



Many so-called churches are happy w/doing things in a virtual environment (versus meeting physically together). Yet what the Bible teaches is that our physical assembly is not only necessary to being the church, but also God's house, the place of salvation and blessing.

1. God's house is identified with the church under the New Covenant.

1.1. (Isa 2:1-3) = Among other things, these verses tell us that in a time future to Isaiah ("the latter days"), there will again be a "house of the LORD (or God)". What will make it distinct from the previous ones is that: 1) it will be "established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills" –meaning it will possess more authority than the former house of God, AND 2) "all the nations [or "many peoples"] shall ["come" or] flow to it" – meaning its membership will include not just Jews –but Gentiles as well (nations/peoples = Gentiles).

1.2. According to the Apostle Paul, this prophecy has been fulfilled in the New Covenant church (Eph 2:11-3:10) = "Gentiles" are now "fellow citizens" and "members" of God's new house (or "household") - i.e. "the church", whose superior authority – i.e. "the manifold wisdom of God", is "now be(ing) made known" to God's former house, "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (God's house is the heavenly place on earth which means the authorities/rulers Paul has in mind are the Jewish priests; see also Eph 1:21b-23 "gave Him as head over all things to the church" = Jesus's superior authority resides in the church as God's new house).

1.3. Paul directly calls the church, God's house in (1Ti 3:15 "household" [Grk. oikos] = House).

2. The church as God's New Covenant house - and residing place of His Holy Spirit, *only exists when and where His ordained pastors and people are physically assembled together for the purpose of carrying out His prescribed duties.*

2.1. Under the Old Covenant, God's house was the physical building where His Spirit resided (e.g. the Tabernacle and Temple).

2.2. Under the New Covenant, God's Spirit resides in His church – not a physical building, but *the physical assembly* of His ordained pastors and people gathered together for the purpose of carrying out His prescribed duties: corporate praise and prayer, sermons, sacraments and judgments. When we gather in that physical way for those sacred purposes, we become God's house and that place becomes sacred space. But not until those things are true! The church building ≠ God's house until His people are in it doing His work.

2.3. As it re: to a physical assembly vs a virtual assembly (e.g. ZOOM or YouTube church): The paradigm in Scripture is a physical assembly in a geographic location (e.g. Act 5:12 – "all together") = Physical assembly"; This was true even under the Old Covenant. Though God resided in a physical building (or on a mountain top), His presence was only witnessed in that place when the people were physically assembled together (1Ki 8:1-11; Exo 19:10-17); (1Co 14:23-25) = It is the impact of the physical assembly in corporate proclamation, praise and prayer that causes the unbeliever to acknowledge God and His power among His people. Such tangible and personal experience cannot be replicated in a virtual setting. The physical assembly is therefore absolutely critical to the expansion and advancement of God's kingdom (i.e. evangelism/making disciples).

2.4. As it re: a physical assembly vs a physical building: (1Co 3:16-17 – "you" [pl.] = refers to the Corinthian assembly) = The physical assembly is considered the "temple"/house of God. Same idea is communicated in (Eph 2:22 and 1Pe 2:5); (Rom 16:5 w/1Co 16:19 w/Col 4:15 – "the church in their/her house") = What constitutes the "church" is separate from the house where the people met. It is instead associated with their physical assembly in that place; (1Co 14:34-35) = If the church – or God's house under the NC is a physical building or permanent sacred space (versus it becoming sacred space only when there is the physical assembly of God's people doing God's business) then this verse becomes problematic for any family whose home doubles as the church since that would mean women could never speak of spiritual matters while in their houses!

2.5. As it re: a physical assembly that includes an ordained pastor (Act 11:19-26) = The "great number who believed" only become a "church" after the arrival of "Barnabas" an ordained pastor from the Jerusalem church (Barnabas was an apostle. Apostles were all ordained men – Act 14:14 w/Joh 20:21-23). This paradigm traces its roots back to the OT and the sacerdotal system established by God (Exo 19:5-6 w/Rev 1:6 and 5:10) = A kingdom that possesses ordained/anointed priests – i.e. those able to mediate relationship between God and humanity. This is also what designates a people as a holy nation – the fact that they possess ordained/anointed priests. Christ is the church's high priest (or chief/covenant mediator – Heb 3:1 w/9:15, 12:24; also 1Ti 2:5 = He is the "one" or only high priest thru which people can be saved – see Col 2:15). However, consistent w/the OC priesthood, Jesus has (under the NC) ordained/anointed other priests to be His personal mediators or representatives for the people (Isa 66:20-21; Mat 16:19, 18:20; Joh 20:21-23; Heb 13:17). Hence the reason, there can be no legitimate church – or house of God w/o legitimate ordained/anointed priests (i.e. teaching elders/pastors).

2.6. As it re: God's physical assembly for the purpose of carrying out God's prescribed duties: (Act 15:4, 6, 12, 22 – "all the assembly" w/1Co 5:4 - "assembled in the name of the Lord") = Physical assembly for the purpose of judgment; (Act 20:7 - "we were gathered together" w/1Co 11:17-22 - "when you come together") = Physical assembly for the purpose of sacraments. Notice Paul makes a distinction between the sacred eating of the LT and regular eating revealing that not all assemblies constitute "church" – but only those gathering to carry out God's prescribed duties; (1Co 14:26 - "when you come together") = Physical assembly for the purpose of corporate praise and a sermon; (Act 4:31 – "were gathered together") = Physical assembly for the purpose of corporate prayer (Act 2:42-44 – "were together...attending the temple together") = Physical assembly for the purpose of sermons, sacraments and corporate prayer.

2.7. How many of the ten people necessary to constitute a legitimate church (Gen 18:32) are required to physically assemble in order to become God's house? As little as two or three where there is also an ordained pastor and their physical assembly together is to carry out God's prescribed duties (Mat 18:17-20) = This assembly (though small – "two or three gathered in My Name") is called "the church" b/c they are carrying out the prescribed duty of judgment w/ordained pastors (the only ones who can "bind and loose" - see again Mat 16:19 and Joh 20:21-23). As such, this truth can also be concluded: being God's house does not require her entire membership to be present/physically gathered (e.g. 1Co 5:4-5 = The Corinthian church ml did not yet have an ordained/anointed pastor. As such, Paul's decision in respect to judgment [specifically "binding in this case] was necessary. The church however did not need to his physical attendance to function as God's house. They possessed the necessary "two or three"!).

3. The prescription for assembly in (or as) God's house is all together as one.

3.1. IOW: It is to be integrative vs segregated worship (e.g. of segregated - COVID 19 restriction of "no more than ten people").

3.2. (Exo 10:9; Deu 31:12-13; Neh 8:1-2 w/Act 1:14, 2:42-47, 5:12, 20:7 w/Heb 10:25; Also 1Co 1:10 w/11:17).

4. God commands us to worship Him in (or as) His house if we are to receive His blessings and salvation.

4.1. As it re: God's command for worship in (or as His house): (Psa 135:1-3; Psa 96:7-9, 99:1-5, 9 w/Isa 60:13 and Eze 43:6-7; Psa 100:1-4, 150:1-6).

4.2. As it re: the blessings and salvation associated with His house: (Psa 20:1-9, 23:6, 24:3-5, 26:8, 12, 27:4-5, 36:7-9, 50:2, 65:1-4, 68:17-18,26, 35 w/Eph 4:8-16; Psa 73:12-17, 27, 84:1-12).

5. Therefore, to continue receiving the special blessings of God's Spirit and salvation found in His house, requires that we not forsake *physically assembling ourselves together* as the church.

5.1. (Heb 10:25-26)

5.2. This is why the church during times of persecution has always sought to meet - even secretly. For example, during Decius' persecution in the 3rd century, the church met secretly in the underground tombs of others, because they knew the importance of physical assembly (of being the church) in order to be in God's house and continuing to receive His blessings/salvation.

6. The blessing afforded to us when we physically assemble to become God's house (or the church) also benefits the world (Mat 5:13-16 = We are the "salt" and "light" of this world which preserves the good and pushes back the darkness of evil. Stop God's people from becoming the house of God/the church and you forfeit all hope of things getting better in this world.)

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION: Consider how far adrift America's current sanctions against the church are from her founding fathers and their stated desire for this nation as communicated in the Bill of Rights and the First Amendment of our Constitution,

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...or the right of the people to peaceably assemble..."

CLOSING CHALLENGE: Pray for our government! That they (like our American forefathers) would again see the church (or God's New Covenant house) as "First Amendment essential business" (essential even to them!) and give us back our freedom to assemble as one.