

Is virtual meetings an option?

Many assemblies have switched to holding virtual meetings. Would that be the same as gathering at a hall or meeting place? The word 'meeting' is loosely used to refer to the coming together of believers. Our coming together is unto the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:1). Throughout the Scripture, there is a physical location associated with the presence of the Lord (Exodus 25:22; Mathew 18:20).

Furthermore, a physical place is necessary to accommodate activities like the Lord's supper. In the upper room after the supper, our Lord wrapped a towel around Him, took water in a basin, and washed the disciples' feet (John 13:4-5). The example the Lord set is used metaphorically to serve one another. Without discounting such applications, we obey the Lord's instruction when we enquire of one another's wellbeing when we come together for meetings. How much of such "washing of feet" is possible over Zoom?

Some assemblies have started to hold Gospel meetings via Zoom and post the recordings on social media. The use of such digital platforms to reach more people with the Gospel message seems justifiable. It, however, raises several issues that are subtly getting normalised within the Assembly circle. One is, we are starting to like the idea of preaching from the comforts of our homes. Recall the words of the Lord when he sent the seventy in pairs –

Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

The Lord likens His work to a harvest. Harvesting is labour intensive work, at least in those days, needing a large number of labours. It happens in the field; therefore, the labours needed to be in the field. The field in the context of the Assembly is the local area. Each Assembly is responsible to the Lord for the harvest in their area. Hence, our preaching and good works need to be locally focused. We need to ask ourselves whether preaching to faceless people in the virtual space is what the Lord is asking of us.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 14, Apostle Paul emphasises the importance of doing all things to the edification of the assembly. Note, the emphasis here is the entire assembly or the local body of the Lord. Therefore, the acid test for these virtual activities is how edifying they are to the assembly members. It is worth stopping to ask ourselves whether these virtual meetings are helping or burdening the believers. The context of chapter 14 is the use of tongues or languages in the meetings, which is discouraged without proper translation. A language is a system based on syntactic rules. Communication is effected only when the speaker and the listeners know to follow the rules. The Internet is a communication channel, carrying the spoken words (of the meetings) from the speakers to the listeners. This is achieved by using specific hardware and software combined with established protocols. For communication to take

effect, the speaker and listeners need to have and know how to handle the technology. If there are members who find this challenging, then we come under the ruling of 1 Corinthians 14: 27 & 28

If any man speaks in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most *by* three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

While there are no direct scriptures concerning holding virtual meetings, we must judge for ourselves whether such exercises edify our local gathering.