

## Back To “Assembling”?

---

by Wayne Goff

*The covid-19 pandemic seems to be coming to an end, and government officials are reducing or eliminating the restrictions we have lived with for the past fourteen months. Churches have suffered greatly during this time, and we have learned (1) how precious are literal assemblies together; and (2) that “virtual assemblies” via live stream are no assembly at all! So what are churches to do?*

### The Problem

Once again, traveling just a few days in southern Missouri and Arkansas, we could see “signs” of churches urging their members to assemble together once again. One sign simply read “**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together’ – Hebrews 10:25.**” Church leaders are learning **the hard way** that *a year-long absence* from public assembling has taken its toll on the members! Some churches have used FaceBook, YouTube, and Zoom meetings to provide a “virtual assembly.” Some churches provided *recorded videos only* for their members. We all wonder what could have been done differently. It was certainly a blessing for us to provide an online presence for our members. And this congregation **exceeded** many churches in this part of the country in returning to public worship and Bible classes long before others have! Some are just now meeting publicly again for the first time in a year!

However, **the problem** is that some have grown *complacent* and *comfortable* with the “virtual assembly” online. It is **so convenient** to stay at home, with a cup of coffee and house shoes or slippers, and tune in to the church’s meeting while sitting in a recliner or on the couch with the kids. This was even more convenient with the terribly cold winter we had for a few weeks in February! Thus some have reasoned that if they could do it during the covid-19 epidemic, why not do it all the time? **The answer is simple: online assembling is no substitute for assembling in person.** It is only provided in an *emergency situation* when a threat to one’s health is very real! As wonderful as the online provisions have been for all of us, it is not acceptable for the able-bodied saints when the danger is past!

### The Solution?

Just as each church has decided for itself how it would provide “virtual assemblies,” so each church will now have to decide how to get all the brethren back together again. Our Lord Jesus has **commanded** that we assemble **together**, *not virtually*, when we are able, **Hebrews 10:25**. Elders will have to make judgments as to when sheep in their flock are justified in staying home, and when they are neglecting their responsibilities, **Hebrews 13:7, 17**. That will be no easy task. *If every member of every local church really wanted to assemble at every service, then there would be no problem!* But that has **never** been the case. There have always been the spiritually weak who neglect their God-given responsibilities for a variety of reasons. Throughout my forty-seven years of preaching, I have seen weak brethren excuse themselves from the assemblies for the most absurd reasons imaginable! (The truth is that they really didn’t want to be there in the first place.)

There is **great value** to being *together* in the worship and work of the church. The “virtual assembly” does not provide for the caring and nurturing that results from looking out for “*one another*.” The virtual assembly causes us to neglect our mutual love and care for each other and to only look out for ourselves selfishly. The church that stays apart permanently will die. Some local churches have already died during this pandemic. Of course they were weak and dying already, but the same will happen to every church if the appropriate steps are not taken to return to the “*assembling of ourselves together*.” **The basic reason for assembling together is this: we need to show love and care for one another!** Take the time to read **Rom. 12:5-16; 13:8; 1 Cor. 11-12**. Then you will see the **value** of caring for one another.