

MEETING TOGETHER

HEBREWS 10:25

"NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER, AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS". The quotation of this verse is the main ammunition of those who oppose people, whose view of the Church has led them to abandon regular attendance at "services" or religious meetings. What these proof-text-quoters fail to realise is that the verse will not bear the meaning they wish to read into it. In an endeavour to be honest with myself and to face up to the real meaning of the original of this verse, I did some research.

Firstly, I found that most modern translations simply say, "Not neglecting to meet together." Now, I suppose one may construe that in the sense that we are not to neglect attending meetings; but equally it would support quite informal times of getting together. The important point, from the context, is what we do when we do meet together. This context makes it clear that meeting together should be the occasion of "provoking one another to love and good works" and of "encouraging one another". The meeting is for interaction, relationship and mutual encouragement. My personal experience would strongly suggest that these aims are much better served when I am together with two or three brothers and sisters in an informal situation, rather than in structured "meetings". But maybe I too am guilty of making the verse say something to suit my position, so let us go to the original Greek text of the verse and seek the independent and authoritative interpretation of "The Expositors' Greek Testament."

The word here translated in the King James version, "Assembling yourselves together" is "Episunagoge" rather than the simpler word "Sunagoge". Here is what Expositors has to say, "Delitsch suggests that the compound word (episunagoge) is used instead of the simple one in order to avoid a word with Judaic associations, but "sunagoge" might rather have suggested the building and formal stated meetings, while the word used denotes merely the meeting together of Christians." In other words, it would seem that the writer to the Hebrews had been at pains to indicate that his meaning was not formal religious gatherings in a religious building, but rather any coming-together of Christians.

Further, I would suggest that there is much less true "meeting" in "Meetings" than in times when we sit down together, two or three believers, to open our hearts to one another, and to talk about the Lord. It is on such occasions that I find myself being encouraged and provoked to love and good works more than in formal services.

The other point of considerable importance is this; when these early Christians came together, they did not gather in the name of any denomination, but simply as members of the one Body of Christ, the Church. They had no Christian denominational menu to choose from, such as is set out in the "Church Notices" in our newspapers. If they belonged to the Lord, they belonged to the one and only Church, and meeting together was only unto Jesus Christ the Head of that Church.

No matter how fervently we sing, "We are gathering together unto Him", so long as we are meeting under denominational banners and the names and organisations of

men, we are giving the lie to our words by our actions. So, if those who quote Hebrews 10:25 to me can show me where in this land I will find Church as it was in the New Testament, there I will be glad to assemble together with my brothers and sisters in the Lord, but I will not gather in the divisive denominational churches of today, whose very existence denies the unity of the Spirit we are exhorted to maintain. To summarise: I reject the way in which this verse is used by those who would persuade us that, because we do not "go to church" and attend services and religious gatherings, we are in disobedience to the word of God. I reject it for the following reasons:

1) The original Greek text does not specify attendance at regular organised services, but rather the evidence strongly suggests that it means something less formal, which does not take place in religious buildings. Indeed, the whole Epistle to the Hebrews is aimed at demonstrating that the "Old Covenant" with its "Regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary"(Hebrews 9:1) has been abolished and the "New Covenant ", which needs none of these things, has been established.

2) I would hold that wherever and whenever Christians come together, and they encourage one another and provoke one another to love and good works, then they are meeting in the true sense of this verse.

3) True meeting of heart and spirit is much more likely to occur with twos and threes than in larger formal gatherings.

4) Even should we concede that larger gatherings are what is meant in this verse, we have departed from the original ground of gathering, simply in the name of Jesus, by meeting instead in churches with denominational names. When Christians in a town gather in a dozen different churches on a Sunday they are not "Assembling together" but assembling separately.

5) Finally, Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." The verb, "gathered" is in the passive mood. Do we trust Jesus to do the gathering, or do we arrange gatherings? We are finding that, as we allow Jesus to do it, He provides times and occasions of rich intimate fellowship and times of mutual encouragement, quite often when we have not expected it. I look forward to the time when there will be a restoration of that original creation of God, a pure unified Church, unified, not by the ecumenical schemes of men, but by the Holy Spirit of God, released in fresh Pentecostal power among us. Then, I have no doubt, there will be large "family reunions", joyful gatherings with wonderful fellowship, but no religious services conducted by men. These gatherings will be creative events directed and orchestrated by the Holy Spirit.

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