

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

Established 1953

October 2009

Vol. 43 / No. 10

“NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER”

PART THREE

by Lee Moses

Should I Really Attend When. . .

A question will occasionally arise as to whether a Christian is expected to be present in the church assembly when hindering factors arise. Sometimes the question is legitimately asked—a brother or sister young in the faith may not grasp what the Lord expects of him. Some excuses are legitimate—there are occasions when brethren **absent** from an assembly have in no sense **forsaken** the assembly. However, there are occasions when one’s excuses for absence ring hollow, both in the ears of his concerned brethren and in the eyes of God.

. . . I Have Work?

When asked why they are unable to attend the meetings of the church, many respond, “Work.” Certainly, all men of a certain age have work responsibilities that must not be neglected (1 Timothy 5:8 [compare with Genesis 30:30]; Proverbs 6:6-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13). There may be occasions when those responsibilities genuinely prohibit one from attending an assembly of the church. A Christian does not sin who misses an assembly because he stops to assist an injured person on the side of the road. Neither does a Christian physician sin who performs a lifesaving emergency surgery on a Sunday morning in the course of his work duty. Others may similarly have responsibilities that force them to be away from an assembly at which they long to be present.

And a Christian does long to be present with the saints when they assemble. He will do all he can to see that his hours are scheduled not to conflict with any appointed assembly times. Sadly,

some children of God take no such precautions. They gladly take a job that they know will regularly require work hours conflicting with worship and Bible class times. When overtime opportunities arise, they gladly volunteer to work on Sundays and Wednesday nights. This is the attitude of one forsaking the assembling of the church. Contrast this attitude toward assembling with that of President Garfield:

James A. Garfield was President of the United States of America, taking office March 4, 1881. On his first Sunday in Washington after his inauguration, a member of the cabinet insisted that a meeting must be called to discuss a matter that threatened a national crisis. The President refused on the grounds of another appointment. The cabinet member then insisted that the national matter was of grave importance, and that Mr. Garfield should break his engagement, but Mr. Garfield refused to do so. Then the cabinet member remarked: “I would be interested to know with whom you have an engagement so important it cannot be broken.” President Garfield replied: “I will be as frank as you are. My engagement is with the Lord, to meet Him at His house at His table at 10:00 tomorrow morning, and I shall be there.”¹

Do you have the same determination to make your engagement with the Lord? If not, perhaps it is not your work that is to be blamed for your absence—the blame more likely lies on you.

. . . I Have Extracurricular Activities Scheduled?

A problem that faces most Christian parents and young Christians is what to do when sports or other extracurricular activities are scheduled in conflict with a church assembly. In times past, Sundays and Wednesdays were verboten for football and basketball games. Sadly, this is no longer true. Athletic directors and intermural associations rarely hesitate to schedule games on Wednesday nights. Many coaches even have regularly scheduled Sunday and Wednesday evening practices. However, this problem is not really a problem for those who have determined to put God’s kingdom and righteousness first in their lives.

Like Martha, many parents and young people are “*anxious and troubled about many things*” (Luke 10:41, American Standard Version). Every young person in a public school is already dangerously immersed in secular activities. Not all of these activities are wrong within themselves, but when we allow ourselves or our children to become absorbed in secular activities, it will lead to neglect of spiritual matters. Young people especially cannot afford to give away time spent with the Lord to more time spent in secular matters. We need to determine that, come what may, we will be like Mary, who chose “*that good part, which shall not be taken away from her*” (verse 42). Young people and parents should express their commitment to those activities in which they are involved (Ecclesiastes 9:10; Colossians 3:23), but they should express to coaches and band directors that their first priority lies with the Lord. When an extracurricular activity conflicts with the

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

USPS Publication #211780

. . . is a Periodical publication issued monthly by the Church of Christ at Third and Bethel (P.O. Box 251), Mammoth Spring, AR 72554-0251. **POSTMASTER: Please mail all changes of address to the above address.**

FCGN is mailed free of charge to any who care to receive it. We will be happy to add any names to the regular mailing list. If you send in a name we must have a complete address, including number and street name, or R.R. or HCR number, plus box number, or a P.O. Box number and the **NINE DIGIT ZIP CODE**. This paper is supported by voluntary contributions for which we are grateful. Financial information will be furnished upon request. **Mail all address corrections or manuscripts to:**

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

P.O. Box 251

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

Lee MosesEDITOR
Phone(870) 625-3217
E-Mailcocfcgn@centurytel.net
Websitewww.fultoncountygospelnews.org
Brian DixonWebmaster
E-Mailsales@halopages.net

(continued from page one)

assembly of the church, the Lord must come first.

I am Traveling?

A predictable phenomenon that occurs every summer is that church attendance declines, as families take far more vacations during the summer season. Basic rules of arithmetic would demand that while church attendance might dwindle at vacationers' home congregations, it would increase proportionally at congregations where vacationers might travel. Sadly, this is not the case. As they leave town to "get away from it all," many apparently leave the Lord back home as well. Of course, one can never leave the Lord without blemishing his soul to condemnation (Luke 14:27; Galatians 2:11-12; 2 Timothy 4:10).

"But," some might respond, "We are members of the congregation back home. Our responsibilities lie with that congregation. The elders of other congregations do not have oversight over us, so they cannot authoritatively call us into their assemblies. And when we are hundreds of miles from home, we obviously cannot assemble with the congregation back home."

All these things are true. However, a child of God still has individual spiritual

responsibilities to which he must attend, even when traveling. And some of these responsibilities require assembling, such as partaking of the Lord's Supper and singing to others with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. One's elders have deemed it needful for all the members to assemble multiple times during the week. Although a member may not be able to assemble with his home congregation while traveling; in deference to his elders' judgment, he should still seek to assemble with faithful congregations at their parallel assemblies.

Although any member's home congregation will miss him when absent, yet he can provide encouragement to congregations in areas where he will travel. And visitors do provide great encouragement to churches, especially to small, struggling churches. To refuse to provide that encouragement to a church that needs it is to refuse to do good (compare with Galatians 6:9; James 4:17).

To find faithful congregations in unfamiliar areas will take preparation. Ask brethren in whom you have confidence. Search the Internet for information on churches in the area. Just as one spends time before a trip packing belongings and finding information on lodging, one should spend time finding a congregation with which he can assemble.

It may be that a faithful congregation cannot be found within a feasible distance of one's travel route or destination. Sadly, such is growing to be increasingly the case in America, especially in certain geographic regions. Should this be the case, one is limited to assembling with his traveling companions and any others he might be able to rouse. But if a faithful congregation can be found relatively nearby, a Christian needs to make it a priority to assemble with them.

. . . I am Sick or Tired?

There come times when Christians are too sick or weak to make it out of bed, much less out of the house and to the church's meeting place. Others may stay away from the assembly because their illness is highly contagious, and do not wish to infect others. However, sometimes brethren use sickness as an excuse. Yes, it may be true that such a person is feeling ill. But his illness does not keep him from work or school, or from going out and doing a number of activities—it only keeps him from attending the assemblies of the

Lord's church. When this is the case, the real illness keeping him from attending is **spiritual** illness—not physical.

There will be times when a faithful Christian finds himself physically unable to be present. But his heart and spirit goes out to assemble with the saints when the time comes: "*For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ*" (Colossians 2:5). Remember—once you miss an assembly for a legitimate reason, it often becomes much easier to miss the next assembly for a lesser reason. A Christian never **wants** it to become easy to miss assembling with the church.

. . . I Get Nothing Out of the Classes and Worship?

Some brethren feel they do not derive enough benefit from their time spent in Bible class and worship to make it worth their while. Some brethren excuse themselves from attending as they should because they claim the preaching and teaching is poor: "The preacher is lazy; he does not study or prepare—he just gives fluff." If this is true, He is certainly failing to meet his obligation, and should repent, remove himself, or be removed from the pulpit. But regardless of his failure to meet his obligation, this does not excuse you from meeting **your** obligation. As a member of the body of Christ, you need to assemble with the saints. And if there are shortcomings, perhaps you can make the contributions that close the gaps.

But consider this: is poor preaching and teaching the problem, or is it poor **listening**? Did the preacher say something that stepped on your toes? Do you have your mind on other matters when your mind needs to be set on worshipping God? And why are you so obsessed with **getting** when you worship? Worship is always first and foremost about the worshipper **giving**—not getting (Genesis 4:3-4; Leviticus 1-3; Revelation 14:7). However, the one who gives his focus and attention to worship and Bible class will always get the most out of it. If you are not getting anything out of worship and Bible study, it is surely symptomatic of a larger problem (see the following section).

The exhortation in Hebrews 10:25 was written regarding certain brethren in Jerusalem who were guilty of forsaking the assembly, warning the others not to fall

into the same trap. But what was prompting so many to forsake assembling together with the church of our Lord? Among other factors, **persecution** (verses 32-34; 12:3; compare with Acts 8:1). Do the things that would keep us away from the assembly compare with this reason? Do we face loss of property or potential violence from assembling? Often times the excuses we conjure are extremely weak in comparison. And yet those facing such persecution were not excused from assembling.

There are indeed legitimate factors that can keep us from assembling with the church. If we miss an assembly, we should examine our reasons and intentions. And our question should not just be, "Is my reason valid for being absent?" Our question should be, "What can I do to make it?" Sometimes the answer may simply be that there is nothing we can do to make it. But if we could have made it but did not, we have sinfully forsaken the assembly.

Forsaking the Assembly is Symptomatic

It has been well observed that forsaking the assembly is rarely an isolated problem. It is almost always symptomatic of much larger issues that cause a brother's willing absence.

Self-Complacency

When a child of God willingly absents himself from the assembly, he effectively declares, "I do not need to strive to please God. I do not need to grow in my faith or Biblical knowledge. I have done all that I need to do."

How unlike this is the apostle Paul's determination to strive toward perfection! As he expressed that desire,

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14).

To say that Paul was heavily involved in the work of the church would be a gross understatement. Every Christian needs to

be striving for greater things for the Lord, and the commitment to be present at every assembly of the church is a starting point.

Misplaced Priorities

Jesus clearly enunciated what every Christian's first priority must be: "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33). Those who choose to do other things when assembly time comes indicate that those other things are more important to them. It is not as though faithful attendees have fewer responsibilities than forsakers. As one unknown author pointedly asked, "Did you know that the people who never miss a service have just as much sickness, just as much company, as those who miss when they have a hangnail or company comes? They just put first things first."

We must make a determination if we are not to forsake the assemblies of the Lord's church. As the late Gus Nichols said,

People do not just accidentally attend worship without missing for 20 years. They must have planned to always attend. Soon after I obeyed the gospel in 1909, I read of an old brother who had not missed attending in 41 years. That caused me to resolve that I would never miss worship as long as I lived, if possible to attend. . . .

. . . I did not decide last Lord's Day to go to services, nor the Sunday before. That was decided over fifty years ago.

We need to say, "Regardless of personal cost, I am going to assemble with the saints." Many Christians and other devout persons have made assembling such a priority. While its doctrinal beliefs leave much to be desired, Brigham Young University is to be commended for its firm refusal to play sports on Sunday. Eli Herring was a highly regarded NFL prospect out of BYU, but he said he would not play in the NFL because of their Sunday games. Even so, he was drafted in the sixth round of the 1995 NFL draft by the Oakland Raiders—had he not previously stated his intention, he would have gone much sooner. And although every boy who ever straps on a helmet and pads dreams of playing at that level, Herring chose instead to follow a less glamorous career path that would allow him to assemble.

Some will say, "I can't afford to miss work" or "I can't afford to miss school." Brother, you cannot afford to miss an assembly of the Lord's church! While secular education and providing for one's family are important, spiritual education and providing for yours and your family's souls are much more important (Matthew 16:26). One whose mismatched priorities place his work above his soul sets himself up for a fall, as did the Rich Fool who thought he had finally "arrived":

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:19-21).

If there is something coming between you and assembling with the saints—and thus between you and your Lord—you need to determine where your priorities lie. If that hindrance will remain a hindrance to serving your Lord, you need to get rid of it!

And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell (Matthew 5:29-30, ASV).

Lack of Love

A local church's assembling bespeaks Christians' mutual responsibility to one another. As Paul said, "*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*" (Galatians 6:2). This is spoken in the context of restoring a brother or sister "*overtaken in a trespass*"; however, Christians have a responsibility to take steps to prevent their brethren from being overtaken in the first place: "*But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*" (Hebrews 3:13). When the Hebrews writer speaks of those guilty of "*forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*," he sets as its opposite

noble Christian provocation: *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”* (10:24). When a brother or sister neglects assembling, he fails to **consider** his brethren.

Not only does a forsaker of the assembly demonstrate lack of love for his brethren—he demonstrates lack of love for God. Following the prohibition against forsaking the assembly, the Hebrews writer goes on to speak of those who *“ha[ve] trodden under foot the Son of God, and ha[ve] counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and ha[ve] done despite unto the Spirit of grace”* (verse 28). While these particular forsakers were also guilty of falling back into Judaism, all forsakers of the assembly are guilty of similar disrespect. By their actions they say, “I don’t need the Lord or His word. I don’t need to show my gratitude for the forgiveness He’s granted me.” The psalmist loved the Lord, as demonstrated by his earnest zeal to worship: *“My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God”* (Psalm 84:2). With the grace given us in Christ, our love for God should prompt even greater zeal toward His assembly.

Conclusion

We have devoted more space to this study than to any other since this writer became editor of the *Fulton County Gospel News*. We believe this is with good reason. Attendance is a very fundamental subject, and should be learned very early in one’s Christian walk. Not only is it fundamental, but it is a fundamental subject that children of God seem to have a most difficult time grasping. Aged brethren who “grew up in the church” yet practice spotty attendance habits, apparently unaware that anything is wrong with such habits.

Forsaking the assembling of the church must not be taken lightly. It provides grounds for church discipline, and will cause one to lose his soul.

But let our motivation to persevere in assembling be that great Christian impetus—love (1 Corinthians 16:14). When our hearts are right with God, our love for Him, His Son, His children, His word, and His worship will never let us forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

I I do not recall the source of this anecdote. However, being somewhat acquainted with President Garfield’s commitment to his church, I do not doubt it is factual.

SEPTEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS

CHURCHES

Moko church of Christ (Moko, AR) . . . . .	.50.00
Viola church of Christ (Viola, AR) . . . . .	.25.00
Oak Grove church of Christ (Walnut Ridge, AR) . . . . .	.25.00
Bakersfield church of Christ (Bakersfield, MO) . . . . .	.50.00
Elizabeth church of Christ (Elizabeth, AR) . . . . .	.25.00
Camp church of Christ (Camp, AR) . . . . .	.40.00
Gospel Hill church of Christ (Pottersville, MO)	100.00
Crossroads church of Christ (Gepp, AR)	100.00
Pilot church of Christ (Mammoth Spring, AR)	100.00
Agnos church of Christ (Agnos, AR) . . . . .	.50.00
Dellhalf church of Christ (Thayer, MO) . . . . .	.30.00
Jeff church of Christ (Thayer, MO) . . . . .	.25.00
Moody church of Christ (Moody, MO) . . . . .	.50.00
Sturkie church of Christ (Sturkie, AR) . . . . .	.30.00
Cottage Grove church of Christ (Cottage Grove, TN)	100.00
Poughkeepsie church of Christ (Poughkeepsie, AR) . . . . .	.50.00
Clarkridge church of Christ (Clarkridge, AR)	150.00
Eastside church of Christ (Lexington, OK) . . . . .	.30.00

INDIVIDUALS

Wilene & Luceile (Franklin, AR) . . .	.20.00
Lovice Garner (Benton, AR) . . . . .	.25.00
Madelyn Elliott-Smith (Searcy, AR)	100.00
Ernest & Janette Henderson (Itasca, TX) . . . . .	.25.00
Johnnie & Arlene Everett (Abbeville, AL) . . . . .	.50.00
Dorothy Badgero (South Bend, IN)	10.00
Charles & Joan Tostige (Falmouth, MI) . . . . .	.50.00
Allene James (Elizabeth, AR) . . . . .	.20.00
Sarah Cates (Mishawaka, IN) . . . . .	.25.00
Ann Wilson (Hot Springs, AR) . . . . .	.20.00

**MOVING?
CHANGING TO 911?**



*Be sure to send us
your change of address.*

GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

ADDRESS
SERVICE
REQUESTED

CHURCH OF CHRIST
P.O. BOX 251
MAMMOTH SPRING, AR 72554

Periodical Postage
Paid At
Mammoth Spring, AR
72554-9998
Publication #211780