

WOULD YOU HAVE BEEN THERE?

The Bible tells of God's people gathering for various reasons, reasons that were good, with divine approval. Obviously any gathering approved of God should have the approval and support of all of God's people. Little patience is indicated in Scripture with regard to children who are absent without leave. There was John Mark Acts 13:13; 15:36-40; Meroz Jud 5:23; Demas 2Tim 4:10 along with many, many others throughout Scripture. It would seem to me that what is said of Demas could be said of all who stay away from any of the assemblies to engage in any activity for their own enjoyment or just to do things that they want to do.

Now, look with me at some assemblies approved of God and ask yourself these questions: If I had lived during this time would I have been there? Would I have made sure my family was there?

A meeting to read God's word Neh 8:1-8. By the way, this reading took place from "morning till midday" and all the people stood as they listened to God's word being read and explained to them. Would you have been there? What about your family? If not, would God have been pleased with you? The Jews had a similar service every Sabbath. Jesus, our example, attended regularly Lk 4:16. The Lord's church has assemblies every week in which God's word is read and discussed. Sometimes there are special assemblies planned specifically for the reading and discussing of the Scriptures. God approves them or else they are sinful! Do you and your family attend all of these assemblies that you possibly can or are you absent without leave? Do we really understand that God knows whether it is possible for us to attend or not?

A meeting on the first day of the week to break bread Acts 20:7. Yes, indeed there was a great preacher there and he preached until midnight. However, they didn't come together just because they wanted to hear the great preacher, although it would not be wrong to come together to hear an especially gifted speaker explain God's word. They came together to break bread, that is, to observe the Lord's Supper. Would you have been there? Would you have been entertaining company that day? Would the entire family stay home because one member of the family was sick? Would you have been out on the lake or engaged in some other form of recreation and just couldn't make it back in time for services? Would you stay home just because you "didn't feel good", or just "had a slight headache" or had other slight aches and pains. Are you absent without leave when worship services are planned? Remember Heb 10:25, 26 and note the willful sin!

A meeting to settle a controversy Acts 15. The issue according to vs. 1-3 involved a difference in teaching regarding the necessity of circumcision. Those who were teaching the necessity of circumcision were allowed to have their say vs. 5-7; then Peter, James, Paul and Barnabas spoke showing that circumcision was not required in order to have salvation. Though the matter was settled by the apostles and elders with the approval of the Holy Spirit, the church was there (the assembly) and supported the decision that was reached as a result of what the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles vs. 12,22. Would you and your family have been there? Or, in spite of announcements and pleadings by the apostles and elders, would you have stayed away? Would you have criticized and said: "I just can't stand all this fussing?" or "It's just a preacher's fuss anyway." There are serious issues now dividing churches as well as families. At times it becomes necessary to come together and discuss various "issues" that are causing problems among brethren. However, many will not study and do their best to learn what is involved and determine what the Scripture says regarding issues. They know what their favorite preacher or paper says or what position they take and which way big churches and the majority of churches have gone, and that seems to be all they want to know. We should be thankful when godly men discuss vital issues and do their best to determine what the Scriptures teach. We should be willing to take our time and hear

discussions regarding issues among brethren. This is not just enjoying a good “fuss” or a good “fight”, but earnest, honest and open discussion of God’s word. Remember: “there must be heresies 1Cor 11:19. And we are warned against drifting Heb 2:1-3; Acts 20:29, 30.

A meeting for prayer Acts 12:5, 12. The circumstances involved the fact that James had been killed by Herod and Peter had been imprisoned with plans for him to be put to death. The church was helpless as far as human help was concerned. There was no ruler or court to which they could appeal. Prayer was their only resort. As a result many met together for prayer. They didn't just offer a brief prayer at home. They came together, and apparently continued until late. Would you have been at this gathering for prayer? Or would you have been at home asleep? Or maybe your favorite program was on TV or you were at some place of amusement. Your children might have had a sports program or some other school activity planned that they just “had” to participate in, so you couldn't be present. We don't pray enough. Would it be possible to pray too much since 1Thess 5:17 says pray without ceasing? We don't come together to just pray. Yes, we have prayer during our assemblies but do we place more emphasis on other activities which take place during our assemblies for worship? All the activities we engage in during our assemblies are indeed scriptural, but should we emphasize one more than the others. We are taught to pray for rulers 1Tim 2:1-3; for preachers Col 4:2, 3; Eph 6:18-20; 2Thess 3:1; for the sick and for forgiveness Jas 5:13-16 as well as in many other situations. I wonder about the results if we had a real prayer meeting, if we gathered together just to pray for a specific matter of great concern to us? Jas 5:16 says: The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. But if we had such a meeting would we attend?

Christians are to present their bodies as living sacrifices Rom 12:1. The Macedonians did that very thing 2Cor 8:5, and it influenced their service to Lord greatly. When people give themselves to the Lord, they won't have to be frightened, emotionally aroused, inspired by some big name preacher come to town, stirred by a city-wide campaign, or fed a meal to get them to attend the assemblies of the Lord’s church. Those who have given themselves to the Lord will be present for every service which the Lord approves unless it is not possible for them to be there. Sadly, however, there are many that are absent without leave from planned assemblies of the saints. (JLH)