

Good habits for Christians - The Christian Life Assembling yourselves together Hebrews 10:25

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

In our present series of talks we are looking at some 'Good habits for Christians'. There are 5 talks in the series and the fact that each of the subjects have a scriptural reference, I think, means that they are more than good habits; they are essential habits for Christians. There are many more good habits which I'm sure we may have, and although we may not be able to quote a specific Scripture to backup each one, we know through experience that they are good.

Previously we have looked at 'Searching the Scriptures daily', something which was commended in the Bereans (see Acts ch. 17 v.11), and at 'Praying without ceasing' which is a direct instruction to the Christians in Thessalonica (see 1 Thessalonians ch. 5 v. 17), but which absolutely applies to us as well. In the following two weeks, in the Lord's will, we will look at the good habits of 'Do good to all' and 'Press to the goal'. The references for these habits are Galatians ch. 6 v. 10 and Philippians ch. 3 vv. 13-15. These talks will all be available to you on our website where you will be able to find a full list of subjects covered in our programmes.

Our website is www.truthfortoday.org.uk. Please feel free to download any of our talks to listen to, or print them off to read, and if you have enjoyed any of our broadcasts, then tell your Christian friends about us, so that they can benefit from them too.

Today our subject is 'Assembling together' and the scriptural reference is Hebrews ch. 10 v. 25. There we read, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is...." I will return to this passage and read a few more verses as I feel the context is important.

Assembling together

As I prepared and recorded this talk, I thought a great deal about the irony of our subject and our present circumstances, how that during this coronavirus pandemic, many of us have been unable to gather together in our Christian groups. We trust it won't be too long before we are able to enjoy this privilege again. The term, "assembling" may not be familiar to every listener, so let me try and briefly explain what I think it conveys. To start with it means to come together in one place. You may remember the school assembly hall, which usually was big enough for all the students to come together at various times during the year. We have the same thought in an assembly line, which puts things together. But it also means to come together for a common purpose. At work we have a fire assembly point and if the fire bell rings, we each need to report to the specified place so we can have our names recorded. In the Bible, and especially in relation to the Church (by that I mean every true believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of creed or denomination), the word used implies to be called out. What a precious thought, that the Lord Jesus Christ has called

a company (the church) out of the world, to Himself. As we 'assemble' together, may we ever remember that our gathering together is to Him.

I know that the Christian testimony is fragmented (at least on the outward appearance), but we do well to remember scriptural principles. Our gatherings should be both exclusive and inclusive. The Lord Jesus Christ is the centre, and our assembling together must be to Him exclusively. May no other take His rightful place amongst His gathered people! But as we gather to Him, we need also to remember that He, our Lord, is the Head of the one Body. So our gathering is not to be sectarian but inclusive of every true believer.

The order we find in the Scripture is, naming the name of the Lord, departing from iniquity, and following righteousness, faith, charity, and peace, "with them that call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart" (see 2 Timothy ch. 2 vv. 19-22).

I guess many of us are longing for the opportunity to meet as we once did. What a joy it will be to be assembled together! To remember our Lord together, to worship together, to sing together! I have no doubt that once the current pandemic is under control, we will value and appreciate our gathering together much more than we did before. However, it maybe wasn't always a joy for us to attend the meetings. From our reading in Hebrews, it seems clear that certain ones had ceased to gather together so the exhortation was, "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."

We were encouraged to think that we were going to meet Him rather than going to the meeting. What a difference that would make! I need to challenge myself, as one who is often not the most punctual, if I was more in this mind-set, I would be eager to meet Him. Perhaps we may gather in small numbers, but His promise remains ever true, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (see Matthew ch. 18 v. 20). The question was asked, "As we gather together in His name, when does He come into our midst?" and the answer was given, "as the Host, He is already there to welcome us".

I often think that in the Upper Room, once the Passover had been taken and Judas having gone out, our blessed Lord instituted His supper to eleven of His disciples. We don't need to be gathered in large numbers to know the Lord's presence with us. In my experience, sometimes it is in the smallest of gatherings that we know His presence most. We can be sure that if we gather in His name He is with us. What a promise!

In our current circumstances we are thankful for the technology which allows us to keep in touch with our fellow believers. Many Christian groups are adept at making their services or meetings accessible over the internet, and this is good, but I haven't heard anyone say it was better than meeting together. The first century church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (see Acts ch. 2 v. 42). Fellowship (as governed by the apostles' doctrine) is so very important. We need each other!

I suggest there is something wrong if we do not want to gather with the people of God. In his epistle, John writes that our love for the brethren is a proof of our new life in Christ. Again, if I thought of every Christian as being one of 'Christ's ones', this would change my attitude towards them. Through our fellowship together, we can encourage and build ourselves up in the Faith. We have often heard the illustration of the coal fire, with the coals red and glowing, but take a single coal out of the fire and place it on the hearth and just see how quickly it loses its heat. Those who forsake this good (yes, essential) habit of assembling together would do well to consider this illustration. The Lord Jesus said to His own, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love" (see John ch. 15 v. 9). Jude sums it up beautifully when he writes, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep

yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (see Jude vv. 20-21).

Hebrews ch. 10 vv. 19-25

Now let us read together the verses from Hebrews chapter 10, beginning at verse 19:

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. 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.”

As every Bible student will know, the Hebrew epistle contrasts what the Jewish worshipper had under law and what the Christian believer has under grace. Perhaps what some fail to see is that what we have now in Christ, is “better” than what they had then through Moses. The good things they had in the Old Testament (and they were good as they were from the hand of God), are but shadows and types of the realities that you and I have in Christ.

Perhaps I should just say at this stage, to avoid any doubt as to what the New Testament teaches, the blessings of Christianity are available to both Jew and Gentile. The apostle Paul tells the Christians at Ephesus very clearly that through the grace of God, the Gospel brings both Jew and Gentile together, as “one new man” into the blessing of Christianity. “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (see Ephesians ch. 2 vv. 11-18).

All the things the Jewish worshipper had under the law, the tabernacle and temple, the Levitical priesthood, the altar and the sacrifices, the feasts, the ordinances and all that accompanied them, were but shadows and types pointing forward to the coming of Christ and the blessings of Christianity. What you and I have as believers of this dispensation is better than Judaism according to the writer of the Hebrew epistle. Chapter 10 begins by saying this, “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.” Later we read, “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (see v. 14), and so it is with boldness we enter into the presence of God. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus”, “Let us draw near”, “Let us hold fast...”, “Let us consider one another.” These are wonderful verses bringing before us our Christian privileges and responsibilities. It is in this context that we are exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

God wanted to be at the centre of His earthly people. We see this as the twelve tribes took their places encamped around the Tabernacle, which was at the centre of the camp. God gave instruction for set times when His people would be gathered together. In Leviticus we read of the feasts of the LORD, which were annual festivals to be observed by the Israelites. These would have been special times for the Jewish people, times of blessing and thanksgiving, beginning with the Passover celebration in commemoration of their exodus out of the land of Egypt. In chapter 23 of Leviticus we read of the Sabbath which was to be held each week, and of the set feasts which were to be held annually. Immediately after the Passover came the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was for seven days. Then followed the Feasts of First Fruits, Wave-loaves, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles (which also was for seven days). These feasts were full of meaning for God’s earthly people, the Israelites, but they are full of instruction for us in our day too. Whilst as Christians, we do not hold these feasts, they do speak to us in pictures of spiritual things.

The apostle Paul addressing the Christians in Corinth writes, “For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (see 1 Corinthians ch. 5 vv. 7-8). So it is good if we can learn what God intends us to learn from these Old Testament types and pictures. Again I would direct any who want to make a study of “The Seven Feasts of the LORD” to our website www.truthfortoday.org.uk, where you will find a series of talks on the subject.

We have already stated that, as Christians, our gathering together must be to Him. He must be the gathering point. It has been pointed out that these Feasts of the LORD are spoken of as “feasts of the Jews” in the Gospels. Perhaps the inference is that they had lost their focus and become more about the Jews and less about Jehovah. We need to be very mindful of this, too, in our day. As we meet together our focus must be on the Lord Jesus Christ, not on those with whom we meet. It is really not “our church”, but His. We need to be concerned how we gather together to ensure it pleases Him.

For the rest of the time we have available I want to say something on the gatherings we have outlined in the New Testament, and which, I feel, should form the basis of our assembling together. We have already quoted from Acts 2 how that the early church “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”, and it would appear that they quickly got into the habit of breaking bread on the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week (see Acts ch. 20 v. 7). The apostles took the opportunity to preach to them, which is again a gathering sanctioned by the verses we find in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians ch. 14. The early Christians prayed together. We read in Acts 4 that after being threatened by the Jewish authorities, Peter and John “went to their own company” and “lifted up their voice to God with one accord”, and “when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together...” Oh for prayer meetings like that! And last but certainly not least, there is the matter of administration. This would cover gifts and giving, but would encompass much more. In Romans 15 we read about the gift that was gathered for the Christians at Jerusalem by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, the details of which we find in the Corinthian epistles (see 1 Corinthians ch. 16 vv. 1-3 and 2 Corinthians ch. 8 vv. 1-15).

Attending assembly or church meetings is a good habit for Christians. I remember hearing a story where a Christian was asked if they were going to the prayer meeting later that evening. Their answer was, “Certainly, I made that decision 30 years ago.” It is good if early on in our Christian lives we make the decision to attend the meetings, to be gathered with the Lord’s people. There is no better place to be than to be gathered with the people of God. When I was younger, and perhaps needed some encouragement to go to the meetings, it was pointed out to me what Thomas lost by not being there when the risen Lord appeared to His disciples. We read that “Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came” (see John ch. 20 v 24). We don’t know why that was, but we know the following week he was with them and heard Jesus say, “Peace be unto you.” There is a blessing to be missed by not being gathered together with the Lord’s people.

I know some meet in house groups, sometimes in age groups, or all male or all female groups, and there is nothing wrong with that. But this should not replace your attendance at the assembly or church meetings. The fact that you have a youth meeting, or a ladies Bible study, should be in addition to attending the assembly meetings, and not instead of. Why? Because the Lord wants His people to be gathered together “in assembly” to Himself. He has given gifts to the assembly for the building up of the church and so we need to be present at the assembly meetings to benefit from these gifts. Other meetings may provide a less formal setting and be helpful for our spiritual growth, but I say again, these should be in addition to the meetings where the whole assembly, old and young, male and female, can be present together and subject to assembly conditions

Assembly meetings

The breaking of bread –

Sometimes called the Lord's Supper, or communion service. Although we need to be careful about setting hard and fast rules, for me, I think this should be the first meeting of the week. We have already seen that it was on the first day of the week, the Lord's day, the resurrection day, that the disciples came together to break bread. I'm sure it must have been later on in the day, as Paul then preached until midnight, but the breaking of bread was first. I think we have a pattern for this in the Scripture: our service Godward comes before our service manward. Worship before preaching, going "in" before going "out". What a beautiful way to start a new week together, being gathered to remember our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. For this, all we need is bread and wine, one loaf and one cup. These elements are only symbols but the Lord's words make them so poignant and full of meaning, "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (see Luke ch. 22 vv. 19-20). This meeting is a reflective time when we can meditate upon the Lord Jesus Christ coming into this world to lay down His life at Calvary. It is good if the focus of our remembrance is on Him, the greatness of His person and His work, and less on our need or even our blessing. From the remembrance of the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour there rises praise and worship to our God and Father.

The open ministry –

In any group of Christians (or church) there should be an opportunity for there to be a prophetic word spoken. Now sometimes we think of prophecy as a fore-telling, but prophecy also means a telling-forth. Prophecy involving the future we can find in the Word of God, and we should refuse what cannot be supported by Scripture. However, there is a need for "the prophets" to speak, "two or three", and for the others to judge what is said. These prophets are men and should be under the control of the Spirit of God. In the same verses we read, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak...". You may argue otherwise, but Paul says, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (see 1 Corinthians ch. 14 vv. 34 & 37). I am not saying there is not a place for systematic teaching or study, as I'm sure there is, but what seems clear is that there must be the opportunity for a brother to bring a "word in season" to the whole company.

The prayer meeting –

The prayer meeting is the power meeting, so it is sad when it is not attended by everyone. Many years ago I heard a brother say that in Laodicea they probably had stopped having their prayer meeting. He, of course, referred to Revelation ch. 3 where we read the Laodicean view of themselves, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..." (see Revelation ch. 3 v 17). How far different was the Lord's assessment of them, "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Perhaps as a society we have forgotten largely about God, but may we, as the people of God, never forget to pray together. Read the story of Rhoda in Acts 12 to see the effect a prayer meeting can have. It is worth mentioning, I feel, that the brothers who pray audibly in the meeting, need to speak up so they can be heard. Our prayers should be on behalf of the assembly, so that all present can add their hearty, Amen! When we say 'amen', we are asking – so let it be. When God says Amen, He is saying – it shall be so!

The business meeting –

This is perhaps relegated in our thoughts as being less important, but the business of the church should be dealt with decently and in order. We have already alluded to the instruction given by the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (see 1 Corinthians ch. 16 v. 2). We need to act wisely in relation to the financial needs of the Lord's

people. His servants and His work require support. Apart from finance, there are also practical matters to be dealt with, and this should be in an assembly meeting, where the usual conditions apply, due respect for the elders etc.

I do trust you will have found this talk interesting, helpful, and even challenging.

May God bless you all.

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