

WHERE AND WHY THE NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS MET

As I sat listening to the CTTS classes online this morning, I received a phone text with a question. I have received many such messages about the same topic since the governments all over the world have shut down their citizens' movements because of the pandemic. Today's question was a good question, one that needs to be researched so that Christians do not defile their consciences. Here are just a few things people have asked recently:

1. "Is it OK for some Christians to meet at home and take communion with their families?"
2. "Some members of the Lord's body are not gathering with the church these days; they are meeting in their homes and taking communion by video chat. Is that acceptable?"
3. "If it is OK for Christians to meet by video chat during the pandemic, while the government is shut-down, why is it not OK to meet the same way at other times? Over the years, many denominations have watched TV evangelists on a Sunday."
4. "What if a church member lives far away from the church building? Can they simply watch TV and worship that way?"

The following scriptures apply when there are no extenuating circumstances. When the law of the land commands us not to meet together because it is a matter of life and death, we need to find a way to provoke one another to love and good works and to edify each other in the best ways we can. We can still gather and depend on the promise that where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, he will be there in the midst (Mat.18:20). Without extenuating circumstances, we must listen to the admonition not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:24).

Like I said earlier, this lesson is part of a series we have talked about before for normal situations. However, if one is in the hospital and not able to leave, he would be justified to partake of the Lord's Supper with his mate or someone who brought it to him (Matt. 18:20). If a person is unconscious in the hospital, he is fully justified not to meet with the saints or take the Lord's Supper.

Similarly, if the government commands us not to meet because of a pandemic or other life threatening situation, we are justified not to assemble or take the Lord's Supper until that ban is lifted.

WHAT DO WE ACTUALLY DO WHEN WE MEET TOGETHER? ARE THESE THE ONLY THINGS WE NEED TO DO?

- We **hear** the word of prophecy—sermons, Bible classes or prayer meetings as determined by scripture, the elders, or the men of the congregation (1 Cor. 14:23-25)
- We **pray** (Matt. 18:20 Ask for Jesus to be with us; Matt. 13:19 give understanding; James 1:5 wisdom)
- We **sing** (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:26)
- We **give** (as prospered on the first day of the week. 1 Cor. 16:2)

- We **partake of the Lord's Supper** (John 6:53; 1 Cor. 10:15-17; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)

WHAT DOES THE LORD ALSO EXPECT EACH MEMBER TO DO?

- Romans 14:19—Let us therefore follow after (G1377 flee, pursue) the things which make for peace, and things wherewith **one may edify another**.
- Romans 15:2—Let every one of us please his neighbour **for his good to edification**.
- 1 Corinthians 10:23—All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but **all things edify not**.
- 1 Corinthians 14:3-5—But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. 4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. 5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, **that the church may receive edifying**.
- **1 Corinthians 14:12**—Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may **excel to the edifying of the church**.

WHAT DO WE CHOOSE? DO WE CHOOSE THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE, OR THE LORD'S WAY SO WE CAN EXCEL TO EDIFY?

- 1 Corinthians 14:23—**If therefore the whole church be come together into one place**, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? 24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: 25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. 26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. **Let all things be done unto edifying**.
- Ephesians 4:11-12—And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, **for the edifying of the body of Christ**:
- Ephesians 4:16 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR EVERY MEMBER TO SUPPLY THE EFFECTUAL WORKING IN EACH OTHER WHEN WE ARE NOT ALL TOGETHER?

- 1 Thess. 5:11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and **edify one another**, even as also ye do.

HOW CAN WE SING TO ONE ANOTHER IF WE ARE NOT TOGETHER?

- Eph. 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.
- Col. 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.16 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.

How can we work in one another's hearts BEST if we are not together as much as possible? Would an earthly family rest content to see one another once a week? Would a husband and wife have the best relationship possible if they only speak by phone or text? Would a mother be able to train a child long distance?

There is a reason God commands Christians to exhort one another daily. There is a *reason* he commands the Church to *meet* on the first day of the week!

- Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.
- Acts 20:7 And upon the first day of the week, when **the disciples came together** to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF SOMEONE HONESTLY CANNOT MEET WITH THE CHURCH FOR THE REGULAR ASSEMBLY?

Granted, there may be those who push their ox into a ditch and thus are responsible to change their habits or their lifestyle so they do not miss the assemblies. However, are there times when it is truly impossible to meet with the Church?

- One true example might be where the person cannot drive and the congregation has not designated anyone to do that work or none is available to pick up shut-ins.
- Another example might be that their employer does not allow the person to take off. They have to depend on attending either a morning or an evening service, but not both.

- Those who travel long distances for their jobs may sometimes find themselves in a situation where there is no faithful congregation where they are on a Sunday.
- Sometimes the government shuts down everyone because of a pandemic and demands everyone shelter in place. By law, what does every citizen have to do?
- What if you were like King David and had to run for your life because someone was trying to kill you? Could David go to the temple three times a year as the Law of Moses required, or did he have to worship with his band of men while he was hiding from King Saul somewhere in the countryside? At one point in David's flight from King Saul, he could not go to a regular shop to buy his food. He had to depend on the priests' showbread. It was a matter of life and death because David and his men needed strength to escape from King Saul's army. As Jesus said, the law was made for man, and not man for the law (Mat.2:27; Lev.10:16-19; Num.9:10-11).

ANOTHER QUESTION WAS, "WHERE SHOULD WE MEET ON THE LORD'S DAY?"

Wherever the Saints normally meet is where we should meet on the Lord's Day or any other day there is a scheduled assembly. If we normally meet in a building, then that is where everyone should go. If we normally meet in someone's home, then that is where we should go. If the congregation has a hired hall or a room, then that is where everyone should gather. Wherever the other brothers and sisters of the congregation are gathering, that is where every member should gather with them.

WHERE DID THE FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANS MEET?

Judging from several scriptures about where the early church gathered, we can conclude they had no church buildings as we have today. Later, as persecutions grew less and less, Christians were able to build buildings.

- Matthew 18:20—For **where** (anywhere) two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
- Acts 2:46-47—And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread **from house to house**, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.
- Acts 20:20-21—And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you **publicly, and from house to house**, 21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Acts 5:12—And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord **in Solomon's porch**.)
- Acts 12:12—And when he had considered the thing, he came to **the house of Mary the mother of John**, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

- Acts 14:27—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 15:30-31—So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.
- Acts 20:7-9—And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. 8 And there were many lights **in the upper chamber**, where they were gathered together. 9 And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from **the third loft**, and was taken up dead.
- 1 Corinthians 5:4-5—In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **when ye are gathered together**, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 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.

If we were able to arrange a way to hear the prophecy that edifies, we would be required to fulfill the purpose of the assembly. **Listening to TV evangelists cannot fulfill the scriptures, because** they are not assembling according to Hebrews 10:25.