

# CHURCH OF GOD PUBLICATIONS

## #DiscipleshipTuesday



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# Responsibilities of Church Members

Acts 6:1-7; Romans 15:1-7; 2 Corinthians 9:6-13;  
1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; James 1:27

## INTRODUCTION

On August 23, 2011, at 1:51 p.m. EST, an earthquake with a magnitude of 5.8 occurred in the eastern U.S. While damage to infrastructure and buildings was minimal, the iconic Washington Monument—built to commemorate the first U.S. president, George Washington—was affected. Surveys done by engineers revealed cracks near the top of the building, so the world's tallest stone structure was temporarily closed to tourists and visitors for further inspection and repairs. The monument, an obelisk-like structure, towers into the Washington sky some 555 feet above ground level. It seems remarkable that a structure that high would not topple over in the wake of a 5.8 magnitude earthquake, until one realizes that the foundation of this monument spans some 55 feet at the base with 15-foot-thick foundation walls. This firm and reliable foundation is an apt metaphor for the spiritual foundation laid by the founding fathers and early Pilgrim settlers of the U.S., based on Judeo-Christian principles.

Throughout the previous lesson, the study of the nature of the Church, we stated explicitly and categorically that the foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ. He is not just a spiritual Christ, but the Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Palestine, preached the coming of God's kingdom, performed miracles hitherto unseen, and finally died on a Roman cross for the salvation of humankind in perfect obedience to his Father's will. The words and works, as well as the life and ministry of our Lord, set the tone for the Church's mission in and to the world.

Our responsibilities as members of Christ's body can be rightly viewed only on the basis and in light of the Judeo-Christian ethic: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "[love] your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27 NKJV; cf. Lev. 19:18). To live responsibly is to live and function in the realm of the Jesus ethic—love of neighbor and of self. The apostle Paul assists us in understanding the true nature of Christian love; it is not poetic or emotional love, but it is love that redounds in action for the betterment of the other even at one's own expense (cf. 1 Cor. 13).

### Unit Theme:

The Church

### Central Truth:

Christians are called to build up one another, support church ministries, and serve the needy.

### Focus:

Highlight and commit to personal responsibilities in the Church.

### Context:

New Testament perspectives on the duties of the Christian community

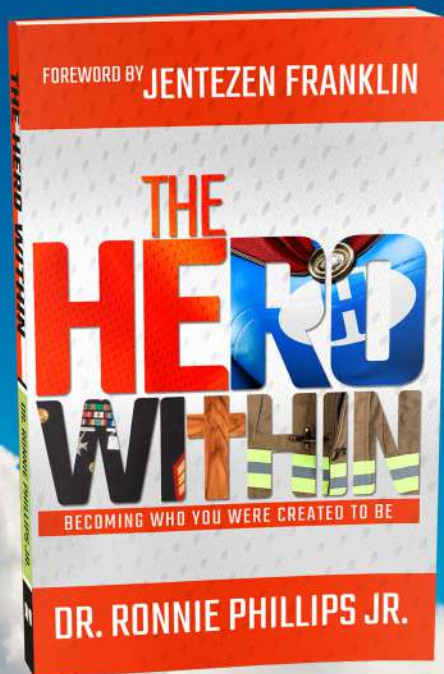
### Golden Text:

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

### Study Outline:

- I. Build Up One Another  
(Rom. 15:1-7;  
1 Thess. 5:12-13)
- II. Support Church Ministries  
(2 Cor. 9:6-13)
- III. Serve the Needy  
(Acts 6:1-7;  
James 1:27)

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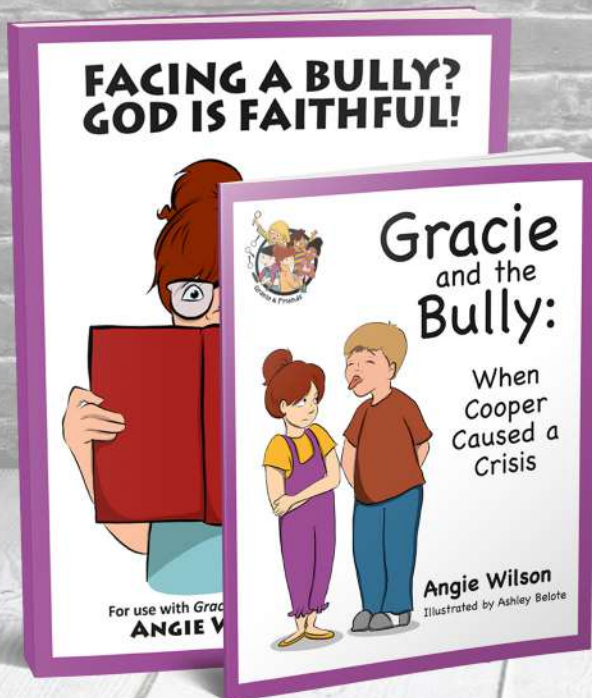


## THE HERO WITHIN

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—Jentezen Franklin

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I. BUILD UP ONE ANOTHER (Rom. 15:1-7; 1 Thess. 5:12-13)

A. A United Community (Rom. 15:1-7)

**1. We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.**

**2. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.**

**3. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.**

**4. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.**

**5. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:**

**6. That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**7. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.**

**Talk About It:**

1. Who does Paul mean by “the weak” and the “strong” (v. 1)?

2. What example did Christ give us to follow (vv. 2-3)?

3. How can the Scriptures help us (v. 4)?

4. Describe the unity that should prevail in the Church (vv. 5-7).

Paul begins this passage by encouraging his fellow “strong” believers in the city of Rome to bear the weaknesses of those among them—the less powerful believers—and not please themselves. The references to the “weak” and the “strong” describe people in the church who took opposite views on the cultural issues regarding meat and wine. The weak were those who practiced abstinence, while the strong took a more liberal view of the eating of meat bought in “temple shops” and the drinking of wine with their meals. The burden of bearing the scruples of the weak is on the strong, and they ought to bear such burdens with sensitivity and understanding. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says to the strong with regards to foods sacrificed to idols: “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (8:9 NIV).

On the question of “not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15:1), Paul cautions the strong believers not to place their own interests above those of the weak. However, in verse 2, Paul is careful that any action by the strong on behalf of the weak must be for the spiritual betterment of the weak. In other words, they should not condone wrongdoing simply as “weakness” (cf. 1 Peter 4:15-16).

Paul continues his previous thought regarding the weak and strong, but now he wants to encourage the strong by saying that “even Christ did not please himself” (Rom. 15:3 NIV). When Paul invokes the name of Christ, he appeals to a prophecy taken from Psalm 69:9, which reads, “The insults of those who insult you fell on me” (NIV). Paul wants

his readers to understand that the role of the Old Testament is still relevant for us in understanding the record of God's salvific work, which begins in the Old Testament and comes to fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and subsequently the church in the New Testament (Rom. 15:4). Thus, Paul's view of the Old Testament becomes unambiguous—its contents should spur believers on to hope, encouragement, and endurance.

Verses 5 and 6 contain a prayer of intercession on behalf of the Romans. Paul prays that God, who is the fountain of endurance and comfort, will give the Romans the attitude of Christ. Paul draws on the liturgical doxology in Philipians 2:1-11 and encourages these believers—weak and strong—to seek a common perspective and “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Unity among the believers should be in accordance with the will and spirit of Christ (Rom. 15:3). It is only when the Christians at Rome come together as a united community—acting with one accord and speaking with one voice—that God will be glorified. This unity becomes the theme of the next section (vv. 7-13). When the strong receive the weak and the weak receive the strong, it is valid testimony that Christ has accepted them and thus God is glorified (v. 7).

B. An Orderly Community (1 Thess. 5:12-13)

**12. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;**

**13. And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.**

Paul exhorts the community at Thessalonica concerning the proper attitude toward workers in the church. While there does not appear to be any official ministerial office or formal procedures at this early stage in the church's development, we learn from Paul's letters that he did appoint leaders in the churches he planted (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15-16).

“Those who work hard” (1 Thess. 5:12 NIV) are the leaders who exercise their God-given gifts for the well-being of the church's members. Such leaders work fervently and tirelessly, reflecting the greatness of their cause so that, in the end, their work builds the community.

The self-giving of these leaders is demonstrated in the way they execute their duties. First, they care for the members of the community by leading, directing, and affording protection just as a father as head of his household leads his family (see 1 Tim. 3:4ff.). Second, these leaders “admonish” believers—which means to “warn.” Given that Paul spent barely three weeks in Thessalonica, this fledgling church

“Your greatest fulfillment in life will come when you discover your unique gifts and abilities and use them to edify others and glorify the Lord.”

—Neil T. Anderson

**Talk About It:**

1. What responsibilities do leaders have toward church members?
2. What is the duty of church members toward leaders?

“Those of us who follow Jesus Christ must seriously commit to praying for our leaders, never forgetting that even our greatest heroes are flawed individuals who need Jesus Christ, just like the rest of us.”

—Jonathan Falwell

perhaps had both doctrinal and ethical issues that caused friction. The congregation’s leaders had the responsibility to gently rebuke the people for their missteps (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14).

In light of the leaders’ work of ministry, Paul encourages the community to hold them with special affection and esteem. Leon Morris said, “If leaders are affirmed and loyally supported in their work, the church should expect these leaders to work effectively” (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*). Paul urges members in this community—leaders and followers—to “live in peace with each other” (1 Thess. 5:13 NIV). Mutual love and respect results in peace in the community (cf. 2 Cor. 13:11).

## II. SUPPORT CHURCH MINISTRIES (2 Cor. 9:6-13)

In soliciting the financial support for the church in Jerusalem, Paul writes to the Corinthians, encouraging generosity and laying out some principles of generous giving. Ralph P. Martin suggests that the collection is in keeping with Pauline exposition of the Christian life where grace comes through God’s free gift of His Son, and gratitude as a response from the individual recipient characterizes biblical religion (*2 Corinthians*). It is also believed that Paul used the Corinthian offering as a way of uniting the two wings of the church—Jewish and Gentile Christians.

### A. Generous Community (vv. 6-10)

**6. But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.**

**7. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.**

**8. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:**

**9. (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.**

**10. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;).**

Paul begins this section by invoking agricultural imagery—sowing and reaping. Verse 6 echoes Proverbs 11:25: “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (NIV). Paul makes a similar statement in his letter to the Galatians, albeit in abbreviated form: “A man reaps what he sows” (6:7 NIV).

It would appear from the farming analogy that Paul is advocating self-interest on the part of the giver—that the material benefits they receive in return will be determined by the

### Talk About It:

1. Explain the principle in verse 6.
2. Define a “cheerful giver” (v. 7).
3. Describe the “sufficiency” God provides (vv. 8-9).

amount of their giving. The point of the farming analogy is simply that a farmer harvests in proportion to his planting. While people will reap what they sow, we know the Lord does not evaluate one's gift by its monetary size. A New Testament example that attests to this fact is the teaching from Jesus regarding the widow who gave all she had (Luke 21:2-4).

With reference to the word "sparingly" (2 Cor. 9:6), the Greek language is more precise than the English. The word means "to be stingy." It is found twice in this passage and nowhere else in Scripture. Consequently, Paul is arguing for the *how* and not the *what* of giving.

In verse 7, Paul offers some general guidelines for giving. First, he says, "Each man should give what he has decided" (NIV). Giving should always be a personal matter without coercion. One's giving should never be determined by what another member gives. Jesus was careful to note that the widow who gave her only two mites did so in the company of other givers more economically privileged than her, yet this did not preclude her from giving God her best.

Second, giving requires a resolute decision, or a choice. Our giving should be a calculated, thoughtful decision, offered to God through the church.

Third, Paul reminds his readers that giving is from the heart. Consequently it is a private decision. One ought to give always with the attitude of cheerfulness. William Barclay says, "The real way to give is under love's compulsion . . . because the sight of a soul in need wakens a desire that cannot be stilled" (*The Letters to the Corinthians*).

Paul goes on to assure the Corinthians that, as they accept their God-given responsibility of making this much-needed offering possible, they can trust God to grant them the desire to share as well as the ability to achieve their goal (v. 8). Their willingness to do "every good work" will be equally met with the provisions promised from the all-powerful hand of God. The quotation in verse 9, from Psalm 112:9, brings back a farming analogy, where the farmer who scatters his seed widely has given to the poor as contrasted with sowing sparingly without any concern for the poor. The Old Testament gleaning laws (Lev. 19:9-10) come to Paul's mind as he characterizes the anticipated gift from the Corinthians for the church in Jerusalem.

Paul's desire was to help the Corinthians realize that no person is poorer for being generous. Paul was confident that God would supply the necessities of His giving people. In verse 10 he quotes from Old Testament prophetic books—God will give "seed to the sower, and bread to the eater" (Isa. 55:10), and God will "break up your fallow ground . . . and

"It's not how much of my money will I give to God, but how much of God's money will I keep for myself."

—Oswald Smith

rain righteousness upon you” (Hos. 10:12)—to emphasize that the righteous will always have the means of performing benevolent deeds on behalf of the poor.

B. A Community Glorifying God (vv. 11-13)

**11. Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.**

**12. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;**

**13. Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men.**

**Talk About It:**

1. Explain the “liberality” (v. 11 NKJV) God endorses.
2. What will result in thanks and glory to God (vv. 12-13)?

“I believe with all my heart that God’s people possess God’s provision to accomplish and fulfill God’s purposes in the world.”

—Joel Vestal

In these three verses, Paul is careful to point out that God is a beneficiary in the giving and receiving of offerings: “Your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service . . . is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. . . . [Others] will praise God . . . for your generosity” (NIV). It is not the Corinthians who will receive the recipients’ thankfulness and gratitude, it is God. Through the Corinthians’ obedience in giving, God will be glorified as the One who enabled them to give and who thereby provided for those in need.

Irrespective of ethnic background, geographical distance, and cultural dissonance between the two church groups (needy believers in Jerusalem and the Gentiles), all are members of the body of Christ, who is the Head. Such a relationship is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit, who unites each member into the one body we call the church of Jesus Christ.

III. SERVE THE NEEDY (Acts 6:1-7; James 1:27)

The Book of Acts is the story of a fledgling band of believers called Christians (11:26), whose leader and founder was a crucified Nazarene called the Christ. However, this man from Nazareth was more than an ordinary criminal unjustly condemned to a Roman cross; He was Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world ( Luke 2:11). Upon His ascension, Jesus left His disciples with a promise: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NIV). Luke, the writer, uses this geographical structure to frame his narrative to demonstrate the exponential growth of the church in the early days of its existence. However, as the church grew, it began to encounter converts from outside of the cultural and linguistic Jewish tradition. The passage in chapter 6 recounts the dissension that developed within the early church, the resolution to its problems, and the results of their actions.



A. Church Conflict (Acts 6:1)

**1. And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.**

In Acts 2:42-47, early in the church's history, Luke portrays for the reader the ideal church: The believers were together and had all things in common; they distributed their proceeds to all who were in need; they shared their meals gladly; there was goodwill among the people; and new members were added to the church daily. However, certain tensions developed sooner in the church rather than later. In Acts 6, the problem was a disagreement between two factions in the church—Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews who came to Jerusalem from the Diaspora) and Hebrews (Aramaic-speaking Jews who were native to Israel). The charge against the administration of the church was that the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked and thus discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. When communication in a multicultural church breaks down, some voices are less heard and eventually muted . . . hence the distress calls from Hellenistic widows.

B. Positive Plan of Action (vv. 2-7)

**2. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.**

**3. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.**

**4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.**

**5. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:**

**6. Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.**

**7. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

The leadership (the Twelve) must be commended for their method of action. While the idea of holding a committee meeting among themselves was probably an attractive prospect, the disciples decided to call the whole assembly together (Hellenists and Aramaic Jews). These leaders were concerned to uphold and fulfill the traditions as recorded in

**Talk About It:**  
Explain the complaining that arose.

**Talk About It:**  
1. What was the primary responsibility of the apostles (vv. 2, 4)?

2. What qualities would the seven deacons need (v. 3)?
3. Explain what “increased” and “multiplied” (v. 7).

the Scriptures relating to widows, the poor, and the neglected (Ex. 22:22-24; Isa. 58:6-10; Luke 4:16-23). At the same time, they recognized their God-given role of preaching and teaching about Jesus and the coming of the Kingdom (Matt. 28:16-20; Luke 24:47-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:1-8). Therefore, in light of the proliferation of the church and its emerging cultural and linguistic composition, the growing need for practical care of the needy and widows, and the call to preach the gospel, this decision was made: Elect seven men (deacons) to take charge of the pastoral care ministry in the church while the disciples devoted their time to ministry of the Word and prayer.

The community of faith selected the seven men for service in the church and presented them to the apostles for their commendation. These men were commissioned by the laying on of hands, and this appointment was to be the genesis of greater works they would accomplish in the days ahead. We know that Stephen and Philip would later play important roles in the defense of the Christian faith and in evangelism.

Luke records that the “word of God spread” (v. 7 NKJV), resulting in rapid church growth. So while the apostles evangelized, the seven deacons went about their work. They were men of good reputation, so as to gain the confidence of their constituents. They were Spirit-baptized, empowering them to execute their duties in harmony with Christ’s mandates; and they were men of wisdom so they could carry out the practical affairs of the church with skill and resourcefulness. It is no wonder that the influence of the church extended to the far corners of the Roman Empire and beyond in a few years.

### C. God’s Identification With the Poor (James 1:27)

**27. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.**

Paul Gauguin’s famous painting is as interesting as is its title: *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* The painting depicts an idyllic nature setting with trees, flowers, green grass, animals, and birds under blue skies. In the center of the painting are images of religious statues and people in the posture of worship and prayer. Some have their hands raised to heaven, and others are in deep meditation. Apparently, Gauguin in this mysterious painting is attempting to define *religion*. While religion attempts to respond to our innermost longings and desires, and answer the kind of questions posed by the painting, any

“We cannot perform our charities by proxy. We must come in personal contact with those whom we would help.”

—Clovis G. Chappell

#### Talk About It:

Describe three characteristics of “pure” and “unpure.”

standard dictionary will define *religion* as “a system of belief that involves the worship of a God or gods.”

Notwithstanding the above, James helps us better understand the practical outworking of the Christian religion. While to be contemplative, devotional, and prayerful are all hallmarks of the ideal Christian life, there are other dimensions we often neglect. James offers us this corrective: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress” (NIV). James is not alone when he spells out what “pure religion” looks like, for the Old Testament writers frequently expressed similar thinking (Ex. 22:22-24; Deut. 26:12-13; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 5:27-29).

Orphans and widows are often considered together because they represented two social classes that were vulnerable and exposed to exploitation and affliction in ancient Israel (Isa. 1:10-17; Zech. 7:8-10). God is known as their advocate and protector (Ps. 68:5), and the reward for those who protect the orphan and widow is a special blessing from the Lord (Deut. 14:28-29).

### CONCLUSION

We are called to be advocates for those who are marginalized (the poor, orphans, and widows). Indeed, much more than just being advocates, we need a vision that translates “pure religion” into practical, down-to-earth action. If our piety is only in the form of prayer and meditation, it will become mere ecstasy and emotion without praxis.

In the world today, almost 200 million children are orphaned; every 14 seconds an AIDS victim causes another child to become orphaned; and here in the U.S., statistics show that more than 800,000 children pass through the foster-care system. By employing our God-given gifts and talents, we meet the need of our proverbial neighbor and, in the words of James, this is true religion, pure and faultless.

As members of the body of Christ, as diverse and multicultural as we are, we all come with varying gifts for the edification of the Body. Paul reminds us that we are many members, but one body (1 Cor. 12:12-31). Consequently, it is our duty to build up one another, support the various ministries of the church, and look for opportunities to serve the needy.

### GOLDEN TEXT CHALLENGE

“NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER, AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS; BUT EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER: AND SO MUCH THE MORE, AS YE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING” (Heb. 10:25).

By speaking of gathering ourselves together, the writer was referring to times of worship where prayer, preaching, singing, and the administration of sacraments were an integral

### Determined Witness

On a visit to Nepal in late December 2005, my host pastor took me on a tour of the local market. At that time proselytizing was illegal and considered a crime against the state, and punishment for proselytizing was imprisonment. The pastor took me to a particular vendor whose stall displayed an array of books, pamphlets, and magazines both in English and in Nepali—many of the Nepali resources were ones he had translated and printed in his own print shop. He had discovered this way of witnessing with his pen. Like my host pastor, every Christian has a personal responsibility to minister to others inside and outside the church.

—Edley Moodley

**Daily Devotions:**

- M. Anointed to Serve  
Numbers  
11:24-29
- T. Open Hands  
Deuteronomy  
15:7-11
- W. Kindness Given  
2 Samuel 9:1-11
- T. Jesus' Prayer for Unity  
John 17:20-26
- F. Spiritual Gifts  
1 Corinthians  
12:1-7
- S. Christlike Conduct  
Ephesians  
4:25-32

part. Public worship served to admonish, encourage, and provoke unto love and good works, as well as to comfort, establish, and encourage those who were afflicted or persecuted. Thus, he admonished the readers not to forsake these meetings.

Forsaking God's house may be either total or partial. This neglect may stem from a fear of suffering. When lands, possessions, houses, relations, liberty, or even life itself, become more important than Christ, the soul is in danger. This neglect may also stem from spiritual laziness.

The writer of Hebrews implied that some had already fallen—"as the manner of some is." During those early days, some had begun to decline from their profession, often failing in worship attendance.

So the writer instructs believers to encourage one another. We should seize every opportunity to persuade and encourage one another to faithfulness in Christian service. And this we should do more earnestly as we see that the day of His coming again is drawing near. To see His coming as imminent and not be diligent in the duties of divine worship reveals a backsliding attitude.