

The Family of God:

Not Forsaking The Assembling

Home
Newsletters
About Us
Donate



(A sermon given May 2, 2020, upon re-opening the church after weeks of closure due to pandemic)

Have you heard the song, “I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God?” I titled my article today “The Family of God.” Aren’t you glad you’re part of the family of God? Isn’t it good to

get back together again after a long separation? Like when you send somebody away on a mission and they come back; it’s homecoming!

I fear for our people. We’ve had empty pews for quite a few weeks, haven’t we? At the drop of a hat the churches were closed and nobody was around. We think of it especially in terms of the “End Times”.

This song, “I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God,” has this very interesting line that says, “I’ve been washed in the fountain cleansed by the blood, joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, for I’m part of the family, the family of God.” Why did they put, after being a part of the family of God, that they’d been washed in the fountain and cleansed by the blood? We’ll look at that from the Bible because, that’s a very good line actually.

You know, David was a man after God’s own heart. If you want to know what God’s heart was like, look at what David wrote. Apparently, when David wrote, he wrote what was on God’s mind. If you want to know what God might have prayed like, look the prayers in Psalms. Let’s look at Psalm 27:4, “One thing have I desired.” How

many things did he desire? One thing! This is the central focus of his life; this is where he wants to go with his life; this is what his mind is preoccupied with. "That will I seek after." Do we do that? Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. We tend to be that way don't we. David's mind and heart show that he wanted to be with the Lord, "that I made dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." He reiterates that also in the twenty-third Psalm, doesn't he? "and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever", to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple. It's good to be back in the temple isn't it? This is a good place to inquire of the Lord, it's not just us wanting to meet with Him. The book of Psalms is a good place to look for what's on God's heart, because God also wants to meet with us.

David wanted to go to the temple where God is. Let's think about this. I would like to be where God is, how about you? How does God tell us we can draw near to him? James 4:8 tells us, "draw nigh to God and God will draw nigh to you." It can be a mutual relationship, we all want to get together with God, and God wants to get together with us.

How do we do that? How do we draw near to God? What would be the impediments to getting together with Him? If I wanted to go to town, what would keep me from going to town? Maybe there's a roadblock. What could be the roadblock stopping me from getting to God? What would separate us? Is there something that sometimes separates us from God? For sure, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Sin separates because to sin, God is a consuming fire. If we have sin in/on us it is uncomfortable getting into His presence. This separation is sort of a buffer zone, a social distancing, due to sin. "Your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear," not that He's wearing a mask or anything but there's a separation taking place there, because sin separates.

What does the Bible say we need to do about this separation that sin causes? That is an important question. If we finish the rest of that verse we will find out: "Draw nigh to God he'll draw nigh to you, cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts ye double minded." We must deal with the factor which separates us; the thing that has put distance between us. We need to get involved in the sanctification process, in cleansing. We're certainly encouraged and empowered by God to do so. We have to put our will on His side.

David ties this together in chapter 51 of Psalms regarding his great sin where he's talking to God about his confession and his repentance; he says, "Cast me not away from thy presence," he knew his sin had separated him from God he wanted to get back together with God. Then he says, "and take not your Holy Spirit from me." (Psalms 51:11). This passage, paralleling both the not being cast from His presence,

and having the Holy Spirit removed, is telling us something about the Holy Spirit's role in being close to God. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, and of judgment, and righteousness. He helps us to search our lives so we can know what is standing between us and God. In Psalms 139:23-24, David says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." We need to look to the Holy Spirit to help us search our hearts so that we won't have to be out of God's presence. We don't want to be separated from that presence, that presence may be to sin is a consuming fire, but to the righteous it is a light and a shield.

What does God say our heart should be like if we are going to come into His presence; if we're going to draw near to Him? I'm going to draw on Hebrews chapter 10 here for some insight. We're going to look at a few verses from Hebrews Ch. 10, so keep that context in mind because Hebrews 10 is a very good chapter on this topic. In Hebrews 10:22 it says, "let us draw near with a true heart." Aren't we to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind,, strength and soul? We want a true heart, a heart that has no separateness. God will not share a divided heart. A true heart is a heart that is 100% for Him. Reading on in Hebrews 10, "in full assurance of faith," we can only do this through faith. Without faith it's impossible to please him. Reading on, "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." Something about an evil conscience is a barrier to us having a true heart and so it says sprinkling. Remember Ezekiel 36:25-27, "then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and cleanse you from all your filthiness," then it talks about taking away our "heart of stone" giving us a "heart of flesh." Well, we need to have a true heart and not an evil conscience. Something about an evil conscience will keep us from God, from fellowship, from being with Him. That's Hebrews 10:22.

How does Hebrews 10 say that we get a true heart? This is where Hebrews 10 talks about the New Covenant. "This is the Covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts." Then will you have a true heart? Yes! "And in their minds will I write them and their sins and iniquities will remember no more." This again is Hebrews 10. What laws is He putting in our hearts? The laws of God, the Ten Commandments, "thou shalt have no other gods before me," "thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images," "thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain" "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." If I'm violating the Sabbath day, can I have God's law in my heart? No. Having this law in my heart will help me keep the Sabbath day. If I want to have a pure heart, I need to have the law in my heart and part of that is the Sabbath commandment. The Sabbath commandment commands us not to work, but there are other instructions about the Sabbath commandment we need to understand.

How do we draw near with a true heart toward God? We'd better go where He is, right? If you're going to draw near somebody, you better go where they are! Let's read on in Hebrews 10, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is." "As the manner of some is." That doesn't sound like a commendation rather it sounds like a condemnation. They are not being held up as good examples. These "some" who aren't assembling, must be out of God's grace, or are making a mistake, or perhaps even sinning! "But exhorting one another." You can't do that very well if you're not together. "And so much the more as you see the day approaching." Do you see that day approaching? I do! As we see things happening around us, we definitely feel that that day is approaching. Consequently, it's more important that we assemble! Not as the manner of some is who draw apart from the assembly of the people of God.

We haven't been doing this (coming to church) for a while now. What does God's word say happens if we resist assembling together? We've just read Hebrews 10:25, "not forsaking the assembling," Now let's read the next verse (26). What does it say? "For if we sin." Is it saying those who don't assemble fall into sin? Next it says, "wilfully." That's not just a sin of ignorance, for which there were sacrifices in the Old Testament; this is known sin, maybe even, premeditated sin. Reading on, "After that ye have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking forward for of judgment." It sounds like looking forward to judgment isn't in anticipation, but in, "fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." So, the adversaries don't join the assembly. Those who have reason to fear the judgment won't be assembling together. According to Hebrews 10, those who are wilfully sinning won't be assembling together, and they won't have a new or pure heart.

Earlier I said, "I fear for our people." Why does the Word of God put so much emphasis on gathering? Is assembling--gathering together--a tenet of the Christian faith? Is fellowship part of the heart cleansing?

I was at a little church and we were doing outreach. A few people were attending church from the community. One particular gentleman attended every month or so, then he'd find something he didn't like about something said and he'd disappear for a while. But one day he came in looking all shaken up and worried. I welcomed him, and he says, "I knew I had to come."

I said, "really!"

He says, "yeah, I knew I had to come."

I said, "we're glad you're here, how'd you know you had to come?"

He says, "I read this verse in the Bible, 1 John 1:7, 'if we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son

cleanses us from all sin.' I knew I needed to be cleansed from sin and I knew if I was going to be cleansed from sin I needed to come today and fellowship."

I wish more people would come and fellowship with God and His people at church and get cleansed. Remember the song I mentioned earlier, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family God, I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by his blood?" When this gentleman brought my attention to this connection, I said to him, "Wow, that's a new twist on that text I've never thought of before! Thank you for sharing that."

Interesting; there's something about fellowship that supports cleansing. Proverb 27:17 says, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." We get together and we polish one another. Maybe it's good to have a few rough people around you. It takes rough sandpaper to clean up some rough edges sometimes, right? "Oh but they are all hypocrites down there in that church," you may be thinking. Great! Wonderful opportunity for polishing! "Oh, but I don't like the way the service goes there." Wonderful opportunity for character development! We need each other to polish each other. It's harder to do that over the internet or telephone.

How does God describe those who will not assemble? This is in the Bible; don't blame me! This is a Bible study. "These be they who separate themselves," says Jude 1:19. What does it say about them? "Sensual!" What does sensual mean? They're all about their feelings. They might say, "Oh, I don't feel good when I meet with the people of God," or, "I don't feel like I got a blessing," or "my feelings weren't excited by it," or "I didn't feel like I my needs were met." It doesn't sound like Jude is giving a good commendation to sensual separatist people.

Then Jude says, "not having the spirit." We would have picked that up earlier from Psalms. Those who separate themselves don't have the Holy Spirit. and they're all about their feelings. This is what God says about those who don't assemble. So really, failure to assemble is one of the sins that separates from us from God. That is sort of self-evident, I guess. I'm saying something obvious here, and maybe it sounds a bit redundant to say that, but not getting together with God's people might be a case of not getting together with God.

When does God and His Word say we should assemble for this soul cleansing fellowship? When does He say we should meet? He's very clear, "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation;" (Leviticus 23:3). What is a convocation? One of the meanings of the word used here in the Hebrew is assembly. Sabbath is for assembly. So, when Hebrews 10:25 says, "not forsaking the assembling," that's not forsaking meeting together on the seventh-day Sabbath. We're not talking about showing up on Wednesday or Sunday or Tuesday or whatever, we're talking about failure to show up on the Sabbath, that's what Hebrews

10:25 and 26 are telling us. And so we come together on Sabbath for a holy convocation to meet with our Christian friends and with our Saviour.

Did Jesus, our example, assemble on Sabbath as stipulated? Of course, that was His habit. Did He do it at the peril of His life? Yes. “He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up and as his custom was He went into the synagogue on Sabbath day.” He kept all the commandments (John 15:10). Did they like what He said? No. Did they take Him out to the brow of the hill intending to toss Him over and throw stones on Him? Yes. Sometimes we have to face difficulties when we meet on Sabbath.

This reminds me of a story I heard about in communist Russia. The communists knew how to deal with church services. They closed them down in a hurry. There was a group of people meeting (we say underground), and they were going to have their church service and they were meeting in secret. As they were meeting, all of a sudden five soldiers showed up with their guns raised. They said, “we're here to kill the Christians, anybody who wants to leave, leave now.” Several people left, but a bunch of people stayed. Then the soldiers said, “Good, they're gone, we're here to worship with you. We knew that if we did that, the informers would leave.” Jesus went to the synagogue, even when His life was at risk.

Where does the Bible command us to assemble? Does it say where we need to meet? It sure does. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,” that, “assembling ourselves together,” in the Greek is the word *episunagōgē*, like epicenter—at the center. It's at the synagogue or at the church. That is where you're supposed to meet. That's a heavy command; you are meant to show up at the church (Hebrews 10:25). Okay, what if we can't? Well, if you're a shut-in, or you're in the nursing home, or there's other things out of your control, that make meeting impossible, it is one thing. But, if we are able to come, and God empowers us to come, that's where we're supposed to show up.

I found some very interesting health research on high blood pressure that examined people going to church. People who attended religious services weekly (in other words that showed up at church every week) and prayed and/or studied the Bible frequently had a 40% lower risk of high blood pressure. Wow!, so there's a health benefit to showing up at church! What was really interesting in that same study was that people who stayed home and substituted religious TV or religious radio, (maybe we could say YouTube, or streaming video) actually had higher blood pressures! There's a health lesson here. You are healthier if you come to church.

Sometimes on the Sabbath we go and sing at the nursing homes. Studies show that if you go and sing at a nursing home for one hour and play instruments, people's

immune systems improve, their natural killer cells improve, their interferon improves, they are healthier and more resistant to pandemics. Don't you think we'd do better if we came to church together and sing for a bit and socialize? It's a health benefit. Do you think there is a health benefit from social isolation? Long before this mandatory social isolation ever came about, studies showed that people who isolate themselves don't live as long; they have more diabetes; more heart attacks; more high blood pressure; they have all kinds of problems. Social isolation is a step toward death. What about a pestilence, do you think we'll be healthier for having followed God's instructions to meet together, or not?

What about the apostles, were they obedient to this command to show up at the synagogue every Sabbath? Sure! "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." Acts 18:4.

What reason does the Old Testament give for assembling? "Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God." Psalms 92:13. This text reminds me of a song we sang back in youth group, "We Shall Not Be Moved." It goes, "We shall not, we shall not be moved, We shall not, we shall not be moved, Just like a tree that's standing by the water side, We shall not be moved." We are trees of righteousness planted in the house of God. Will we be moved, or are there things that we will let interfere with our fellowshiping?

When does the Bible tell us that meeting with Jesus, at church, on Sabbath, will cease? When will we stop meeting? Is it at the Sunday law? Is it at the close of probation? Is it when the seven last plagues start falling? Or are we going to do it throughout eternity? Isaiah 66:22-23, "For as the new heavens and a new earth which I will make shall remain before me." How long will the new earth remain? Through eternity! "Before Me saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain." How long do you want your name to remain before God in heaven? Throughout eternity! "And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another and from one sabbath to another all flesh shall come and worship before me." Is God a God of gatherings? Did He say, "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them,"--that I can assemble with them? Christianity is about assembling. Christianity is not a do-it-yourself at home alone endeavour, it is a community affair, it is called the body of Christ. Shut down assembling and what have you done? You've just shut down Christianity.

The origin of the name Christian helps explain the centrality of assembling to its exercise: "And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts 11:26). Because of their gathering, the significance of their collective

public presence, they were recognized as Christians which means, Christ like ones. We call it a church, the Christian Church, "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn," (Hebrews 12:23). Jesus is the founder and head of the Christian church, which is known also as the kingdom of heaven, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: he is the head of the body, the church." (Colossians 1:13-18). Part of salvation is being added to the assemblies of the saints, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47).

"Some have advanced the thought that, as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent. The stars of heaven are all under law, each influencing the other to do the will of God, yielding their common obedience to the law that controls their action. And, in order that the Lord's work may advance healthfully and solidly, His people must draw together." (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9 Pg. 258).

How integral to the Christian mission does God say church attendance is? In other words, what does God tell us in His Word the reason for gathering is; why are we doing this, why do we meet? There are a lot of essential reasons. Let's just look at a few.

We meet for fellowship with God and with believers, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3). That's pretty good; we come to fellowship with believers, God, and Jesus Christ our saviour, don't we?

Then there is this text I referred to earlier, we have fellowship together so we can be cleansed from all unrighteousness, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7.

We come to meet with God, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20). Do you want to be in God's presence? Come and fellowship.

We meet to receive the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost they were all gathered together and the Holy Spirit descended, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31). Note that they

came together to speak the Word of God to one another.

Isaiah 8:16 says, “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples.” “Among them,” sounds like a gathering. We received the seventh-day Sabbath seal by showing up on Sabbath, gathering and assembling together. It's the seal of God as opposed to the mark of the beast.

Christians meet together for unity, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalms 133:1). It's a lot easier to think you're in unity when you never have to look at each other, when you never have to argue or debate with one another at a board meeting.

It's also good to get together to test our unity. In 1 Peter 2 it says, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,” Can you have unity if you have malice and guile and hypocrisy and envies and evil speaking? (Evil speaking today is referred to as gossip) “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:1,5). When you get rid of the malice, when you get rid of the guile, when you get rid of hypocrisy, and envies, and evil speaking, then you can be built into God's temple. God is trying to build a temple, the chief Cornerstone of which is Jesus Christ. It is God's plan for us to cleanse our lives and be built together into the Church of God; a holy church; a holy nation.

We meet together for more effectual prayer: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” (Acts 1:14). God wants us to get together for prayer. This is important because, remember when Peter was thrown into prison, they all got together and prayed without ceasing and the angel showed up and took Peter out of prison? “Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” (Acts 12:5). But, when Paul got put in prison they didn't know whether they should pray or not. They didn't know what to think of Paul. Remember he had gone to Damascus to try to slaughter a bunch of them and so they always had questions about him. So they didn't get together to pray for Paul, and he consequently ended up in Rome. When we all get together and pray, things happen; it makes a difference.

Does God protect those who meet in His name? This is where you all need to take notice! Does God protect those who gather together? Remember Samuel assembled all the Israelites for a holy convocation, and the Philistines looked over and saw the assembly and thought, this is our chance, they're all together in one place, let's go wipe them out (1 Samuel 7:7-10). So they brought their army and Samuel cried unto

the Lord for Israel, “but the Lord thundered a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines and discomfited them and they were smitten before Israel.” This is prophetic: this is what's going to happen in the Battle of Armageddon. Sometime I should do an article for you on the Battle of Armageddon. God is going to take care of His people.

I read a mission story recently about brother Andre, a literature evangelist down in northern Brazil on the Amazon. He sold a book, “*Bible Readings For The Home*” to a man who took it to his home in a remote village way up the Amazon. The man converted some of his village friends to become seventh-day Sabbath keepers. When brother Andre learned about that, he said, “I’ve got to go down there and preach to them,” and so he headed off to this remote village. He came within 25 miles of the remote village when he realized that he needed a mule to go the rest of the way. So, he looked around the town. The police wondered what he was up to. They found out he was looking for a mule to go out to this remote village. They took him to the mayor, and the mayor asked, “What are you planning to do out at that remote village?” Brother Andre says, “I'm going to go out there and meet with my friends, and preach to them.” With that, the mayor replied, “You can go out there and meet with your friends all you want, but you cannot preach out there because that's against the law. If you do that, I'll have to put you in jail.” Brother Andre said, “You better put me in jail now because I'm going out there to preach.” The mayor said, “Well, you haven't done anything bad yet, you haven't broken the law yet, so we can't put you in jail. But we have a brand-new jail out there and if you go out there and preach, we will put you in that jail.” Brother Andre went out there, he met with his friends and started preaching. The police showed up, but a huge storm came and blew that brand-new jail down flat. They couldn't put him in jail; they didn't arrest him, and he kept on preaching. Wow! Does God protect his own?

Does God promise to protect us from pestilence? Moses knew this. He knew if they didn't meet together they would get a pestilence. When he went in before Pharaoh he said, “The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.” Exodus 5:3.

“Hurricanes, storms, tempests, fire and flood, disasters by sea and land, follow each other in quick succession. Science seeks to explain all these. The signs thickening around us, telling of the near approach of the Son of God, are attributed to any other than the true cause.” (Testimonies for the Church, vol.6 Pg. 408).

What caused the pestilence in David's day? David transgressed and numbered Israel and a pestilence came. What happened that caused a pestilence in Balaam's day?

Balaam got the people of Israel to come over to Moab and have a sinful festival at Baalpeor: it was their apostasy that resulted in a pestilence. There is no place in the Bible that says, “Oh, it was a bad year, and we had a really bad mutation, and some funny bugs showed up.” The text, Hebrews 10:25, commanding assembling, says, “so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” How do we know the day is approaching? Pestilences? Matthew chapter 24 tells us why pestilence comes in our day! In the end time, it's a sign that Jesus is coming soon, isn't it?

There is also the true philosophy of history, where righteousness exalts a nation. Proverbs 14:34. Has China been a champion of religious freedom, or has it been cracking down on Christians? Recently you may have heard stories about them saying that they are intending to rewrite the Bible so it looks more like the Communist Manifesto, so that the Christian churches will be more in line with the Communist doctrine. Could that be why they got this pandemic started over there (in China) first?

We can be protected from pestilence: this is the message of Exodus 15:26, “And said if thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God we'll do that which is right in his sight and we'll give ear to his Commandments,” one of which is the fourth commandment which commands to have a holy convocation every week, “and do that which is right in His sight, yea and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I've brought upon the Egyptians.” God is here to keep us healthy! Continuing, “for I am the Lord that healeth thee.” Do you want God to be your healer? God is in the business of healing, if we keep His Commandments. Can we expect Him to heal us and keep us if we don't keep His Commandments? Not according to Deuteronomy 28:15 and 21 “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.” Then He lists a lot of curses and in verse 21 it says “The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, (You can't even get rid of it with a hand sanitizer!) until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it.” (Deuteronomy 28:15,21). When the Lord blesses you, you shall be blessed; if He curses you, you shall be cursed.

If we want relief from pestilence, we can come back to the Lord, at the house of meeting, according to 2 Chronicles 20:8-9 for relief. “If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine.” (According to Matthew 24 famine is coming also. With all this food distribution disruption, there's a lot of talk about coming famine.) If “we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.” 2 Chronicles 20:8-9. If you want help from a pestilence, don't stand alone at home. The passage “We stand before this house and in thy presence,” sounds like an assembly.

Do we want help in this time? If we have pestilence, go to our website rev14.com. We did a whole video on prevention of pestilence, especially talking about this specific pestilence. We have a whole video on how to treat it at home using natural remedies, fermentations and charcoal, etc. There's only one healer, isn't there? There's only one Saviour, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;" Can the medical system forgive your iniquities? "who healeth all thy diseases;" (Psalms 103:3). God is the true healer, both of the soul and of the body.

So, let's put this in perspective. We've shown that God tells us that failure to assemble brings pestilence and obedience to God's commands, including assembling, brings His protection from pestilence. If you are affected by pestilence, approaching God in the context of assembling, brings relief. So, is there any healthier place you can be than at church in time of pestilence? What sense, then, does it make to close the churches during a pandemic? Would that not be like closing the hospital during a pandemic to those who desire to go there when they have the pestilence?

We also go to church to help one another in trials. "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). We need each other; don't wing it alone! We are a community, not a bunch of aimless individuals.

Our convocations are to promote purity of doctrine. There are reasons we gather, "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:14,15). There's a lot to this. When we are baptized and we swear to the doctrines of the baptismal vow, we're basically saying we want to be a part of God's church, which is more than just a church, it's really a holy nation. When we do that, one of the things that we're told were to do if we come up with some new idea, is that we are not just supposed to start spreading it, rather, we're supposed to take it to the church! The Church is the pillar and ground of truth, and we are to take our new idea to the Brethren. You think 2520 is the most important time period in the Bible?, take it to church. You think the Holy Spirit isn't a person?, take it to church. You think that you know we've got to start keeping feasts?, take it to the church! If God's assembled church says that doesn't match up with what we, as a collective body, see God teaching, then you're not supposed to go running around teaching it. That's why we gather together. It's not about every man doing what's right in his own eyes, it's a case of finding out what God wants to promote through the church!

The Apostles knew this. They went to the Gentiles. A big question arose: should a person be going to the Gentiles? Should they be taught to be circumcised? So they

went back to the church at Jerusalem and they went to the Jerusalem General Conference: “When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.” (Acts 15:2). That's what we assemble for. That's why Sabbath school is more important to church because we get together and we get our ideas bounced off each other and perhaps, tuned up a bit.

Assembling is also to resolve issues. If you have a problem with your brother you go to them first (one-on-one) and if that doesn't work out, you take somebody else with you, and then if that doesn't work, you “tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” (Matthew 18:15-17). The church assembling is part of resolving issues.

Assembling is to judge important issues and behaviours. Paul says, “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

Another reason why we get together is for church discipline. It's not a big part of our church, but sometimes it has to be done, in the spirit of Christ. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

Assembling is also for reading the word of God. Remember, we mentioned earlier that Jesus, “Came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.” (Luke 4:16). Revelation gives a blessing on those who read, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” (Revelation 1:3). “Is at hand?” We are to assemble, “So much the more as you see the day approaching!”

We meet together to lift our united voices in praise to our mighty God. Psalms has some good passages on this, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.” (Psalms 22:22,25).

Assembling is for singing, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16). Christianity is our

opportunity to get together and sing, "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." (Hebrews 2:12). We get together to sing, to demonstrate and practice our love for God.

How do we love God? How do we show it to Him? "In that you've done it unto one of the least of these my brethren you've done it unto me, we love Him because He first loved us." "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." (1 John 4:19-21,12). When meeting together we can demonstrate that we truly love God by loving our brothers and sisters in the church. You can't do that very well at a distance. You need to see God in your fellow church members and love God in them. We gather together to serve one another, "by love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13). Where would one have a better opportunity to do this than at Church?

Attending church is to exercise faithfulness. Every Sabbath we come together, just like Jesus went to the synagogue every Sabbath, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing," (Romans 2:7). It's the habits of life; the sanctification; a settling to the truth both intellectually and spiritually so we cannot be moved; the exercise of faithfulness; that happens in the context of assembly.

We need to meet to organize fulfilling God's great commission to carry this message to entire world, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20).

We assemble to teach and make disciples, "And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts 11:26). We gather the church and teach the people: this is Bible religion.

We get together to send out missionaries, "It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul," (Acts 15:25). How are we going to complete the work if we never get together and organize to send out missionaries?

There're so many things we could cover. Christianity is basically about assembling. Do you get that impression, as I go along here, with all these different texts, that

Christianity is not a do-it-at-home-alone project?

We attend to get fed and to feed the Church of God. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Acts 20:28.

We assemble to share our testimonies “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” Acts 14:27. How do we overcome the devil? “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” Revelation 12:11. We get together to share our personal testimony of what God has done for us, to say, “look what God did for me this week.” Isn't it wonderful to get together for testimonies?

Not forsaking the assembling! Christian assemblies are mandated by the Bible and are not an optional part of salvation. Those who fail to assemble are counted as sinners, sensual, having an evil conscience, and lacking the Holy Spirit. God asks us to meet with Him weekly, at church, on the seventh-day Sabbath, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. How much force, fear, intimidation, manipulation, and/or bribery would it take to get you to abandon your Christian gatherings? We're part of the family of God, and cleansed by the blood. This is our opportunity to get together again, it's something we need to cherish, we might not always be able to do this openly.

“Elder A. V. Olson used to tell a story of the way God took a hand in affairs in one of the European countries in the early 1930s while he was president of the Southern European Division. In this country the Greek Orthodox Church was the state church, and Adventists were always persecuted. Only when the ruling cabinet was made up of men educated in Western countries did the Adventists enjoy a degree of freedom. Well, one time the king made the metropolitan of the state church the prime minister, and he called in a number of bishops and priests to make up his cabinet. Immediately they made a decree that on a certain date all Seventh-day Adventist churches and schools would be closed. The publishing house would be taken away and all ministers and colporteurs would be imprisoned. The Adventists would not be permitted to visit one another in their homes or on the streets. The men were determined to destroy our work. In vain our leaders went to see some of the cabinet members. They even went to the prime minister himself, but he said, ‘I have tried to destroy the Adventists for a long time. Now this is the time, and we are going to do it.’ Our workers sent word to the General Conference officers. They proclaimed a day of prayer and fasting and sent the word all around the world. And on that Sabbath day...all the Adventists

everywhere with prayer and fasting pleaded with God to keep His work from being destroyed. God answered that prayer. Just a few nights before the decree was to be enforced, the prime minister went to bed and went to sleep—and never woke up! God had poured out His vengeance upon him and removed him from power. The new prime minister called a new cabinet, and the first thing they did was to rescind the decree to destroy the Adventists.”

“God Has Power. I wish we had more days of fasting and prayer for our workers in lands where liberties are restricted. Don’t you?” (Eric B. Hare, *Make God First*, April 30).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMDUITiIKU4>