

Forsake Assembling?

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us 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 10:23-25)

Let us say that you have looked closely at The System, the Institutional Church, Church Inc., and found that it does not compare favorably with the Biblical model of Christian assembly. You have tried repeatedly to engage the elders at your local congregation in honest and thorough discussion concerning these things, only to be brushed aside with vague references, quotes from contemporary scholar/authors and the conclusive pronouncements of “The Church Fathers.” You have spent long hours, days, weeks and years digging into the Scriptures, and an equally long, but far more frustrating time, trying to get answers from your leaders. Throughout this time, you have found yourself, time and again, pressured by your convictions into the role of the reluctant reformer. Your constant refrain of, “Where do you find this in the Word?” has made you less than popular around the coffeemaker on Sunday mornings.

Let us further say that after months or years of frustration and heartache two glaringly obvious notions are at last able to drill through the granite of your skull and occur to you simultaneously. The first notion is the self-evident fact that you are merely tolerated by the leadership (the hint is when you catch them rolling their eyes as you speak). You realize that everyone is so comfortable with their traditions that a little thing like the Bible is not going to change their minds and that you are just spinning your wheels. The second notion is that it is hypocritical of you to spend your time pointing out how others are falling short of obeying the Word, if you remain part of the System yourself. So you decide that you must leave the frustrations and heartaches of the Church Inc. for the frustrations and heartaches of starting a house to house assembly.

In a moment, it seems, you’ve gone from being a reformer to a separatist. You stand there, dazed and a bit frightened, and pray for the discernment and support of your brothers and sisters in Christ. How do they support you? For your own good, they bombard you with a reminder from Scripture that is not even a complete sentence. They say: “Not forsaking our assembling together!” If you’re especially loved, brothers and sisters who know the Word well might also say:

“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.” (1 John 2:19)

Clearly, then, your concerned brethren have shown you the error of your ways. You have done wrong by separating¹ yourself from the (local) assembly, and you are in dire need of repentance and reconciliation. Your very salvation is questionable until you return to the System, the Institutional Church. Your former leaders, when they think of you at all, sadly shake their heads and perhaps say a word of prayer for a lost sheep. Of course, you must realize that there is now an inverse relationship between the degree to which you were a puritan and the likelihood of a personal visit from a board member to inquire concerning your welfare.

The words make you feel guilty: “not forsaking our assembling together.” The words are fired off like missiles from an Aegis destroyer, the second your “unchurched” state is detected. The phrase is a knee-jerk reaction, a condemnation, and is meant to be the final word, all at the same time. Yet, it is doubtful that many of those who smugly spout the phrase even realize that it is part of a sentence spanning three verses, and may not be the bottom line on the subject that they think it is. In fact, once you put the phrase in its proper context, it is unlikely that their application is justifiable.

Let’s put everything in context first. The writer of Hebrews has gone to great length to present Christ’s credentials, and His superiority to anything that has come before, including angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood. The Lord’s sacrifice is superior to the temple sacrifices and effective for the complete salvation of those who trust in Him. He has also given three warnings: 1. About the danger of neglecting so great a salvation, the danger, 2. “lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God” (Heb 3:12), and 3. The danger brought on by lack of diligence in study:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb 5:12-14)

After demonstrating conclusively that Christ’s sacrifice is all that we need (For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. [Heb 10:14]), the writer goes on to talk about what should be the result of this knowledge:

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and **since** we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19-22 – Emphasis added)

He then continues with the encouragement and exhortation that the letter has been building towards:

¹ See Separation.PDF on this site for verses concerning this.

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Look more closely:

Let us hold fast... NT:2722 katechoo;

1. to hold back, detain, retain
 - a. tina, from going away, followed by tou mee with an infinitive, Luke 4:42
 - b. to restrain, hinder Rom 1:18
 - c. to hold fast, keep secure, keep from possession of: with the accusative of the thing, ton logon, Luke 8:15
2. equivalent to Latin *obtinere*
 - a. to get possession of, take: Matt 21:38
 - b. to possess: 1 Cor 7:30²

The idea here is of taking ownership and treasuring something. What are we to take ownership of? ...**the**...

confession.. NT:3671 homologia, homologias, hee (homologeoo, which see (compare Winer Grammar (1883), 35 (34))), in the N.T.

profession (the English Revised Version (1881) uniformly confession);

- a. subjectively: archierea tees homologias heemoon, i. e. whom we profess (to be ours), Heb 3:1 (but others refer this to b.).
- b. objectively, profession (confession) i. e. what one professes (confesses): Heb 4:14; 1 Tim 6:12 (see *homologeoo*, 3); 1 Tim 6:13 (see *martureoo*, a. p. 391 a); **tees elpidos, the substance of our profession, which we embrace with hope, Heb 10:23**; eis to euangelion tou Christou, relative to the gospel, 2 Cor 9:13 (translate, for the obedience ye render to what ye profess concerning the gospel; compare hee eis ton tou Theou Christon homologia, Justin Martyr (150 A.D.), dialog contra Trypho, c. 47 -- a construction occasioned perhaps by hee eis ton Christon pists, Col 2:5; (compare Winer Grammar (1883), 381 (357))). ((Herodotus (484-408 B.C.), Plato (428-348 B.C.), and others.)) *³

Notice what Thayer says about Heb. 10:23, “the substance of our profession, which we embrace with hope.” An alternate way of translating this phrase would be “Embrace the fullness of our profession with hope, unwavering...” The verse goes on: ...**of our**...

...**hope**... NT:1680 elpis expectation whether of good or of ill

1. rarely in a bad sense, expectation of evil, fear
2. in a good sense: expectation of good, hope; and in the Christian sense, joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation: Acts 23:6
 - a. the author of hope, or he who is its foundation, 1 Tim 1:1
 - b. the thing hoped for: Titus 2:13

(from Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2000 by BibleSoft)

² Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2000 by BibleSoft

³ Ibid.

...without wavering... NT:186 aklinees, aklines

not inclining, firm, unmoved: Heb 10:23⁴

This completes the first phrase of our sentence, and portrays another thing that the writer believes should be the result of our confidence in Christ: we take ownership of and embrace the content of our confession with hope immovable. He is saying that we should embrace our Christianity, our connection to this great high priest who made a single, once-for-all sacrifice and sat down at the right hand of the Father! Why would he feel the need to tell Christians that they ought to be hopeful and unwavering in their confession of Christ? They have been through persecutions⁵ and are on the verge of renewed persecutions.⁶ The writer prepared them with the supremacy and greatness of Christ, and then he asks them to use that comfort and that knowledge to help them retain hope and to hold fast to our testimony of faith. He reminds the reader again: **... for He who promised is faithful...**

Verse 24 continues the sentence, expanding on the thought. Not only should we embrace our Christianity with unwavering hope because of His faithfulness, but we should also:

...consider... NT:2657 katanoeoo, katanoo;

1. to perceive, remark, observe, understand: ti, Matt 7:3

2. to consider attentively, fix one's eyes or mind upon: ti, Luke 12:24,27⁷

...how to...

...stimulate... NT:3948 paroxusmos, paroxusmou, ho

1. an inciting, incitement: Heb 10:24

2. irritation Acts 15:39⁸

...one another to love and good deeds...

With everything on the line, we are to take comfort in the Person and work of our Lord, and as we take comfort we are to keep our eyes on stimulating our brothers and sisters to continue to demonstrate Christian love and charity. In America, in the twenty-first century, acting like a Christian will set you apart from the crowd. Acting like a Christian during a time of fierce persecution can get you killed.

Now we come to verse 25, and the pivotal issue. It is still part of the same sentence, and continuing the same thought. We are to hold firm in our confession, stimulate the brethren in love and charity. **...not...**

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Heb. 10:32

⁶ vs 36 they are told that they will have “need of endurance”, 12:4 they have not yet resisted to the point of “shedding of blood.” Also, 10:36 the writer points out that “we (Christians) are not those who shrink from destruction...”

⁷ Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2000 by BibleSoft

⁸ Ibid.

...forsaking... NT:1459 engkataleipoo

1. to abandon, desert Matt 27:46
2. to leave behind among, to leave surviving: Rom 9:29⁹

This is a very strong word, as we shall see. It's like deserting in the midst of combat and leaving your mates to suffer and die. This will prove important in just a moment. The text continues:

...our own... NT:1438 heautou, heautees, heautou, etc. or (contracted) hautou, hautees, hautou It is used:

1. of the 3 rd person singular and plural, to denote that the agent and the person acted on are the same; Matt 27:42 of itself, i. e. in its own nature, Rom 14:14
2. It serves as reflexive also to the 1 st and 2 nd person, Rom 8:23
3. reciprocally, mutually, one another: Matt 16:7¹⁰

...assembling together... 1997 Episunagoge; from *episunago* (1996), to gather together, from *epi* (1909), to, and *sunago* (4863), together, collect.

A gathering together (2 Thess. 2:1 cf. 1 Thess. 4:17). An assembling together at one place. In Hebrews 10:25 it does not merely denote the worshiping assembly of the church from which some were likely to absent themselves, but the assembling for corporate worship, not as a solitary or occasional act, but as customary conduct. The verb *egkataleipo* (1459), to desert or leave stranded, to leave neglected, give up or abandon, which term is used of betrayers, is too strong an expression for the mere avoidance of assembling for religious worship. It refers rather to the separating of oneself from the local Christian community because of the dread of persecution. The prep. *Epi* (1909), to, must refer to Christ Himself as the One to which this assembly was attached. Therefore, it would have the meaning of not betraying one's attachment to Jesus Christ and other believers, not avoiding one's own personal responsibility as part of the body of Christ.¹¹

Here we see the crux of the matter, and it fits perfectly with the initial phrase of the sentence, and in the overall context. Rather than speaking of not going to Sunday morning worship, the “not forsaking our own assembling together” is talking about abandoning the faith, the assembly of Christ¹², to avoid persecution! See how it fits? The encouragement and hope that are in Christ must lead us to hold fast to Him, and continue to identify ourselves as His with our unwavering and hopeful confession of faith. It should lead us to continue, even during persecution, to stimulate one another to act like Christians. It should prevent us from deserting our brethren in the midst of persecution, from denying Christ in the same way that Peter did, for we have nothing to fear; Jesus has fully saved us!

... as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2000 by BibleSoft

¹¹ The Complete Word Study New Testament, compiled and edited by Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D.; AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN 1991

¹² Note: The ONLY other use of 1997 is 2 Thess. 2:1 “Now I request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our **gathering together** to Him,

What “day” is drawing near? The day of God’s judgment:

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:26-31)

Do you really think that the writer wants to connect the “terrifying expectation of judgment” with not attending worship services? To do so is to abandon salvation by grace through faith in favor of a works salvation (attend church of face terrifying judgment!) However, if you cannot endure persecution, and abandon the faith, you should be questioning your salvation. Isn’t it more likely that this is in view here, especially considering that, “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.¹³”? The only reason to equate “not forsaking our own assembling together” with not attending the Institutional Church’s unbiblical worship services is to be able to **use the phrase as a scourge with which to beat down those who would leave the System.**

The other passage used to guilt (used as a verbal noun) a Christian into returning to the Church Inc. assembly is 1 John 2:19. This verse, however, is easily and quickly explained by the context.

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. (1 John 2:18-20)

The passage is talking about antichrists, false teachers who arise from within the visible church. They left the community of Christians and drew others out with them. The curious part is that John states that, “they went out, in order that it might be shone that they **ALL** are not of us.” (2:19 Emphasis added).

οὐκ	εἰσὶν	ἄ	πάντες	ἐξ	ἡμῶν.
not	they were		all	of	us.
3756	1526		3956	1537	2257
ouk	eisín		pántes	ex	heemoón

Some of those who are teaching false doctrines have left the Christian community, while some have not. Some still claim to be Christians, but others do not. This is not talking about someone who does not go to Sunday morning gatherings. Some false teachers continue in the assemblies throughout their lives. This is talking about heretics!

¹³ Rom 8:1

When you take into account that John was likely writing from exile, and could hardly have been a member of the local assembly that he was writing to, the “us” takes on a different meaning. Also, in both passages, it should be remembered that the “churches” were not institutional **buildings** but the totality of believers in a city or area. In other words, you would not find a Bula-Bula Bible Church across the street from First Baptist of Bula-Bula. Those who “went out” actively divorced themselves from the company of and identification with Christians.

The Nicolaitan system¹⁴ is about retaining power. To do that, the “laity” must remain enslaved by the System, and under the control of their “bosses” in the faith. Pastors, priests, elders, bishops, and doctors have always taught that “not forsaking assembling” together means you can’t stop “going to church” on Sunday. They have taught that “they went out from among us, but they were not really of us” means that if you leave the “church” (the institution) you are a heretic. What did you expect them to teach?

¹⁴ See “It’s the System” on this site.