

Why Should I Assemble?

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Introduction.

- A. The new year is now upon us, and it comes with its usual spate of New Year's resolutions. Many of us take this time of year to determine to work on things we need to improve. Although I'm not normally a resolution-maker, I've decided this year that I need to get back into shape. We'll see how that goes by about April.
- B. Of course, as important as physical fitness is, our spiritual fitness is much more important. No matter how much we discipline our bodies, sooner or later those bodies will fail. By contrast, if we keep our souls in shape, we will win the prize of eternal life. With this in mind, then, I'm going to spend the next several Sunday mornings proposing some New Year's resolutions that will make us spiritually fit.
- C. The first of these is that we should all resolve that every time we can be here, we are going to be here. Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, meeting nights, every time the doors are opened, here is where we are going to be. Obviously, this is not always possible. Things like work and illness can defeat even the most diligent churchgoer. However, when it is possible, we need to make it happen.
- D. Now, I realize that this is a big commitment of time. Just about all of us have other things we could be doing with those four hours a week. Why, then, should we make the extra commitment to regular attendance, when in an earthly sense, we could get away with showing up just enough to keep the elders off our backs? The passage on the screen behind me, Hebrews 10:25, is the typical proof text we use to establish the importance of assembling, but the Bible has so much more to say to us about the real, practical reasons we need to come together. Let's look at some of them this morning, then, to answer the question, "Why should I assemble?"

I. Study-Oriented Reasons.

- A. The first reason why we should assemble with the saints as much as possible is **TO OBEY**. This is not just a Hebrews 10:25 thing. There are commandments in Scripture that we simply cannot follow outside of a group of Christians. For instance, look at Paul's comments about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:33. It was explicitly something that had to be done in an assembly of the entire church. Many other commandments are the same way. We can't obey Colossians 3:16 unless we're around other Christians to teach and admonish. We can't pay attention to the public reading of Scripture unless we're somewhere where the Scripture is being publicly read. We can't even pray together with other Christians unless we're there during the prayer.
- B. Sometimes, we fall into the trap of thinking that if we've obeyed these commandments in one worship service a week, we've done enough, and we can choose to stay home with a light heart after that. The problem with that mindset is that God doesn't want some minimal level of obedience from us. He wants everything that we can give. Some commandments can only be fulfilled once per week, like the Lord's Supper and the collection, but God wants us to carry out the rest as much as possible. Otherwise, we're like the man who says, "God tells me not to commit adultery, so I don't cheat on my wife on Sunday morning. The rest of the week, though, my time is my own!" The thing is, friends, our time ISN'T our own. It belongs to God, and unless we've done everything with it that He wants us to, we don't have the right to use it for ourselves yet.
- C. Second, we need to assemble diligently **TO FLEE SIN**. Paul describes the importance of this in 2 Timothy 2:22. All of us know that the world around us is an evil place. We are typically surrounded by evil people who, in one way or another, are trying to influence us to do the devil's bidding, and even things like radio and TV can have the same effect. Sometimes, we just need to escape from that, an escape where we can re-center ourselves on who we really are and what we really stand for, and gather strength to keep going. The assembly is one of the best escapes possible. When we're here, we're surrounded by people who are trying to push us toward God, not pull us away from Him. When we neglect that, when we don't take advantage of the priceless sanctuary of the assembly as much as possible, it is going to show up in our spiritual lives. If we don't spend time tuning out the world, we won't keep the world out of us. If we don't constantly fight against the evil we hear all the time by seeking out good to hear, that evil will corrupt our thoughts, our speech, and ultimately our lives. Let's remember to use the assembly as a way to escape the voices of sin.
- D. Third, we need to assemble **TO LEARN**. This is Peter's point in 1 Peter 2:2. If we want to grow and mature into the Christians God wants us to be, that has to begin by learning from the word of God. Indeed, we have to long to learn. And you know, there's this amazing thing about the assembly: every time we come together, there's something that's teaching us about the Bible! Our sermons are for teaching, our Bible classes are for teaching, and even our singing is for teaching. Don't take that blessing for granted! Let me tell you, friends, the thing that I most miss about being a normal Christian instead of a preacher is the opportunity to be taught. When we were visiting in Houston, I didn't teach any classes, I didn't preach any sermons, I just sat there and was fed. It was so wonderful! If you're not an all-the-time attendee, let me challenge you this morning.

Come to every service this year. Be fed three times a week. See if it doesn't make a difference in your life. I guarantee you that by the end of a year of learning God's will, you will be a stronger Christian.

- E. Now, there's a certain class of folks who think they've heard it all before. They think that they have this God stuff down, so they don't need to hear it again. There are a couple of problems with that point of view. In the first place, if you think you've got the Bible figured out, please let me know. I have some questions I want to ask you. Second, though, we need to assemble regularly in order **TO BE REMINDED**. Peter points out the importance of this kind of reminder in 2 Peter 1:13. Just because we hear some spiritual truth once doesn't mean we don't need to hear it again. In fact, we do need to hear it again. I've got a pretty good memory for Bible stuff, but I still need to have God's expectations for me put in front of me over and over and over again, because if they aren't, I forget what those expectations are, and I don't carry them out. I doubt I'm the only Christian who's that way, either. The assembly is a wonderful place to be reminded. The more teaching we hear, even if it's teaching we've heard before, the more likely we are to hear something we needed.

II. Practice-Oriented Reasons.

- A. Even beyond the realm of study, though, there are excellent reasons why we need to be here as much as we can. For one, we need to be here as much as possible **TO WORK**. Paul describes the Christian's responsibility to work for God in Romans 12:6. God has things that He wants every single one of us to do, and if we're not here, there's an excellent chance we're not doing them. This starts with the assembly itself. I know that Josh and Chris have a terrible time every month coming up with enough men to fill up our duty roster. If we could serve in the assembly, but we choose not to be here instead, we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem. Assembly attendance, though, is critical to working for God not just for the men of our congregation, but for all of us. How do we know who's sick and needs a visit unless we're here for the announcement? How can we contribute to the Lord's work unless we're here for the collection? That's in addition to all the other ways we work for God through the assembly that are mentioned explicitly in this lesson. In reality, what kind of work can we be doing for the church if we don't bother coming to church in the first place? The point is plain: if we aren't here, friends, we aren't working.
- B. As a subset of this, we need to be here as much as possible **TO ENCOURAGE**. Let's look at what Hebrews 10:25 reveals about this. In this passage, the main reason that we are commanded to be here is so that we can encourage one another. We encourage each other by our words, by our friendliness, but perhaps most of all, we encourage each other by our example. Just think about how horrible it would be if you showed up for a Wednesday evening service, and you were the only one. What a downer that would be! The fact is, just by being a warm body in a pew, we are exhorting everyone else here to continue serving God.
- C. Even beyond that, though, there's one group in particular we need to be careful to encourage with diligent attendance, and that's our own families. Parents, let me ask you: What does your faithfulness in attending services teach your children about serving God? Does it show them that serving God is centrally important to you, that it should be the center of your lives too? Or does it show them that serving God is an extra, something you can do if you've got time and energy, but isn't really necessary? One last question: If your attendance teaches your kids that God isn't important, how likely do you think they are to go to heaven? We need to be the kind of Christians who are always here, not just for our sakes, but for our children's.
- D. We also need to assemble regularly **TO MEET GOD**. A line I've heard more than a few times from people is, "I'm spiritual but not religious." Typically, that's code for "I like the thought of God, but I don't like going to church." Brethren, that attitude is ridiculous. Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 18:20. This one requires some thinking to understand. Jesus, just like the Father, is omnipresent. He is everywhere at all times. This passage, then, isn't saying that Jesus is with us here, but isn't with us when we're on our own. What it is saying, though, is that Jesus dwells with us here just like God dwelt in the temple under the Old Law. His eyes and ears were especially turned toward the temple and the things that went on inside it. In the same way, this assembly is a gathering to which Jesus pays special attention. He is deeply concerned with the things we teach here, the things we sing here, and the things we pray here. If the prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much, how much do you think the prayer of 70 or 80 righteous men can accomplish? If we want to come to the Lord and commune with Him, then, this is the very best place to do it.
- E. Finally, though, we need to assemble as much as possible **TO PREPARE FOR HEAVEN**. Let's start this by looking at Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Consider the implications of this with me for a moment. A church service is an assembly of saints gathered together with God. Typically, our assemblies last about an hour or so. Based on what 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says, heaven is an assembly of saints gathered together with God. However, that assembly will last for eternity. Folks, if we don't love getting together with God and our brethren here, how on earth are we going to deal with heaven? The assembly is something that we need to learn to love, friends, for I guarantee you that there is no learning to love the alternative.

Conclusion. If you need to prepare your entire life for heaven, start today by coming to God.