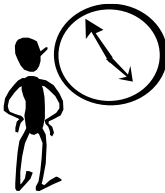


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## Time of Assembly



### Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.  
Worship 10:00 a.m.

### Every other Sunday night:

Worship 5:00 p.m.

### Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

## Closed Doors to Salvation

By Steve A. Hamilton

Viruses are a fact of life. The coronavirus is just a new strain of what has always existed (Eccl. 1:9). However, the reaction to this virus is unfortunate. Churches closed their doors barring members from attendance. Elders are being lords over their congregations preventing those who desired to worship from using the church building (1 Pet. 5:3). Such action is void of love for the members. *“And let us consider one another in order to **stir up love and good works, 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. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries”* (Heb. 10:24-27).

Tertullian (145-220 A.D.) wrote a short work called “The Prescription Against Heretics” wherein he compares the benefits of heresies to deadly viruses:

“Taking the similar case of fever, which is appointed a place amongst all other deadly and excruciating issues (of life) for destroying man: we are not surprised either that it exists, for there it is, or that it consumes man, for that is the purpose of its existence. In like manner, with respect to heresies, which are produced for the weakening and the extinction of faith, since we feel a dread because they have this power, we should first dread the fact of their existence; for as long as they exist, they have their power; and as long as they have their power, they have their existence. But still fever, as being an evil both in its cause and in its power, as all

know, we rather loathe than wonder at, and to the best of our power guard against, not having its extirpation in our power.”

Tertullian points out that society has little power over a virus. We would love to eradicate the virus but that is not within our power. We can treat it with medication and avoid it by putting on masks and limiting our exposure to others, but it will still run its course. The virus exists for an undesirable purpose. It removes physically weak people from society.

Likewise, heresies have the same undesirable purpose. False doctrines result in Christians losing their souls. There is nothing we can do to eradicate a false notion that disobedience to one command is worth the lives of its members. Nowhere in scripture is there a directive to suspend assemblies if we fear for our lives. Even first century Christians dared not miss worshipping the Lord in the face of martyrdom. Yet, by preventing members from worshiping as commanded lost souls is exactly what closing church doors will produce.

Consequently, many congregations closed the doors of salvation to some of their own members. The churches that reopened after forsaking worship have found weaker members absent. The virus eliminated weak members from congregations not because they contracted the virus but because the congregation set an unscriptural precedence making weak members think missing church services was acceptable if they feel threatened by any virus; even when they are perfectly healthy. What can a church say to such members to encourage their attendance without exposing their own hypocrisy?

Members felt justified in their misconduct preaching a message to put the welfare of others ahead of the Lord (Mk. 8:35; 12:30). Just the fact that churches lost members because of the virus is proof that the doors should never have closed. Churches that remained opened did not lose many, if any members. It certainly was an unintended consequence to close church doors thinking they were saving lives. However, they were losing souls. *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one"* (Rom. 3:10-12).

Good intentions produced a stumbling block from which many weak members may never overcome. The Apostle Paul warned all Christians “*not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way*” (Rom. 14:13). A stumbling block is any obstacle placed before a member that causes that brother to sin. The brother did not place the impediment in front of himself. The stumbling block was placed before him meaning it was not his doing. Brethren placed that obstacle in front of their own members by preventing their assembling as commanded and encouraging their disobedience in the absence of any known scriptural reason for healthy members to forsake church

services (Heb. 10:25).

The congregation located at Ephesus was commended for their labors and perseverance (Eph. 2:1-7). However, they lost sight of their first love. This can certainly manifest itself when assembling becomes optional. It is bad enough when members fail in their duty to attend but when the congregation affords excuses and encourages the violation of a command not to forsake the assembling does rebellion replace love. Jesus Christ said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (Jn. 14:15). If Christ's commandments are not worth keeping in face of a virus then love for Him is absent. The coronavirus has well demonstrated what it means for a congregation to leave its first love.

In most cases, fear is driving this train of disobedience. When God sent out the twelve spies into the land of Canaan, most of them returned with a bad report. That information caused the people to fear the land and its inhabitants. That fear was called rebellion. Joshua implored, *"Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them"* (Num. 14:9). The people's response was to *"stone them with stones"* (Num. 14:10). To which God asks Moses, *"How long will these people despise Me"* (Num. 14:11)?

The Israelites had good reason to fear. *"The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature"* (Num. 13:32). However, the people allowed their fear to immobilize them. They no longer wanted to obey God's command to take the land of Canaan. They ignored Joshua's admonition, *"If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us"* (Num. 14:8). They even argued that their lives were far more important (Num. 14:2-3).

If we could only recognize the application this story has upon our present distress. Congregations have allowed their fear of this virus to immobilize their devotion for Christ. No longer is keeping His commands important when it comes to the lives of the brotherhood. Never mind, *"He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear" (Heb. 13:5-6). Rather many congregations have rebelled by ignoring His command to assemble. If anyone dares to rebuke their disobedience, they are called murderers. Might as well stone them with stones. How long will these people despise God?*

Christians have no reason to fear death, distress or even governmental intervention. *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword"* (Rom. 8:35)? The only thing that will separate us from the love of Christ is our own disobedience! Our reaction to this virus should not be a decision that facilitates a departure from Christ and His Church by closing our doors!

## Entangled?

By Bill Pierce

“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Tim. 2:4-5). These words were written to a young evangelist, Timothy, who, as a Gospel preacher, was not to lose sight of his work through entanglement in the affairs of this life. The material world, because of our physical nature, seems to have a greater attraction than spiritual things. And because of this, there is the ever present danger of becoming entangled. The word “tangle” means “to involve so as to hamper, obstruct...to involve as in a mesh; ensnare” (Webster). To be entangled implies a state of being hindered or hampered in one’s faithfulness to Christ – to be confused as to what is to be first in our life as a Christian.

That which is forbidden is not the “affairs of this life.” Paul often worked when it was necessary to support himself in preaching the Gospel and certainly it is right for a Christian to conduct a business to support himself and his family. But that which is forbidden is the “entanglement”! To allow the affairs of this life to ensnare us, to hinder us in our reaching the goal of eternal life – becoming too involved with our work and pleasure that we fail to be faithful as Christians. This admonition is serious and should be considered prayerfully. If we are to be successful in our fight for truth, we will not allow ourselves to become so involved in material things that we lose sight of the spiritual. We will also follow the rules or “strive lawfully” or follow truth.

How can I know if I am entangled or becoming that way? I am entangled when:

- ◆ I allow my work to keep me from rendering full service to Christ (Mt. 6:33).
- ◆ I allow my friends and relatives to keep me from services or from doing the will of Christ daily (Mt. 10:37).
- ◆ I don’t have time to pray, read the Bible, visit the sick and teach others.
- ◆ I enter into any relationship, whether marriage, business, or pleasure that will prevent me from living as a Christian.

Love for this world will alienate us from God. (1 Jno. 2:15-17; Jas. 4:4), it will cause us to forsake truth. (2 Tim. 4:10) and it will dull our desire for spiritual things.(Col. 3:1-4) Are YOU entangled?

Salt and Light by Jonny Hawkins



“She never tithes, but she always gives her two cents’ worth.”

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## The Drawing Power of God's Word

By Joe R. Price

Let's face it; people do not always come to a Bible classes or worship services to hear the word of God. Some come to please someone else. Others come with an expectation of being entertained. Still others come looking for a chance to object to whatever is said or done. These are ungodly traits. Others do have ears to hear, and come in order to "sit at the feet of Jesus" and intently hear, learn and live the gospel of the Savior (Luke 8:8; 10:38-42).

God's inspired word is designed to draw sinners to God and to the salvation in His Son. It is sufficient to the task (Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore, everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me" (John 6:44-45). To deny the power of the word of God to draw sinners to Christ is to deny the power of God.

Brethren must trust the word of God to draw the lost and to preserve the saved. It is the message that must draw the lost to salvation (1 Peter 1:22-25). For example, why is it some brethren prefer to use recreational activities to advertise and encourage young people to attend special services intended for their spiritual benefit? Are young people only interested in hearing the gospel when it is associated with wiener roasts, volleyball and overnight lock-in games and activities? I do not believe so, and those who are interested in feeding their souls will not be lured by offers intended to feed the belly (John 6:26). It is revealing that in the same context in which people thought they could come to Jesus to have their stomachs fed that Jesus said He feeds the soul as the bread of life (John 6:27-38). Jesus did not use food to draw people to Himself; we dare not attempt it today.

Some, while emphasizing faith in Jesus, tell us not to put our faith in the Bible. We cannot do one without the other. Jesus is "the Word" we must hear and follow (John 1:1-3, 14-18; 14:6). The inspired Psalmist said, "I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your word" (Psalms 119:42). He put his faith in God's word. We must, too. Jesus teaches us truth (Ephesians 4:20-21). Faith in Jesus is not and cannot be separated from faith in His word, the Bible (Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Like the apostles, we must go and "speak to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:20). We need not add games and gimmicks to the drawing power of God's word. Divine truth is sufficient to draw good and honest hearts to Christ (Luke 8:14-15; Acts 17:11-12).