

## Excused Absences

by John Isaac Edwards

In the first century, Christians assembled together regularly (Acts 4:31; 11:26; 14:27; 20:7-8; 1 Cor. 5:4; 11:17-18; 14:23, 26). The Hebrew writer commanded, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...” (Heb. 10:25). Some church members today offer all kinds of excuses for being absent when the saints are assembled. So we take a look at *excused absences*.

1) **Where Is the Scripture?** Whatever excuse is made for one’s absence, where is the Scripture that justifies the absence? A good exercise for each of us is to make a list of reasons, along with Scriptures, that grant exemption or release from the command to assemble. We are not talking about what some churches may tolerate, but what the Scriptures allow.

2) **Ways Some Members Excuse Absences.** There are about as many excuses for absences as there are people absent. Here are a few I’ve heard over the years.

*“I was sick.”* Would this sickness keep you from work, from school, or from play? It’s strange that some are too sick to assemble with the saints, but not too sick to do other things they

really want to do. Is it possible to be affected with disease or ill health to the point of being unable to assemble with the saints? Sure it is. But that doesn’t excuse one’s missing for every ache and pain.

*“I’m shut-in.”* Some seem to have misconceptions about who a shut-in is. A shut-in is “a person who is confined to home, a room, or bed because of illness or incapacity” (*Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary*). Those on the “shut-in” list who attend sporting events, eat at restaurants, or shop at the mall or grocery store really are not shut-in. It’s odd that some can sit through a basketball game, but are unable to sit through the services of the Lord’s church!

*“I had to work.”* Are there some exceptional situations that may arise beyond one’s control? Absolutely. A doctor, for example, may be called away for emergency surgery, or a firefighter to rescue a family from a burning building. There’s a difference in that and the doctor who schedules office visits or the firefighter that sits at the firehouse waiting for a fire when the saints are assembled. Paul was a tentmaker by occupation (Acts

18:3), yet “assembled with the church” (Acts 11:25-26; 20:7). Can you imagine him missing services for tent making? There may be some jobs I just don’t need to take so as to be faithful in worshipping God. What’s more important?

*“I had a ball game.”* Why is it that some will not miss a ball game, but will miss the services of the church? Is dribbling, passing and shooting a ball of greater importance than singing, praying and studying? Jesus said, “...whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:33). One who is not willing to give up a ball game may just not be able to be the Lord’s disciple.

*“I was away on vacation.”* Where is the Scripture that teaches we have intermission from our responsibilities to the Lord? Some will choose a vacation destination where there is no church, or go to a place where there is a faithful church, but just not attend. There are others who plan their vacations so as to be with faithful brethren at every service while they are away. Why the difference? Has the Lord ever taken a vacation from you?

*“I had a family gathering.”* The church is God’s family (Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:19). There is a family gathering every time the church is assembled. Why not bring your family members with you? (Jn. 1:40-42). If they don’t want to come with you, leave them behind and, by your example, teach them a good lesson about “seeking first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Mt. 6:33).

*“I’ve not totally abandoned.”* Some have the idea that to be guilty of “forsaking the assembling” (Heb. 10:25), one would have to totally quit assembling with no intention of coming back. Can a person just attend once a week, once a month, once a year, drop in every couple of years and say, “I haven’t abandoned”? In Matthew 27:46, Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Though the Father abandoned the Son only one time for a brief time, it was still a forsaking.

**3) *Would It Have Been Accepted in the First Century?***  
Paul and Barnabas “assembled themselves with the church” in

Antioch (Acts 11:26). Would the excuse you offer for not attending have been made or accepted by them? In New Testament days, brethren assembled at the risk of persecution and death! And some today offer the pettiest of excuses for not assembling with the saints! If absenteeism wasn’t justifiable then, what makes you think it is today?

**4) *When You Are Absent.***

There’s more to being absent than many may realize. When you choose not to attend: you have violated a spiritual shalt not (Heb. 10:25), sinned “wilfully” (Heb. 10:26), failed to consider brethren to provoke to love and to good works (Heb. 10:24), neglected to exhort one another (Heb. 10:25), not taught and admonished one another in song (Col. 3:16), not fulfilled the command to remember the Lord’s death and lay by in store, when absent on the Lord’s day, (1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2), missed an opportunity to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18), encourage visitors, witness baptisms and erring brethren restored, set a good example, and the list goes on.

It all boils down to one question: where is your treasure? Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt. 6:21).

***Why Attend Every Service?***

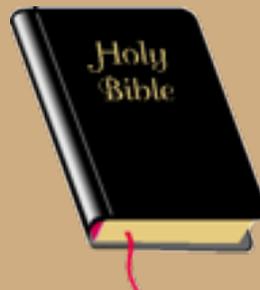
- To be with the Lord.
- To follow the example of early Christians.
- To be made stronger.
- Out of consideration for others.
- Because of what I would miss if I didn’t.
- To put first things first.
- To set a good example.
- For the people I have invited.
- Because of the importance of the church.
- I want to do all I can.
- To help the church grow.
- The Lord could come at any time.
- It’s the least I can do for all the Lord has done for me.
- To be faithful to God.

**The Terre Haute **SPEAKER**** is published weekly by the church of Christ at Terre Haute, Indiana.

**Assembling At:**  
4017 E Margaret DR  
Terre Haute, IN 47803  
[Exit 11 (I-70) W on HWY 46,  
W on Margaret DR approx. 1 mile]

**Assembling Times:**  
Sunday @ 10:00 a.m. & 3:00 p.m.  
Wednesday @ 7:00 p.m.

***Come be with us!***



***We Speak Where the Bible Speaks.***

***We Are Silent Where the Bible Is Silent.***

***We Do Bible Things in Bible Ways.***

**[www.churchofchristatterrehaute.com](http://www.churchofchristatterrehaute.com)**