

THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH
Hebrews 10:19-25

Intro: During the rather brief history of Trinity Bible Church we have never had our own building. The Lord has always provided us with a meeting place, but the facilities have always belonged to someone else. We hope that someday we will have our own building, but Trinity Bible Church is a reality because the church is not the building, but the people who meeting in the building. If the Lord should come before we get our own building, it can still be said that Trinity Bible Church is a real church. You who make up this fellowship are Trinity Bible Church. We are Trinity Bible Church. The Lord has brought us together into this local church, and we are just as much a church as the church at Thessalonica was, or the church at Corinth, or the church at Rome, or any of the other churches mentioned in the NT. In fact, it is doubtful if any of the NT churches had a building in which to meet. They met in homes. So the building does not make the church; the people do--people who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, and who have been drawn together by the Holy Spirit for the purposes that we are going to be talking about this morning.

Personally I believe that the word church belongs to the people of God who have lived since the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 16:18, following the great confession of Peter in which he declared his belief that the Lord Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord said, "I will build my church"---speaking of it as future. And by reading Acts 1 and 2, and then seeing what Paul said about the church in 1 Cor.12:13, it seems to me to be very clear that the church began on the Day of Pentecost as recorded for us in Acts 2. We are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, and the baptism of the Spirit is never mentioned as having taken place until Acts 2.

The church spoken of there was the body of Christ. It is made up of all true believers. Since it is called a body, one thing it means is that we are members of each other, and especially of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the people of God from that Day of Pentecost on to the present day, and on until the Lord comes, make up that body, that church. Those of us here in Trinity Bible Church who know the Lord Jesus as Savior are a part of that body. We are not the whole body, but just a part--not because we attend the meetings of this church, but because we know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. People who attend church, but who do not know the Savior, are not in the body of Christ. It is important that we get the big picture when we talk about the church, the body of Christ. All believers, all who truly know the Lord Jesus as

their Savior, are in the body of Christ. Believers in Russia, believers in China, believers in Haiti, believers in India--believers, wherever they are, regardless of the color of their skin or of the language that they speak--all people who are saved are in the body of Christ. It is something that we join. We are baptized by the Spirit into not the body of Christ when we are saved. That is the big picture. I hope we all understand this.

Now the church, as the body of Christ, is never going to get together, all together, until we get to heaven. And so God has ordained that there be local churches. This is what Trinity Bible Church is, a local church. And there are many local churches. That is the reason I don't think that it is Biblically accurate to speak of a local church as the body of Christ. Christ does not have many bodies; He only has one body. But His people are meeting today all over the world in local churches. Local churches are never pure. It is possible for people to affiliate with a local church without really being saved. They may profess to be Christians. They may think that they are Christians. But they aren't true Christians unless they have been born again by the Spirit of God. The NT gives us many tests by which we can know if a church is a true NT church.

I am afraid that we have many churches today which are not true churches in the NT meaning of the word. They don't believe the Bible is the Word of God, and that it is the book by which we all should live. They don't believe that Jesus Christ was, and is, the Son of God. They don't believe that man is a sinner under divine judgment. They don't believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and then ascended back to heaven. They do not preach the Gospel of the grace of God. And so, while they may carry the word church in their name, they cannot really be considered a true, NT church because they do not believe what churches in the NT believed, and they do not live like the Bible teaches that we as Christians should live.

Now, having said all of that, I want to point out to you that from the beginning of the church, the body of Christ, it has been the habit of Christian people to meet together in local churches. It seems from the book of Acts that believers met together every day to begin with. But, as time went on, they met together on Sunday, commemorating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems that before there was any real teaching on the part of the apostles that Christians should get together, they were drawn together. They felt the need in their hearts for being together. This is clear from the early history of the church in the NT. Perhaps we can say that meeting together grew out of their temple meetings, and

synagogue meetings, but it really began when the Lord, just before His ascension, told them to go back to Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father (cf. Acts 1:4). They did, and the church has continued meeting down to the present day.

— This morning I want to speak to you about THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH. In our Scripture reading we saw that Heb. 10:25 taught the early Christians that they were not to quit meeting together. Listen to the words again:

Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together,
as the manner of some is;
but exhorting one another: and so much the more,
as ye see the day approaching.

Let us notice then what the verse says. The Apostle was clearly speaking about:

I. THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH (Heb. 10:25).

— It is interesting to me to see in the NT that before the end of the first century some of the same problems which we have today were beginning to develop. One of these was that some of the Lord's people were beginning to be "dropouts" as far as church attendance was concerned. Paraphrasing the first verse, what the Apostle was saying was, "Don't quit going to church." And this would mean, don't even allow yourself to miss church once in a while. Paul believed that when the church met every one who was a member of that church should be there--unless, of course, there was illness, or a person was away. But even then when the Lord's Day came, they should find out where the Lord's people were meeting, and met with them.

In a few minutes I am going to be dealing with, why church attendance is important, but for now, let this exhortation reach your heart, and stay there. Don't quit going to church. Don't even miss once in a while if it is physically possible for you to be there. The meeting of the church is always to have the highest priority with those of us who know the Lord.

"As the manner of some is" means that missing church had become a habit with some. Paul was saying, "Don't let that happen to you!"

— There were some of the Lord's people then who felt that they could get along just as well by themselves as they could by meeting with other believers, but Paul wanted them to know that they were wrong if they felt that way. No Christian can really continue to grow spiritually and to increase in his knowledge of God and the Word of God, if he begins to miss

the meeting of the church. And we all know that the more you miss the meetings of the church, the easier it is to continue missing the meetings.

Why would Paul say this? I know that some pastors use church attendance as a club over their people. Paul was certainly never guilty of that. No, it was not that! But Paul knew that the Lord had established local church for the people who are in the body of Christ for their own spiritual good. And he knew that if people missed the meeting of the church, they were missing out on what the Lord intended for their spiritual blessing and growth. And that is why he went on to say what he did: "But exhorting one another."

This word "exhorting" is a very important Bible word, and it has several meanings. When we think of exhorting someone, we think of telling them what to do--and we can't eliminate this from what Paul was saying. Sometimes all of us need somebody to help us know what we ought to do. But "exhorting" also means encouraging one another, comforting one another, and even praying for one another.

As one of our hymns tells us, this world is no friend of grace. That is, this world is not going to encourage us in our relationship with the Lord. The world pulls us down; it doesn't lift us up. The world defiles us; it doesn't cleanse us. The world holds us back; it does not push us ahead in spiritual things. And so we need to be "exhorting one another" in the fullest sense of that word.

And then Paul said this: "And so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." That is, don't go to church less, but go more! Don't just go to church, but go to Sunday School too because the more teaching you get, the better. And the more fellowship you get, the better. And don't just go on Sunday morning, but go on Sunday night, too. And don't just go on Sunday, but go on Tuesday if your schedule allows you to go, and go on Wednesday. And men, go on Saturday morning.

In other words, Paul was saying, "Don't be satisfied with less, but get as much as you can."

And then he added, "And so much the more as ye see the day approaching."

What day?

Paul doesn't really tell us in Hebrews what day he was talking about, but the return of the Lord was so much upon the hearts and in the thoughts of the early Christians that there

is little doubt but that this expression looked ahead to that day. Cf. 2 Tim. 4:8; 1:12, 18; Phil. 1:6.

Do I have to remind you that the Lord is coming? They were looking for Him 2,000 years ago; should we not be expecting Him much more today? Certainly we should! And Paul was indicating that it is THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH that is going to help us get ready. I can tell you right now that when the Lord comes we are all going to wish that we had been more faithful in attending THE MEETINGS OF THE CHURCH. And it can also be said that the more we are looking for the Lord's return, the more we are going to want to be with the Lord's people.

Now I am not going to have the time I would like to have to finish what I want to say this morning, but I will just briefly point out what the meeting of the church ought to be if it is going to mean all that it should mean to us as the Lord's people. And let me deal with this under the question:

II. WHY SHOULD WE GO TO CHURCH? (Heb. 10:19-24).

What should a church meeting be like?

I noticed yesterday in a church ad that people were invited to that particular church with this statement: "Come join the fun!" As I read that I asked myself, Is that why we are to go to church, to have fun? Is it to be like the State Fair, or a Ringling Brothers Circus? Is the church to be in competition with Hollywood, or television soaps? Are we to be giving musical concerts and dramatic presentations? Is the pastor to be a stand-up comedian, or should he try to manipulate people with the wisdom of words so that what he says is not as important as how he says it? I noticed another ad in which a church has a contemporary service early, and a traditional service later. Where do we get such an idea as that from the Bible? What should you expect when you go to a NT church, the assembling together of the people of God?

Let us take our answer from Scripture, not from the contemporary church. We have the answer right here in our text. Verse 25 which we have been considering indicates that the things which Paul had mentioned up to that point were to be done in the meeting of the church. And if we want to see the blessing of God upon the church today, we had better make sure that we are doing what the Lord wants us to do.

The first thing that Paul says that we must do in the meeting of the church is:

A. To draw near to God (vv. 19-22).

I don't see how the exhortation, "let us draw near," can mean anything but, let us draw near to God! When we come to church, we are to come to meet with God, to worship Him, to sing our praises to Him, to pray to Him, to learn of Him, to submit ourselves to Him. According to this 22nd verse, we are even to draw near to God for cleansing. The teacher or the preacher is only the instrument that God uses; the important thing is for people to come to meet God, to enjoy His presence, to be quiet and worshipful before Him. And this means God the Father, God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit.

The OT Prophet Habakkuk (2:20) had a good word for the church today when he said,

But the Lord is in his holy temple:

Let all the earth keep silence before him.

My, what a lot the church has to learn today about drawing near to the Lord.

Note the expression: "full assurance of faith." Where does our faith come from? It comes from God through Christ, and to us through the Word. So this would mean that the ministry of the Word is most essential in drawing near to God. As we hear the Word, our hearts are drawn out to Him.

This is the first thing we need to prepare for in THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH--drawing near to God.

The second is this:

B. The profession of our faith (v. 23).

"Profession" can mean confession. And in the context of THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH this means preaching. And to hold it fast means that the preaching must never be replaced by anything--not by anything! We come together to open the Word and to learn of the Lord. We come together to make the Gospel clear to any who do not know the Lord--that they might be saved. We come together for the edifying of the people of God, not to entertain them.

When people come to meet with us they need to know that we stand firmly for the truth of the Bible, the Word of God. We need to be like the old preacher who said that he believed the Bible from cover to cover, and he even believed the cover--that it is the HOLY BIBLE. This verse indicates that we ought to proclaim the promises of God--His promises to save those who come to Him by Christ, His promises to keep those whom He saves, His promises to help those who are in need, His promises of heaven and glory. Why talk about the promises of God? Because "He is faithful that promised."

Men may break their promises, or not be able to keep them for some reason, but neither is ever true of God. He has never yet broken any promise that He has made.

Let's not talk about politics; let's talk about the Word of God and the wonderful Lord Who is revealed on the pages of Scripture.

One more thing, and we have this in verse 24. I would describe what the Apostle wrote here with one word:

C. Fellowship (v. 24).

In THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH we are not only to be thinking about ourselves, but we are to be thinking about others--what they are getting out of the Word, how they are getting along in their walk with the Lord. If we "consider one another" we are going to be praying for them.

And our object is to provoke each other. Now this word can mean that we must stimulate each other, not irritate.

You see, the pastor or the SS teachers are not the only ones who are ministering when the church meets together. We all should be--not preaching at each other, but talking to each other in such a way that we will increase in our love for each other, and will be busy doing "good works" which will please and glorify our Lord.

We do not just come to church to receive blessing, but to be a blessing--and to have the kind of an influence upon people that will cause them to love the Lord even more, and to go out from the meeting with a greater desire to serve the Lord in any way that they can.

Concl: I started my message talking about Trinity Bible Church. Would you say that Heb. 10:19-25 is a description of TBC? I hope that it is to a great degree, but there is no question but that it can be more than it is. Let us pray daily that the Lord will make us as a church what He wants us to be in our worship, our preaching, and our fellowship.

One more word: Remember that we need the ministry and fellowship of the church so that as we return to our homes, our personal lives, and our jobs, we may continue to enjoy individually and as families the blessings which God is pleased to give us here.