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'Forsaking The Assembling'

by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

I do not like to tear up sermon outlines, but I have needed to do it more than a few times. I hear some brother preach on some passage of Scripture that I have used. After hearing him explain the passage more perfectly, clearly I have misused it. Out goes a good outline that I have hardly used, even some that I have often used.

I have some sermons with Hebrews 10:25 in them. In applying the passage, I said that if one wilfully absents himself, without excuse, from assembling with the local church of which he is a member he has sinned, violating this passage.

However, recently I have been compelled to re-examine my long standing application of the passage. I have heard and read from several brethren, who are good students of the word, how we are missing the point of the passage. They suggest that the way I have applied it is really misusing it. While they do not encourage missing even an occasional assembling, they say this verse does not condemn it. They tell me that since "forsake" means to abandon, this passage talks about complete apostasy -- totally, more or less permanently, abandoning the assembly. In other words, it is totally quitting the Lord and the assembly (church) that is under consideration. So, it has been said, that we should not use this passage to rebuke people who once, twice or occasionally

wilfully absent themselves for congregational assemblies.

So, after a careful examination of what these good brethren are saying and other helps that I have been able to find, I have concluded that I have been making the right application all along. Here is why:

The Greek word for *forsake* in this passage is EYKATALEIPO. Vine says it is "from *en*, "in," and No. 1 (*kataleipo*-EOB), denotes (a) "to leave behind, among, leave surviving," Rom. 9:29; (b) 'to forsake, abandon, leave in straits, or helpless,'....".

Of KATALEIPO, he says pretty much the same thing. The shade of difference between EYKATALEIPO and KATALEIPO seems to be in the prefix "*en*", meaning "in, on, at, with, by, among". Thayer's Lexicon pretty well agrees with Vine.

Since the word, in either form, means to leave or to abandon it may seem to suggest, on the surface, that "forsaking the assembling" would indeed be to completely apostatize rather than merely wilfully missing an assembly or two. However, when one examines its usage more closely, in this passage and others, it clearly shows the duration of the leaving, forsaking or abandoning may be long, short, momentary, temporary or permanent, depending on the context.

Jesus, from the cross, cried, "My God,

My God, why have you forsaken (EYKATA-LEIPO) me". (Matt. 27:46). I may not understand all that was involved in that forsaking, but I believe the Lord was forsaken because He said so. It was only a momentary forsaking. Surely no one will say it was a long-term or permanent abandonment.

Jesus said in a parable, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave (KATALEIPO) the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?" (Matt. 15:4) Was this leaving, abandoning, forsaking of the ninety-nine with no intention to return? Or was it temporary - "until he finds" the one sheep?

Vincent says of *assembling* in Heb. 10:25: "The act of assembling, although some explain *assembly*. The antithesis is, 'not forsaking assembling, but exhorting in assembly.' Lunemann aptly says the idea of apostasy which would be conveyed by the rendering *assembly* or *congregation* is excluded by *ETHOS habit* or *custom*, which implies an often recurring act on the part of the same persons."

Maybe someone can tell me how often and for long must one can willfully miss assembling before he has *forsaken*, *left* or *abandoned* assembling -- if occasional willful missing is not *forsaking*?

A rhetorical question that is often raised in an effort to illustrate that occasional missing does not constitute abandoning or forsaking is: "If a husband stays away from home for one or even a few nights does that mean that he has forsaken or abandoned his wife?" Some answer it with an emphatic, "of course, not!". My friend, if a husband willfully and inexcusably stays away from home overnight or several nights *when he should have been there*, he has left, abandoned, or forsaken it for whatever time is involved. If his wife gets on his case for leaving, abandoning or forsaking her during that time, I don't think he could get by with saying, "Oh, honey, maybe I should have been here, but I did not *for-sake* you. I merely chose to be out with the boys rather than show up. After all, I am here now and that shows that I am not guilty of *forsaking* you."

We all recognize that merely missing assemblies, even for an extended period,

does not necessarily mean we are "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together". Most brethren believe that there are certain circumstances and obligations that would keep one from assembling. If one has a legitimate reason for not assembling then he should not be there. However, if it can truly be said that he should be there or that the Lord expects him there, then if he is not there he has left, abandoned, forsaken the assembling for whatever time(s) involved.

I would still like to know how many *willful misses* it takes to make a *forsaking*.
T
R

Reactions To Happiness 'Hyper'

by Jamie Sloan

The Bible class teacher came to "re-joice in the Lord always" of Philipians 4:7. He emphasized "Rejoice always". As he looked into the sober faces of those who were seriously seeking an understanding of the will of heaven, he began to rebuke them for their failure to "re-joice and be happy". The class seemed bewildered, unconvinced of their sin, but faced with a Biblical injunction that somehow must be understood and applied. They felt, with Job, "...But your reproof, what doth it reprove?" (Job. 6:25).

Then, too, there are those Old and New Testament passages that promise "happiness". "He that giveth heed unto the word shall find good; And whoso trusteth in Jehovah, happy is he" (Proverbs 16:20). And, do we not usually give "happy" as a synonym for "blessed" in the beatitudes? Are these passages obligating us to an eternally light-hearted outward demeanor? Does "happy" really mean "happy-go-lucky"? Is a serious and sober facial expression an indictment of one's trust in the Lord and proof of a failure to count your blessings?

These questions illustrate that we need some light shed on this subject - some words need defining and some Biblical conclusions need to form our concept of "joy" and "happiness".

The bulletin of the Positive Mental Attitude Church of Christ typically begins

In this fashion: "We just want to praise the Lord for the wonderful service we had Sunday at PMA, and for the great joy and love that flooded our assembly, and for the presence of the Holy Spirit that so vibrantly filled our hearts" (ad nauseam). These brethren believe that average is the unpardonable sin and that rebuke is the sin that "it is a shame to even speak of". Surely to them Jeremiah must have been mentally ill, Amos was an inexcusable radical, and Paul should have never written 1 Corinthians.

I charge that these folks have not discovered the real joy and happiness that is described in the New Testament. It does not mean to be favored by circumstances in this world so that our lives are pleasant and joyous. It does not always manifest itself in outward feelings of joy, pleasure, happiness, etc. It is not the universal emotion required in every situation. Paul says to "rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15). Surely no one would accuse the Lord of falling to rejoice and be happy while he is in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary. He is not falling to "count his blessings"!

I believe some of us while we are in our prime of life with perfect health, an abundance of material blessings, and the absence of opposition and persecution, tend to see joy and happiness in too mundane a way. Peter prepares Christians for persecution in 1 Peter 4:12-16. They are not to be surprised by it (v. 12a), and they are to rejoice because of it (v. 13). Does he mean to enjoy the experience, to laugh and shout with great exultation? Hardly. The joy and blessedness here is a mental evaluation and appreciation of the effects brought about by bearing up under the suffering. It is a privilege to suffer since Christ suffered (v. 13a); there are blessings that come to us as a result (v. 14); and there is glory for God in the experience (v. 15). Then, at the end when his glory is revealed, "ye may rejoice with exceeding joy" (v. 13b). William Barclay says about "joy": "...the characteristic of this word is that it most often describes that joy which has a basis in religion and whose real foundation is God. It is not the joy that come from earthly things or cheap triumphs; still less is it the joy that

comes from triumphing over someone else in rivalry or competition. It is a joy whose basis is God" (The Letters To The Galatians and Ephesians, p. 55).

"Happy" and "happiness" have likewise been abused. The concept is not one of "feelings of pleasure and contentment because of favorable life circumstances". When we substitute "happy" for "blessed" in the beatitudes, we may actually be directing attention away from the meaning of the passage. There is a blessing placed on the "poor in spirit" in v. 3. That blessing is that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven". So, in all of them. Again, Jesus places a blessing upon those who are persecuted (vv. 10-12). He tells them to "rejoice and be exceeding glad" (v. 12). But, again, this does not mean to enjoy the experience. We are not "spiritual masochists". The suffering Christian is to glory in the greatness of his reward in heaven, and the identity with the great men who have suffered before (v. 12).

I am very thankful for the favorable circumstances that have characterized my life to this point. However, I must not conclude that I have the "right to the pursuit of happiness". I may need the lessons that adversity and pain teach more than I "need a bed of roses". When I counted my blessings, I wonder if such suffering would even be on the list, much less at the top (Acts 5:41).

(Editor's Note: This article appeared in THE CASTLEBERRY BULLETIN of Ft. Worth, TX in May of 1980 and again in April of 1987. Bill Robinson, Jr. now edits that bulletin. We commend the article and bulletin to you.)

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R

Schedule of Services

SUNDAYS:

Bible Classes 9:45 a.m.
Worship Assembly . . . 10:45 a.m.
Worship Assembly6:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAYS:

Bible Class 10:00 a.m.
Bible Classes 7:30 p.m.

Church Socializing

by Robert Turner

This article has little to do with fun or frolic, and nothing to do with church support of such. But it is impossible to completely separate public gatherings and the working together of people, form their social aspects. Good friends rejoice to see one another. Efforts to divorce all personal and social feelings from an assembling of close friends would encourage artificiality and hypocrisy. Let us honestly acknowledge this and discuss problems it genders.

We are to love one another without respect of person; show no favoritism on account of race, rank or wealth (Jas. 2:1-ff). Our common interest in serving God will draw us together and erase those differences, but close personal ties cannot be made by putting a name on the church roll. Nor is it sinful to have special buddies or friends among Christians. Jesus loved John (Jn. 13:23-ff) and this special feeling was recognized. I believe He did this without showing partiality; and I believe we may do the same.

Church "cliques" are to be avoided but one should be able to have a few brethren over for dinner without making others envious or "hurt." Some "social" events (such as welcoming a newcomer to the

community, or a farewell party for one leaving) may lend themselves to large numbers -- Invite the whole membership of a church. But we should avoid a sort of unwritten law that says "If any members do something together, all must be invited." In fact, allowing wedding, graduation, or other like affairs to have forced church boundaries, is a sure way to confuse church and social functions. We have known some brethren to be "hurt" because one got a graduation announcement and another did not; and we have also known some to be financially burdened to give graduation gifts "just because we are members of the same church." We should do all possible to avoid such feelings of obligation.

Christianity will take care of racial prejudices, quick tempers, feelings of superiority, and other things that separate people. Concern for all others will cause one saint to help another "get acquainted" and feel at home. The more we work together for the Lord the more we appreciate one another as saints-- and that will have an inevitable social effect. But we should not view the church as a "lonely hearts club." Close ties cannot be forced; they are forged over a period of time; they depend much on the nature of the individuals. Surely, we have all heard, "To have friends one must be friendly." The externals of "church" ties should not be expected to do what one will not do for Christ.

-- via *The Castleberry Bulletin*.

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