

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

December 30, 2020

Can we worship “virtually”?

Last year at this time if someone had asked if it's possible to worship “virtually” (online) I would have viewed it as an interesting question, but not particularly relevant. And, if it was asked in an attempt to justify skipping an assembly, the answer would, of course, be a resounding “no!” This year, however, the question has become more than relevant and the answer could have an effect on our eternal destiny. Let's start by defining “worship.”

1. Worship (“*the expression of reverence and adoration toward God*”) is not something you *automatically* do all the time, as I've heard some argue. You must *choose* to do it; it's purposeful (Heb. 13:15).
2. You can worship anywhere and at any time (Gen. 22:5; John 4:21-24; Heb. 11:21). You don't need a building to do it in and you don't need a duty roster to do it.
3. “Worship” (*proskuneo*) and “assembly” (*ecclesia*) are two different words. All of our assemblies should be for worship but not all worship takes place in the assemblies.
4. Our terminology confuses things. Times for assemblies often read: “*Bible class: 9:30. Worship: 10:30.*” Wait — our Bible classes are not “worship”? They had better be!
5. The Bible clearly teaches that there are times for collective worship. 7 times in I Cor. 11 and 14, Paul refers to the church that “comes together.” There has always been a community of believers that gather. (Neh. 8:1; Psa. 84:1-4,10; Heb. 10:24-25).

So, can we worship online? Certainly. We had a Bible class yesterday from 10-11 AM and we honored God during that time. My mother used to sing hymns while she was cooking or doing the laundry; that's “worship,” isn't it? The question is whether it is possible to “come together” when we are online. To answer that, we need to look at what the Bible tells us takes place during those times the church “comes together.”

We know that saints “gathered together” to break bread, to teach and to pray, and had “all things in common” (Acts 2:42-44; “common” is the root word for “fellowship”; cf. Acts 20:7). We know they sang together and “submitted” to one another (Eph. 5:19-21). We know that assembling “in the name of the Lord Jesus” was a regular practice (see I Cor. 5:4, where they used that occasion to discipline an immoral man; cf. Acts 5:11). We can argue that the Lord's Supper is meant to be taken by the entire church, at one time (I Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-34). Much of I Corinthians 11, 12 and 14 makes little or no sense unless Paul is speaking of the *gathered* church. On top of all of this is the fact that the word “church” (*ecclesia*) means “assembly,” defined as *a group of people who gather together in one place for a common purpose*. It is not a mystical “concept” or an “entity.”

The church is a real body (assembly) of people who gather at certain times. Nehemiah 8:1 describes God's people who gathered “as one man” to hear the law read to them “from early morning to midday.” Heb. 10:24-25 specifically criticizes those who habitually avoid meeting together. Why? Because how can they “stir up” and “encourage” others if they are not present in the assembly? Hebrews 10:24 a command, isn't it.?

So, what's the conclusion? Each Lord's Day, the church at Folsom meets in three services. At present, we are meeting under a tent, in less than ideal weather conditions. I have to conclude that all able-bodied members of the church ought to be at one of the services. I can't think of a good argument not to be. Consider what our brethren in the past had to suffer. Meeting was, often, a life or death decision. Christians in other areas in the world are facing the same difficulties even today. Can any of us honestly argue that *we* are excused because it's a bit cold or because it's raining? At judgment, do we want to stand before God if we routinely chose not to meet with others when we had the opportunity? Read Hebrews 10:25 again, but also read v. 26. These are unusual times and each of us must decide for ourselves but we need to ask if we are taking these texts seriously. I'm judging anyone, by the way; I trust you are all making decisions you are comfortable with.

We know there are risks associated with Covid-19 that prohibit some from attending. Some are quarantined for a time, others have underlying health conditions that place them at greater risk and the weather, currently, might put them at even greater risk. Under the unusual circumstances we are facing today, I would never suggest that any of these who have legitimate reasons for not attending in person are sinning.

But, back to the question: can they “worship” with us remotely? In discussing this with one of our members, he said he feels we can only *scripturally* do that if we are live-streaming the service in real time so that we are actually singing, praying and taking the Lord's Supper at the same time with others who are watching the live-stream. He said he didn't feel it's “worship” if you watch a recording of it later. That seems logical.

I'm convinced it can be done, with all the caveats mentioned above. However, should make every effort and any sacrifice necessary, to gather with other Christians, whenever possible. That's God's will and there is no scriptural argument that I can find that suggests we can do our own thing if other Christians are assembling and we have no legitimate reason to stay away.