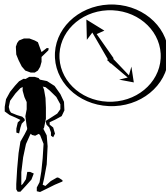


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### Time of Assembly

#### **Sunday:**

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.  
Worship 5:00 p.m.

#### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

## Missing Church for the Coronavirus

By Steve A. Hamilton

During the Roman Empire Christians had to decide if God was first in their lives (Mk. 12:30). Should they attend worship services knowing if they did, they could ultimately die? Knowing the risk if they got caught, would God permit a reprieve to His command for assembling (Heb. 10:25). After all, once a new emperor took office the madness would end. They only needed to hide for a few months or in the worst case, a few years. However, the persecution of Christians didn't end for over 400 years.

There was evidence to suggest Christians were finding it hard to attend services. Ignatius wrote Polycarp a letter to encourage the beleaguered servant of Christ to keep up the good fight. In it he wrote, "Let your assembling together be of frequent occurrence: seek after all by name."<sup>1</sup> Ignatius who was writing this letter from prison was telling Polycarp to meet more often. No doubt with the intent of strengthening the brethren to endure martyrdom.<sup>2</sup> But he also said to "seek after all by name."<sup>3</sup> In the foot notes it reads concerning this statement, "i.e., so as to bring them out to the public assembly."<sup>4</sup> Ignatius was an Elder at Antioch. He was soon to be executed for being a Christian. He knew that assembling placed a target on the backs of the brethren. Yet, he was encouraging more gatherings, not less. It seems Ignatius understood the importance of assembling even in trying times.

Later in the same letter Ignatius wrote, "A Christian has not power over himself, but must always be ready for the service of God." This is an excellent point. Paul wrote the Roman brethren, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*" (Rom. 12:1). Paul wrote the Corinthians saying, "*Or do*

*you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"* (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Ignatius understood that Christians serve a higher power. If that meant potentially being exposed to a virus in order to assemble as commanded by God, so be it! Of course, Ignatius was referring to being exposed to the Roman authorities under penalty of death if they were caught and refused to denounce Christ. In either case, it was far safer staying at home then it was circulating in public.

We would like to think that martyrdom is a far cry from catching a virus. To wit, we agree. Before one was executed during the Roman Empire, Christians had to endure torture and suffering. Catching the coronavirus, suffering in bed and possibly dying somehow does not compare. However, the principle is the same. Christ has commanded our presence at the assembling for worship and we are expected to be there even if it means our life (Heb. 10:25-26; Lk. 17:33). If we get sick because someone at the service exposed us to the virus and we died, do we think God won't notice? Jesus said if we die for the gospel's sake, we will find eternal life (Mk. 8:35). He knows we gave our life in obedience to His commands.

We need to understand that even if we attend worship services for the right reasons, we are still unprofitable servants (Lk. 17:7-10). We are only doing that which was our duty to perform. What does it say about us when we can't even do our duty? When King Saul failed to do his duty, God called it disobedience. Samuel called Saul's disobedience rebellion and stubbornness that rejects God (1 Sam. 15:22-23). Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (Jn. 14:15). If we don't love Him, we won't keep His commands especially when it becomes threatening.

There is no reason why a healthy Christian cannot attend services. The only thing that prevents attending worship services is a fear of getting ill and possibly dying. Sickness and death are cares of life (Matt. 13:22). If we cannot attend services for fear of sickness or death, we will never attend services again. We have proven we possess a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7). Fear can ultimately prevent our salvation (Rev. 21:8).

We should encourage one another to attend services despite the threat of a virus. Many first century Christians sacrificed their lives by attending services. The reward is the same for them as it is for us. There should be nothing that holds us to this life if the Lord is truly first in our hearts. *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength"* (Mk. 12:30). That is what it means to be a Christian. *"Whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it"* (Mk. 8:35). Apparently, many have not counted the cost of discipleship (Lk. 14:26-33).

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1. Ignatius, "Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp," Ante-Nicene Fathers, Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, ed., Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, Vol. 1, pg. 94.
2. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, Book III, 36, pg. 100.
3. Ignatius, "Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp," Ante-Nicene Fathers, Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, ed., Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, Vol. 1, pg. 94.
4. Ibid, pg. 96

## You May Be Surprised to Learn ...

By Doy Moyer

Have you ever taken for granted certain things and believed them, just because that is what you have been told? Perhaps you find yourself in that situation now, believing and doing things because that is what you were told. Religious people sometimes believe and practice something because a preacher said it, or because that is what their parents have always taught them. This can also be true of those who do not believe in God and do not accept the Bible. They have been told that He does not exist and that the Bible is not true, but have not personally looked into the matter themselves. Regardless of what one believes or practices, it is a shame when he does so only on the word of others.

We wish to briefly challenge your thinking here, hoping to create in you a desire to study on your own and learn more about God's way as found in the Scriptures. With this in mind, you may be surprised to learn:

### **That the Bible does not approve of denominationalism.**

There are hundreds of different denominations that exist today. Each denomination has its own peculiar name and faith. This goes against the Scriptural teaching that there is "one faith" ([Ephesians 4:4-6](#)), "one body which is the church" ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#)), and that believers are to be joined together "*in the same mind and in the same judgment*" ([I Corinthians 1:10-13](#); [John 17:20-21](#)). In the first century, disciples were called "Christians," and they were not to be divided by the wearing of different doctrines. If you've been told otherwise, we plead with you to go to the Bible and find exactly what it teaches.

### **That the Bible can be understood by all.**

Many people do not study the Bible because they do not believe that it can be understood. However, God tells us not to be foolish, but "*understand the will of the Lord*" ([Ephesians 5:17](#)). God does not tell us to do something that cannot be done. Therefore, by reading and studying, we can understand the Bible and handle it accurately ([Ephesians 3:3-4](#); [II Timothy 2:15](#)). If you have been told that we cannot understand the Bible, think again; God commands it.

## **That revelation is complete.**

Many teach that they are still receiving revelations from God. They assert that God told them to do certain things, apart from the Bible. Yet, the Bible itself says that this is not so. Jesus promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit, through them, would reveal all truth ([John 16:13](#)). The two alternatives are either that this happened or it did not. If it did not, then Jesus was a liar; if it did, then all truth was given by the time the last apostle died. According to [Jude 3](#), the faith has been "once for all delivered" to the saints. This means that what was revealed was of perpetual validity and never needs repetition. In other words, revelation is complete. The Bible is complete, and we need not look for further revelations from God. His will is already made known. If you have been taught otherwise, we ask that you search the Scriptures to see if this is what the Bible teaches.

## **That miracles and spiritual gifts worked through men have ceased.**

Many claim the ability to work miracles and speak in tongues. However, their claims fall far short of what the Bible teaches. The Scriptures teach that miracles were done for the purpose of proving who Christ was and for confirming the word that was spoken ([John 20:30-31](#); [Mark 16:20](#); [Hebrews 2:1-4](#)). For example, when the apostles went about preaching the gospel, they needed some way to prove that what they said was from God. Thus, God worked with them confirming the word through accompanying signs. Yet, the Bible also teaches that the time would come when those spiritual gifts would cease ([I Corinthians 13:8-13](#)). They were to cease when revelation was completed. When all truth promised by Jesus was revealed, then there would be no more need for accompanying signs. The word was confirmed, and we have the result today in the Bible. If you have been taught otherwise, search the Scriptures to see what they say about miracles and spiritual gifts. You may be surprised at what you learn.

## **That you can have your sins forgiven and be saved.**

Some teach that salvation is only for a few who have already been unconditionally chosen by God. However, the Bible teaches that Christ died for everyone, and that God's desire is for everyone to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved ([I John 2:2](#); [John 12:32](#); [I Timothy 2:4](#); [II Peter 3:9](#)). This includes you. Many do not believe they can be forgiven of their sins. They think they have done such terrible things that God cannot forgive them. This is not true. No matter what you have done in the past, you can have your sins forgiven. God promised rest to all who are weary and heavy laden ([Matthew 11:28-30](#)). Jesus Christ died on the cross for all sin; His blood is powerful enough to cover any and every sin that you may have committed. We must learn to trust in the promises of God.

## **That salvation is conditional.**

The Bible teaches that we are saved by grace through faith ([Ephesians 2:8](#)). Yet

grace, even though something that we cannot earn, is accessed by meeting the conditions laid down by God in His word. In other words, we must obey the gospel ([Romans 10:16](#); [6:17](#); [II Thessalonians 1:7-9](#)). Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all that obey Him ([Hebrews 5:9](#)). Without obedience to God's commands, our faith is dead and we cannot be saved ([James 2:14-26](#)).

### **That heaven and hell are real places.**

Many do not believe in the reality of heaven and hell. Others believe that heaven is real but that hell is not a real place. However, the Bible teaches the reality of both. Heaven is a place of rest for those who were righteous before God. It is a place of everlasting life (see [Hebrews 4:1-11](#); Revelation 21-22). But as real as heaven is, hell is also. Hell is a place of eternal punishment for those who have rejected God, a place where the worm does not die and fire is not quenched ([Mark 9:48](#)).

### **There is a day of judgment coming (Acts 17:30-31).**

We will all give an account of ourselves to God ([II Corinthians 5:10](#)). Are you ready for this day? The Bible teaches us to repent of our sins, confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of our sins ([Acts 2:38](#); [Romans 10:9,10](#)).

We plead with you to search the Scriptures daily, and find out whether the things you have been taught are true ([Acts 17:11](#)). Take only God's word as the final authority. This is the only safe course of salvation.

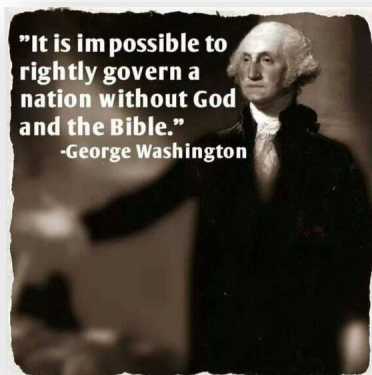
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## **NEEDED: The Discipline to Do the Unpleasant!**

By William C. Sexton

Some years ago I heard a sermon by a young preacher who made some pertinent points relative to a passage from [I Kings 20:42](#), which says, "*Then he said to him, 'Thus says the LORD: 'Because you have let slip out of <your> hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.'*"

The statement was made concerning the following situation: King Ahab had spared the life of a man, King Benhadad of Samaria, who had defied God's teachings to the extent that God's justice demanded his execution. Ahab, when asked by the king to spare his life and promise to return the cities he had seized, consented and made a covenant with him ([I Kings 20:34](#)). This was contrary to God's message by the prophet. God wanted Benhadad executed, not spared.



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It reminds us of the downfall of another king, Saul, who refused to execute the Lord's commandment in a similar case ([I Samuel 15:1-13](#)). This was some years before, and Ahab should have been knowledgeable of it and the sad results.

### Relevant Points for Us

The main point of the sermon was that we, too, have some unpleasant matters to attend to, and we may choose foolishly and destructively the more pleasant path for the present. Some examples might be in regard to the following:

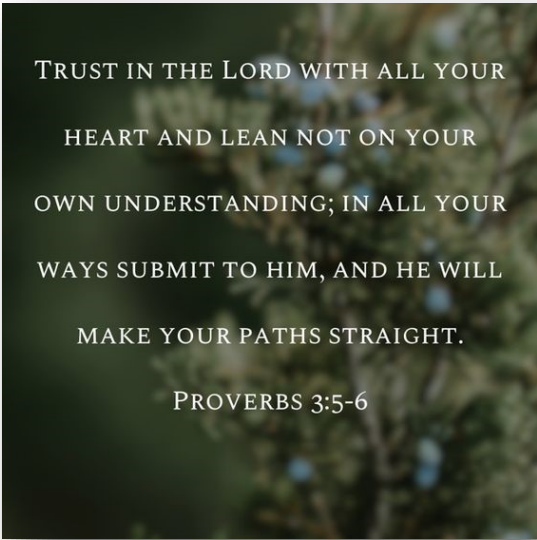
1. God has laid down rules about marriage and divorce ([Matthew 5:31-32](#); [19:9](#); [I Corinthians 7:10-11](#)). Many people feel that it's too harsh to ask a couple who are living in an adulterous relationship, possibly having children, to separate. However, if they were doing some other evil, they'd see no inconsistency or harshness in saying that they'd have to stop doing what they were doing in order to have God's grace forgive them! Out of sympathy, we may be duped into trying to remain on the sidelines and be uncommitted, which is unacceptable to the Lord.

Do we have the discipline and conviction to sustain us in such an endeavor? Let us pray for strength to act disapprovingly if and when we are faced with such! Granted, such is not easy, and it tears the heart strings of the child of God.

2. Some people may be very likable and religious, but have not really obeyed the gospel ([II Thessalonians 1:7-10](#)), as is revealed in the New Testament (Believe - [John 8:24](#); Repent - [Luke 13:3](#); Confess - [Romans 10:9-10](#); Be baptized in order to have remission of sins ([Acts 22:16](#)) and to be united with Christ ([Romans 6:3-4](#))). Some feel that we are harsh even self-righteous and judgmental to say that they are lost. However, being faithful to God, Christians have to perform unpleasant tasks, not because they are arrogant or unloving, but rather because they do love and respect God and people. God is the author of salvation and salvation is in Christ ([II Timothy 2:10](#)).

As Christians, loving the souls of people, we must have conviction and trust in God to the extent that we'll follow His directions. If we really love people as we should, we'll want them to be saved eternally. Knowing that salvation cannot be found in any other ([Acts 4:12](#)), we'll not allow our timidity or compassion stand in the way to the extent that we'll fail to act. Real love manifests itself in action ([John 14:23-24](#)).

To fail to act is equivalent to taking their soul as our own responsibility ([Ezekiel 3:17-21](#)). We'll be lost as well as they. Paul was free from the blood of all men only when he shunned not to preach the whole counsel of God ([Acts 20:26-27](#)). That same principle holds true for us!



TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR  
HEART AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR  
OWN UNDERSTANDING; IN ALL YOUR  
WAYS SUBMIT TO HIM, AND HE WILL  
MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT.

PROVERBS 3:5-6