

Church Meeting Online **—Is it Scriptural?**

Technology such as You Tube Streaming / Facebook has been used to help Christians isolated by distance or some other valid reason. Using this technology, they have been able to meet with a church that they cannot attend physically. But is this practice scriptural?

1 With Others When Separated

Paul says to the Colossians, "For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." (Colossians 2:5). This establishes the principle that the inability to be physically present does not prevent people from still being present ("with you") in spirit.

The norm is to gather together in the flesh, but when that is impractical, we have the means to still be present in spirit and to worship together "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

By means of internet technology and telecommunications, we can actually participate in the church meeting. We are only "scattered" physically. We are "together" in that we can see each other, hear each other, talk to each other, and worship together.

Christians in New Testament times assembled together as they were able. Their only means of congregating was to convene a physical assembly. Today we have the ability to assemble online, and where appropriate we ought to use it. (It is appropriate when the primary and normal means, physical assembly, is not practicable).

Obviously, we prefer physical assembly because it imitates the practice of first century Christians. But when that is prevented, we should still not "forsake the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25). Providence has granted us another means of assembly and we ought to use it.

2 Preaching the Word When Separated

In New Testament times the word was taught in physical presence face to face, or by "writing with pen and ink" (3John 1:18). This establishes the principle that the inability to be physically present does not prevent people from still hearing the word.

We are blessed in this century to be able to use not only pen and ink, but the printed word, telecommunications, videos, and the worldwide web. Everyone understands that "writing with pen and ink" is not the only means we are authorized to use when teaching at a distance.

In New Testament times the word was preached by every means available. We have more means available today, and we ought to use them all.

Sharing the Lord's Supper When Separated

Even the Lord's Supper can be observed when the partakers are separated by distance. The Lord himself is present at the Lord's Supper. He drinks the cup with us in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25).

Jesus promised to be in the midst of those who come together in his name (Matthew 18:20). He is not physically present, is he? This establishes the principle that the lack of physical presence does not prevent people from still participating in the Lord's Supper.

When people in a physical assembly partake of bread and cup, the emblems that each partake of are separated by distance, albeit only centimeters. Does it matter that, in online meetings, the emblems that each partake of are separated by kilometers?

Is any amount of distance prohibited when you can see and hear those you are worshiping with, be seen and heard by them, and partake with them?

Whether in physical presence or online presence, people are partaking "together" of "one bread" whatever the distance between each partaker's hand. There is no less "communion" or "fellowship" with God and each other (1 Corinthians 10:16).

**By the way, I'm not suggesting that people should "just watch church online". Worship is not something to watch as a spectator. It is something in which to participate.

Conclusion

Over the years, we get used to a certain manner of worshiping God. But what if the devil hinders us, and we can't do it anymore? God provides an alternative, and we must recognize, not reject, that blessing and God's good providence.

Generally speaking, we should prefer to meet together physically when practicable. However, when that is not practicable, we ought to gather online with fellow Christians, if that is practicable. Let us thank God for such a blessing for our times.