

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Attendance Helps Prevent Apostasy

By Bobby Witherington

Based on admonitions and information received therein, it is evident that the book of Hebrews was written to persecuted, discouraged Jewish Christians who were in danger of departing from the Lord. In fact, these brethren were admonished to *“beware...lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God”* (Heb. 3:12). They were rebuked for being *“dull of hearing”* and for being in need of someone to again teach them *“the first principles of the oracles of God,”* even though they had been Christians long enough so that they should have been teaching others (Heb. 5:11,12). They were encouraged to *“strengthen the hands which hang down”* and to look *“diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God”* (Heb. 12:12,15). Indeed, they were repeatedly encouraged to take the necessary steps lest, having been *“once enlightened”* they *“fall way”* and *“crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame”* (Heb. 6:4,6).

Other passages depicting their danger of becoming apostates could be cited, but because of space limitations we shall now focus our attention on one item which was crucial to their continued faithfulness, and which, in the light of its overall context, seems to have received the greatest emphasis. In particular, we now note the relationship between **attendance** in worship and one’s **faithfulness** to the Lord. Please note Hebrews 10:25: *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.”* In a very real sense, this verse is sandwiched between the admonitions which precede it, and the dire warnings which immediately follow. First, let us note:

The Admonitions Which Precede Hebrews 10:25

In this chapter we learn of the contrast between the blood of bulls and goats (which were a part of the Law of Moses), and the blood of Christ whereby Jesus became the *“mediator of the New Covenant”* (cf. Heb. 9:15). It was *“not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin”* (Heb. 10:4), but in welcomed contrast Christians *“have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”* (Heb. 10:10). Under the Law the priests offered *“repeatedly the same sacrifices, which could never take away sins,”* whereas Jesus, through the shedding of His blood, has become *“High Priest over the house of God”* (Heb. 10:21), which is the church (1 Tim. 3:15) which Jesus *“purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28), and each Christian is a part of that *“spiritual house”* (1 Pet. 2:5). Hence, as a member of the church, having been washed and cleansed by the blood of Christ, he has regular access to that High Priest Who *“ever lives to make intercession for those who come to God through Him”* (Heb. 7:15).

But the blessings of having access to Christ, who is *“High Priest over the house of God”* (Heb. 10:21), are not enjoyed apart from the Christian honoring his own responsibilities which devolve upon him in consequence of the spiritual cleansing he has received. Hence, we must *“draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...”* (Heb. 10:22). We must *“hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,”* and we must *“consider one another in order to stir up love and good works”* (Heb. 10:23,24). And it is in this context that we are admonished to *“not”* forsake *“the assembling of ourselves together...”* (Heb. 10:25). And heeding this command is crucial to our being able to *“draw near with a true heart,”* to holding *“fast the confession of our hope without wavering,”* to the proper consideration of *“one another,”* and in the stirring up of *“love and good works.”* Plainly put, the child of God who forsakes the assemblies of the church neglects the drawing *“near”* of Himself to Christ our *“High Priest,”* and he betrays a lack of consideration for fellow saints in *“the house of God.”*

Hebrews 10:25 Examined More Closely:

It contains a **Negative** – *“NOT forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...”* You will please note that the writer mentioned *“the assembling of ourselves;”* he did not say “the assembly” (singular). When the local church schedules periods of Bible Study and worship – each of which is designed to worship God, to edify saints, and to *“stir up love and good works”* – then the members of the church should make an honest effort to be present!

It contains a **Positive** – *“Exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.”* As Christians,

and members of a local church, we are a part of a spiritual family. There are many blessings we receive by reason of belonging to a family – especially the **Lord's** family! But ***“to whom much is given, from him much will be required”*** (cf. Luke 12:48); hence, the blessings we enjoy in Christ and in that spiritual family of which we are a part invoke upon us some corresponding obligations. Included in these obligations is the command to exhort ***“one another,”*** and one crucial realm whereby we are able to accomplish this is in the **assemblies** of the church.

It contains an **Urgency** – ***“and so much the more as you see the day approaching.”*** There is some controversy with regards to which ***“day”*** was then ***“approaching.”*** Is the writer referring to ***“the first day of the week”*** which is the specified day for partaking of the Lord's Supper and laying by in store (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2)? Or did he refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in A.D. 70, and which was especially significant to Jews living in that time period? Or was he referring to the coming of the Lord? As a practical matter, it does little good to spend lots of time arguing about which ***“day”*** was under consideration. Perhaps the writer had good reason for not specifying the specific ***“day”*** of Hebrews 10:25, for the fact of the matter is this: for those of us who live on this side of the return of Christ there is always a ***“day approaching!”*** The first day of the week arrives weekly. And Jesus is coming! His return will be as ***“a thief in the night”*** (1 Thess. 5:2), so we must continually be ready. But now let us consider:

The Divine Warning Which Immediately Follows!

Hebrews 10:26: ***“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer remaining a sacrifice for sins.”*** Please note the first five words of this scripture – ***“FOR if we sin willfully.”*** ***“FOR”*** is from the Greek *GAR*, which is a conjunction whereby ***“the reason and nature of something previously mentioned are set forth...”*** (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*). Hence, the consequences of the ***“forsaking”*** in Hebrews 10:25 are stated in that which follows the ***“FOR”*** in Hebrews 10:26. Moreover, he said ***“FOR if we sin willfully....”*** Contextually, the ***“forsaking”*** of verse 25 is the sinning ***“willfully”*** of verse 26. For that matter, to forsake something involves an act of the will. Some people miss the assemblies of the local church because they are too sick to get out of bed, but they have a fervent desire to be present. Such people are missing the assemblies, but they are not forsaking. But others miss for the main reason – they simply do **not** want to attend! Of course, they will seldom admit the real reason for their absence, so they invent any number of excuses whereby they hope to camouflage their own lack of devotion to God, and their lack of concern either for their own soul, their lack of concern for fellow Christians, or for the blood bought church of Jesus Christ!

“...there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26). This is the situation in which one finds himself if he sins ***“willfully”*** after having ***“received the knowledge of the truth.”*** The point being made is this: such a person is rejecting Jesus Christ, thereby forfeiting for himself the benefits of His shed blood. However, in the economy of God, there is no other sacrifice whereby our sins can be forgiven!

So what may such a person expect? The answer is given in verse 27; ***“...a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”*** Friend, this is serious! And to show just how serious it is the writer then contrasted the apostates of the past and the apostates of the present. Those who ***“rejected Moses' law died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses”*** (v. 28). In our terminology they received capital punishment – the most severe punishment which mortals can inflict upon mortals! But please note the next verse! ***“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace”*** (Heb. 10:29). So the ***“punishment”*** of verse 29 is ***“worse”*** than the execution of verse 28! This, of course, refers to the ***“punishment”*** to be experienced by the lost in the hereafter. And, in this context, it refers to that which will be visited upon apostate members of the church – passages which clearly prove the falsity of the ***“once-in-grace-always-in-grace”*** doctrine taught by so many today. Yes, we are depicting the terrible consequences which befall children of God who fall away, and who refuse to make correction. It is sad indeed! But what else can be expected in the light of the true nature of their conduct – inferred by the fact that they have figuratively ***“trampled the Son of God underfoot;”*** they ***“count the blood of the covenant...a common thing,”*** and they insult ***“the Spirit of grace!”*** Therefore, is it any wonder that the writer then referred to the ***“vengeance”*** of God, and added the sober comment, ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*** (Heb. 10:31).

Conclusion:

In the light of these important truths, it is a grave mistake for a child of God to say, ***“it is no big deal if I miss worship today!”*** However, on the other hand, why would any Christian who really loves God with all his heart, even **want** to miss the assemblies of the church wherein God is glorified and saints are edified and built up in the most holy faith?? ■