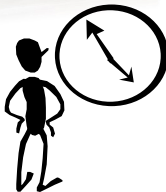


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### Time of Assembly



#### **Sunday:**

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.  
Worship 5:00 p.m.

#### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

## Virtual Worship Not Authorized

By Steve A. Hamilton

In the madness that has developed over concerns for the coronavirus, many churches have closed their doors opting for services conducted over the internet. For the purposes of this article, we will call the streaming of services over the internet “virtual worship services.” At issue is whether virtual worship services are authorized in scripture. Hebrews 10:25 commands the assembling of ourselves together. Can that assembling be done virtually over the internet? Is my physical presence required or can I attend services remotely?

There are only two places in the bible where the Greek word *episunagoge* is translated as “assembling,” or “gathering together.” That Greek word is only found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and Hebrews 10:25. Both passages must apply the meaning consistently. If Hebrews 10:25 could allow a virtual presence, then 2 Thessalonians 2:1 must allow a virtual presence as well. If our virtual presence is acceptable in one passage, then it must be acceptable in all passages that use that same Greek word.

2 Thessalonians 2:1 reads, *Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our **gathering together to Him, ...*** (NKJV). This assembling is with Christ when He returns at His second coming. No one would think a virtual presence with Jesus Christ at His return would be possible or even desirable. When the Lord returns, we will all demand a physical presence with our Lord. No one will contend that our virtual presence if it were even possible should be an acceptable consideration at “*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Since a virtual presence is not a consideration in any sense of the Greek word *episunagoge*, a virtual worship service is not a consideration for the assembling in Hebrews 10:25.

This understanding requires all God-fearing Christians to apply “*the assembling of ourselves together*” in Hebrews 10:25 as a physical gathering of ourselves together. A virtual presence over the internet is not acceptable nor authorized by the simple application of the Greek word *episunagoge* used consistently between the only two passages in the bible where it is found. Neither Hebrews 10:25 nor 2 Thessalonians 2:1 permits the idea of a virtual worship service.

## “Come together”

The Greek word *sunerchomai* is used many times in the New Testament that is primarily translated as “to come together.” In two cases it means to come together in a sexual union and six times to mean accompanied in travel. All three usages of the word require a gathering together near one another. When it is used to describe an assembly, it is necessarily inferred to be an assembly in one place even if it is not specifically stated to be in one place (1 Cor. 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34). The assembly never referred to two locations at the same time though multiple congregations had their own assemblies at the same time. If there were multiple locations, it was necessarily inferred to be another assembly and that one assembly never referred to another location.

The issue in question asks if the location really matters since virtual reality was never a concept when scriptures were written. If we answer that question in the negative, then that implies definitions of words could be updated in favor of new innovations. For example, the local church would no longer need to be a local body of Christians. A Christian in Florida could be a member of a church in South Dakota. If not, why not? A Christian could go on vacation and never miss an assembly via the internet. Never mind that they are not present to stir up love and good works nor able to exhort one another (Heb. 10:24-25). They can **feel** they were present when they were not present. Are we comfortable changing definitions to accommodate our desires? Remember, desires are what draws us away into sin (Jas. 1:14-15). Understand these words never meant anything we presently wish them to mean due to our present distress. We are forced to change the definition of the words to accommodate a virtual worship service.

## Nadab and Abihu

In theory, Nadab and Abihu would have been in favor of a virtual worship service. They made one small change to their worship by getting fire from another source. It had no effect upon worship at all. Did it really matter where they got the fire? Fire is fire. They didn’t even have to change the definition of the word fire. But the condemnation stated that God “*had not commanded them*” (Lev. 10:1-2). In other words, we are not at liberty to change the word of God to accommodate our definition of fire or assembling. We all agree a virtual worship service was never included in scriptures by

the words “assembling” or “coming together.” Times do change but God’s word does not change. Assembling never meant anything other than a physical presence at the gathering together of the saints. Or at least it never did until the coronavirus struck. Nadab and Abihu should have argued that times had changed and their source for fire was far more convenient. Nadab and Abihu serve as an example of what would be in store for us if we dare change the proper order of worship (1 Cor. 14:40).

## Objections

Some have argued that a virtual worship service should be acceptable because Christ said, “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*” (Matt. 18:20). Please note that Jesus qualified that statement by saying, “*in my name.*” Christ is with the assembling of saints when it is authorized. If it is not authorized as in a virtual setting, Christ is not in their midst.

A virtual worship assembling would not be expedient either. For an expediency to exist, it must first be lawful (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). Virtual worship services are not lawful so they are not helpful nor expedient.

## What should be done?

Despite the coronavirus, assembling with the saints is still required of all faithful Christians. If church members or Elders have closed the church doors against the commands for worship (Lk. 4:8; Heb. 10:25), repentance should be afforded the decision makers. King David likewise made a hasty decision without consulting the proper order (1 Chron. 15:13). He repented and moved the Ark of the Covenant properly at his next opportunity.

If the sinful members will not relent or make the building available for those who desire to assemble, then new churches should be started by those who understand their responsibility to God (Mk. 12:30). A similar thing occurred through persecution with the church at Jerusalem. Many new congregations started out of necessity (Acts 8:1).

Whatever decisions are made to remain obedient to our Lord, we should not allow distressing times to separate us from Christ. “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword*” (Rom. 8:35). Sadly, we can only blame ourselves if we are separated from Christ. Many Christians have chosen to cower for fear of illness (i.e. not actually sick), death or even government. None of which are acceptable excuses not to assemble as commanded (2 Cor. 12:10; Lk. 9:24; Acts 5:29; Rev 21:8). Each person must work out their own salvation (Phil. 2:12). However, a virtual worship service is not authorized, acceptable or even desirable.

## What Constitutes Obedience?

By Richie Thetford

A passage of scripture comes to mind when I hear the word “obedience” and that is from 1 Samuel 15:22 which says: And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, {And} to heed than the fat of rams.” We all need to understand that to obey the voice of the Lord is our first obligation. The truth is what guides us unto salvation and all men should obey the truth of God (Galatians 3:1-5; 1 Peter 1:22). We can learn from the scriptures that no man was saved by obedience to anything other than God’s word. King Saul obeyed the voice of the people and that led to his downfall (1 Samuel 15:21). Adam obeyed the voice of Satan (Genesis 3:1-6). Saul of Tarsus obeyed the voice of his conscience (Acts 26:9). Only when one obeys the commandments of God is one able to be saved.

So how do we obey the truth? Before answering this question, let us first see how we disobey it. We disobey the truth by refusing to do anything at all (John 5:40). We disobey the truth by adding anything to it that God has not commanded or allowed. The Proverb writer says: “Do not add to His words Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.” (See also Revelation 22:18; 2 John 9) Besides adding to God’s word we disobey Him by taking away that which He has instructed us to do (Revelation 22:19; Deuteronomy 4:2).

The only way that we can obey the truth is by doing the exact thing that God commands for us to do. “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23). Some may think they are doing God’s will because it “feels right,” or “it is a good work” but that does not make it right!

This point is driven home by the example of Moses when he struck the rock when he was not commanded to do so (Exodus 20:7-12). It seemed such a small thing when Uzzah touched the Ark to stabilize it, yet it caused his death (1 Chronicles 13:9-10). If we offend in one point we are guilty of all “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one {point,} he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10). Let us strive to do ONLY those things which ARE AUTHORIZED by God!



## Against the Odds

By Gary W. Summers

What war tactic has usually proven successful? The ambush. Joshua had used it, at God's instruction, with great success in the second attack on Ai. Once the men of that city were lured out into the open, by what they undoubtedly considered would be another rout of Israel, they were hemmed in on both sides. All the people of Ai were killed ([Joshua 8:26](#)).

In II Chronicles 13, Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, was facing the experienced king Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. He does not seem worried, however; in fact, he is confident of victory. No, he is neither an optimist nor someone who is depending on his feelings or a hunch.

The basis for his assurance of victory is something liberals and "grace only" advocates would never understand — obedient faith. Abijah tells Jeroboam in advance why Israel will be defeated:

*"And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD, which is in the hand of the sons of David; and you are a great multitude, and with you are the gold calves which Jeroboam made for you as gods. Have you not cast out the priests of the LORD, ... and made for yourselves priests, ... of things that are not gods? But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the priests who minister to the LORD are the sons of Aaron" ([II Chronicles 13.8-10](#)).*

He also added: "Now look, God Himself is with us as our head" ([II Chronicles 13:12](#)). Jeroboam, however, tried an ambush, but even with 400,000 in front of Abijah's 400,000 and 400,000 behind them, he could not win; he suffered the loss of 500,000 men in the battle.

Abijah's trust in God was more than sufficient to conquer an army of superior numbers. The king's faith was not misplaced, nor did it go unrewarded. Abijah knew that God would be with them in the battle.

We face an enemy that outnumbers us, too. The devil and his emissaries know several excellent strategies. But when we fight the Lord's battles (whether large or small), we too can be confident of victory. Those on the side of God and Truth always win.