

What Does the Bible Say About “Online Church”?

Is “Online Church” Really a Church?

True followers of Christ are always described as part of God’s “universal church” (all genuine believers across history). But what about the “local church”? Can we BE the church merely through our virtual attendance? Although the concept of “internet live streams” would be foreign to biblical times, across the Bible we see important descriptions, commands, and principles for the “local church” gathering together...

Why We Gather: 12 Biblical Reasons the Church Gathers In Person

1. We Gather because God Chose and Called Us Out of Isolation and Into Our Purpose Together

1 Corinthians 12:18 “But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” (ESV)

- Modern day “Christianity” has advocated for an individualism (“Lone Ranger Christianity”) that is far from the biblical descriptions of corporate responsibility and accountability. The biblical church (*Ekklesia*) is **BOTH** the people who gather and the act of gathering.

2. We Gather because We Need Each Other; the Body Assembled, Not Disassembled

1 Corinthians 12:21 “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’”

- If a piece of your body were physically severed, its disconnection would both evidence & lead towards the severed-member’s damage & death. Likewise the “believer” who severs themselves from the local body of Christ will both evidence & lead themselves on a path towards spiritual damage & death.

- “What Does the Bible Say About Church Membership” - www.trustworthyword.com/what-does-the-bible-say-about-church-membership

- 1 John 2:19 “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

3. We Gather to Suffer & Celebrate Together

1 Corinthians 12:26–27 “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

- God created us for relationships where we lovingly share the ups and downs of life together.

- Genesis 2:18 “Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone”

4. We Gather to Serve God

1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

- We were created and gifted with purpose to love God and one another, in and through our local church. Don’t waste the life and gifting God has given to you. You are not called to be a consumer, you are called and created to be a contributor.

- 1 Peter 4:10 “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”

5. We Gather, because Outside the Church is Dangerously Described as Satan’s Realm

1 John 5:19 “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

(see also... 1 Corinthians 5:5, Luke 4:5–6, & Ephesians 2:2)

- We live in dangerous times and the local church is a place where our presence together brings wisdom, encouragement, safety, and strengthening as we engage in real spiritual battle with our eternal enemies.

6. We Gather In Person, In Spite of Risk, Because God Commands Us

Hebrews 10:24-25 “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near”

- The early church faced great risk of persecution when they gathered. Many “underground” churches today gather together in spite of the very real possibility of financial consequences, arrests, beatings, and death.

- “What Does the Bible Say about Risk” - www.trustworthyword.com/risk

7. We Gather Together As a Foretaste of our Heavenly Gathering

1 Thessalonians 4:17 “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

- The act of gathering together in a biblical church service is a picture, shadow, and foretaste of the delightful activities of worshipping and enjoying God’s presence together in Heaven.

8. We Gather for Lasting Joy in God and One Another

2 John 12 “Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.”

- The early church had a safe alternative to physically gathering together - letter writing - but they never saw such a connection as being a sufficient replacement to physical presence in gathering. Gathering together in worship through a local church brings unique joy that can’t be fully experienced by other means of connection.

9. We Gather, Because Separation Leads to Grief

Acts 20:37–38 “And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.”

- When physical separation occurred between Paul and his church family, it brought sorrow and grief. Likewise, true believers should discover a sincere and pressing desire to be together in person consistently whenever possible.

10. We Gather, As a Local Flock of Sheep Waiting, Preparing, and Uniting for the Chief Shepherd

1 Peter 5:2–4 “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

- One of the most common descriptions of both the universal and local churches is that of a flock of sheep with a chief Shepherd (Jesus) and under-shepherds (pastors). When a sheep wanders from the flock, the distance and separation results in a lack of nutrition, protection, and guidance. Our local gatherings help us to grow, heal, strengthen, and prepare for the return of Christ.

11. We Gather, because “Online Church” Is Not A Real Church - Don’t Settle for Less than what God Commands

3 John 14 “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.”

- Although connecting to your church family via online live streams may be an occasional and temporary necessity, “online church” does not meet the Biblical purposes, functions, and commands of gathering in person.

12. We Gather because We Have Been Purchased for Purpose

Acts 20:28 “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

- The practice of going to church, is the practice being the church - loving God and loving others. We have great purpose when we come together. Our coming together prepares us to go out and live lives that radiate God’s love and truth. Let’s not miss out on our purpose in life and as a church.

- Acts 2:42–47 “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

5 Purposes of Live Streaming a Church Service

If “online church” is not a real church, should we still stream our services? Yes!

Online Live Streaming of Our Church Services Serves As...

- 1. Outreach** to believers disconnected from a local church...to reconnect them to presence in a local fellowship.
- 2. Evangelism** to unbelievers needing to hear the Gospel...to connect them to Jesus in salvation.
- 3. Encouragement** to those temporarily disconnected from our local church due to travel, sickness, or disability...to overwhelm them with God’s love and strength.
- 4. A blessing** to our homebound church members who are unable to leave their home...to help them remain faithful to Christ until they meet Him face to face.
- 5. A supplemental discipleship tool** to compliment your belonging in a local church...to help one another mature and grow as followers of Christ.

6 Things that Happen When We Don’t Gather Together...

- 1. We disobey** God.
- 2. We miss** our purpose.
- 3. We endanger** ourselves to Satan, the world, and our flesh.
- 4. We grieve** our local body of Christ.
- 5. We disable** and weaken our local body of Christ.
- 6. We isolate** ourselves relationally, emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

How have you handled gathering with your local church in the past? How can you grow and improve?

1 Thessalonians 2:17 “But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face”

8 of Satan's Best Temptations to Keep You Out of Church

Here are some of the most common thoughts that Satan tempts us with to try to disconnect us from our local church family. While there are often times that God calls His people to a new church, Jesus will never call His people away from gathering with a local church altogether.

1. "I don't need to go to church to be a Christian"

God describes true Christians as desiring corporate worship, instruction, fellowship, & being obedient to His commands. The biblical church (Ekklesia) is BOTH the people who gather and the act of gathering.

2. "The church is not a building, the people are the church."

God calls the people of the church out of their homes to gather together in worship. The church is not passive, it is active.

3. "I'm safer at home"

God calls us to gather, even in the midst of risky situations.

4. "_____ Church is a bunch of cliques"

God calls us into small groups and fellowship, even if it is hard.

5. "_____ Church is a bunch of hypocrites"

God calls us to the church gatherings to heal & grow the sinful.

6. "_____ Church doesn't meet my needs...I'm not getting fed"

God calls us to serve, not to be served. Church is about God, not us.

7. "There are better sermons/worship online"

God calls us into local fellowships, not just online resources. Watching at a distance can never replace participating in person.

8. "It's too early....I'm too busy...I'm too tired"

God calls us to give Him one full day a week & to prepare for His return.

Your Presence Reveals Your Priorities: 5 Steps Forward Together To Gather

- 1. Admit** Your Need to Gather with Your Local Church.
- 2. Confess** Your Past Sinful Failures in Attitude and Action Towards God and His Church.
- 3. Ask** God for Help to Resist Satan's Temptations.
- 4. Protect** Your Lord's Day - One Day a Week.
- 5. Make** Your "Church Ethic" Exceed Your "Work Ethic" & Practice Mutual Accountability.

*Let's learn and grow together as we await the return of our Lord and Savior!
He died for us, let's live & gather for Him!*