, not to minimize money, but to magnify church attendance.

In some churches there may be some who give large offerings, as important as that may be, but of more importance is their regular church attendance. We need faithful members who will meet with us at least twice on Sundays and once on Wednesday nights. I think I speak sincerely when I say that if you can't both give money and come to church too—if you must leave one of them off—then leave the money off and come to church.



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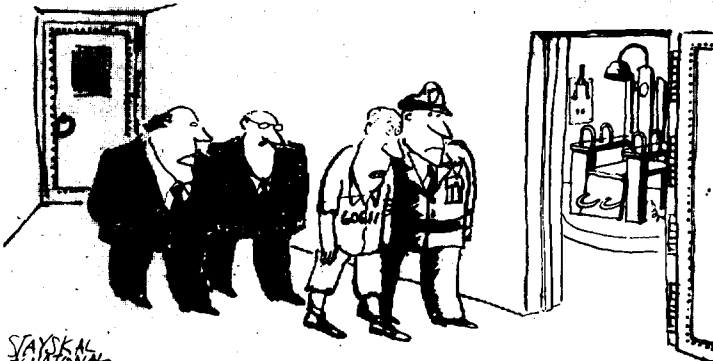
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