

Romans 12 (1-20-11)

THE UNASSEMBLED ASSEMBLY ERROR

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Pride keeps us from receiving from others in the body; and it also keeps us from benefiting others in the body, to our fullest potential. We must avoid all things that would distract us from serving the Lord's assembly in whatever ways we have been called and equipped. We therefore need these constant, Biblical exhortations concerning the body of Christ, so we may avoid laziness, pride, and everything else that would limit our service to the body.

Satan seeks to neutralize our output. One of his goals is to keep us from assembling with a true, godly church; or at least to hinder our service when we do regularly assemble. In light of these devilish goals, I have written tracts in the past, and preached sermons on the subject of "surviving the local church." We must always keep this higher view of things in our minds. We must not get caught up in only the things we can see with our physical eyes. We must realize the spiritual designs of our adversary:

Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Daniel 10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Clearly, there are unseen enemies using whatever they can use to accomplish their purposes. If we are not mindful of these unseen enemies, we may get caught up in smaller controversies, and end up outside the body, or at least neutralized in our service, totally unaware that we have been sifted as wheat by our adversary!

We know that Satan is subtle and deceptive. If cannot take advantage of our pride, he will try to use false doctrine to keep us from serving God in the body. Saul, in the OT, deceived himself into thinking he was doing God's will when he sacrificed unto God without waiting on Samuel. There was an apparent delay, and the situation was dire.

Later, he fell into the same sin when he was commanded to slay the Amalekites and touch none of the spoil (1 Samuel 15). Again, Saul felt he was doing the will of God. He even greeted Samuel with, "Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD." But God said to *utterly* destroy everything and everyone. And Saul said that he did *utterly* destroy...the *garbage*. Later, he sheepishly admitted that he did not exactly destroy everything; but he argued that he wanted to have something to sacrifice unto God. As for the asses (unclean), he blamed the rest on the *people*. He could not control what *they* did. How easily we can deceive ourselves when we want to justify our own self-will! This is why we must renew our minds and prove the perfect will of God.

Satan was not able to fool Jesus Christ as easily as he fooled king Saul:

Matthew 4:6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for **it is written**, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, **Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.**

Having seen how the Devil can use good intentions (and even Bible verses!) to cause us to presume upon God, sin, etc, it will be helpful to always keep his goals and ways in our minds:

2 Corinthians 2:10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

The above Scripture ties all of this together with the earlier points. Satan was trying to keep the man who had repented from being accepted *back into the body*. He was trying it use the lack of forgiveness, resentment, or false zeal, in order to accomplish his goals. We, therefore, must not be ignorant or forgetful of Satan's devices. He desires for us to be disconnected from the body, so we may be neutralized in our service; he also want us alienated from the blessings and edification that others in the body can bring to us.

One way the devil accomplishes this is by false doctrine concerning the church (body):

Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of **the body, the church**: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

The church is a foundational doctrine. It is one that Satan will often seek to assault:

Psalms 11:3 If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

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1 Timothy 3:15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself **in** the house of God, which is **the church** of the living God, **the pillar and ground of the truth.**

The doctrine concerning the church is foundational to our Christian lives. And notice, that the church is something that Timothy must behave himself *in*. Paul has written instructions concerning officers, and many other things concerning church business and order. The *church* is obviously a local assembly of believers, willing to live for God publicly, who are committed and accountable to each other in obedience to Jesus. The church is not just a good idea; it is a commandment from God:

Hebrews 10:24 And let us **consider one another** to provoke unto love and to good works:
25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they **assembled themselves with the church**, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

The last words of Jesus are addressed to churches:

Revelation 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things **in the churches...**

How will Satan seek to accomplish his goal of getting believers to forsake the Lord's assembly? One way is by lowering the importance or estimation of the local church in their eyes:

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Therefore, any Scriptures that contain praise or important exhortations concerning the Lord's body, are applied, wrongly, to a *universal, unassembled assembly*. Many radio and television preachers (or national ministries) have helped forward this idea. Tithes and offerings are to be brought into the *storehouse*:

Malachi 3:10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Many of the ministries were thus tempted to undermine the local church and substitute in its place a universal unassembled assembly of all believers on earth. They therefore began to apply Bible verses concerning the Lord's church to this universal, unassembled church. This teaching has become so widespread (with so many mini\$trie\$ on television and radio promoting it), that believers everywhere think of a universal, unassembled assembly when they hear the words "the church" or "the body of Christ." The true, local church has been successively minimized by Satan.

What is the result? The sad result is that service to the local church is neutralized! A younger generation has arisen that despised church attendance and giving and serving in local church ministries. It has been said that less than 6% of Christians in the U.S. tithe (spending more on dog-food than support for the local church). And what effect does this have on pastors? Is not an extra temptation to compromise or soften the truth?

Notice some Bible verses concerning the church:

1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in **the churches**: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.
35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands **at home**: for it is a shame for women to speak in **the church**.

We see that one's home is not the church - but it would be the church according to the modern theory!:

1 Corinthians 1:2 Unto **the church of God which is at Corinth**, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

Romans 16:1 I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant **of the church which is at Cenchrea**:

The church in these verses refer to local assemblies of believers, committed to one another in obedience to Jesus:

3 John 1:10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and **casteth them out of the church**.

This verse must refer to a local assembly.

Where then is the modern idea taught in the Bible? Many see it in Ephesians 5:

Ephesians 5:23 For **the husband** is the **head** of **the wife**, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of **the body**.

24 Therefore as **the church** is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.
25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

Because the words "the church" are singular in this verse, a great, universal, unassembled assembly is assumed. But is this view justified contextually? Why not also assume a great, universal husband and a great, universal wife, for these individual local wives are called in this same context, "the husband" and "the wife." The Bible often speaks of local, separate things in an institutional sense:

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honourable in all, and **the bed** undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

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Another Scripture that is used to teach this "universal unassembled assembly" idea, is found in our text for tonight:

5 So we, being many, are **one body** in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8...he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Verse 5 is used to support the doctrine of the "universal one body that is not assembled as a body." A quick reading might indeed appear to support this interpretation (even though the general context is against it, sense *ruling* only has value in a local body). But let us, as in Ephesians 5, examine the specific context:

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Verse 4 is using the physical body to picture the church body. Yet, the language Paul uses for the physical body is the same language that he uses for the church body!

"We have many members in one body..."

Do these words mean that we all have one, giant, mystical, universal, physical body? New-agers may believe this - but Bible believers do not! The one body is contrasted to the many body parts. We (meaning locally, and individually) have one body with many body parts that work together. Each part is needed. In the same way (i.e. "so we"),

"...being many, are one body in Christ..."

This does not refer to some universal, unassembled body any more than the previous verse refers to a giant, universal physical body that we are all apart of! It means that *we*, in whatever, local church body we are active members of, are members of all the other parts (members) in that same body. If we will give this body our best, we must not get high-minded, but we must serve others with diligence and humility, knowing likewise our need of everyone else in the body!

Satan is therefore rebuked in his game! The local body is set upon its true foundation, and its importance is not undermined or downplayed. We must therefore guard against anything that will try to dislocate us from the local body - or seek to minimize our service to it, or our benefits from it.

Part of renewing our minds is to awaken our thinking to expose the devil's ultimate agenda. We may get caught up in the present, and in whatever is before us:

Philippians 4:2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

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However Satan, no doubt, has other designs when he causes us to get bitter or resentful with others. A possible sign of this deception already working its leaven is when we begin to speak of the whole church as disconnected from ourselves: "You people at this church," "the people of the church," etc. Never lose sight of the devil's ultimate agenda:

Jude 1:16 These are murmurers, complainers...

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

Examine every discouragement or resentment in this light, and watch for Satan trying to get an advantage, as he seeks to disconnect the coals of fire from the other coals!

Jesus therefore arms us with instructions:

Matthew 18:4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, **tell it unto the church**: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

The practice of these commands and procedures, in true humility, with a constant desire to "gain thy brother" (v. 15) will help us to survive the local church. And the goal is not to simply assemble ourselves diligently, but to make the most of our assembling!

Most of the promoters of the universal, unassembled assembly view, teach that the church was not even brought into existence until the day of Pentecost in Acts! But if the alleged universal, invisible church began at Pentecost - it must, according to this doctrine - have an O.T. commission (Mt. 28), O.T. baptism, etc. (advocates of this view see the Gospels as O.T.):

Luke 16:16 The law and the prophets were **until John**: **since that time** the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

On Pentecost, people were *added* to something already present:

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were **added** unto them about three thousand souls.

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added to the church** daily such as should be saved.

- The alleged universal, unassembled assembly would be a corrupt church, since all believers - even those walking in great sins - are supposedly members.
- It has no instructions, no officers, no ordinances, etc.
- The whole idea (regardless of the good men with good intentions who embrace it) is used by Satan to destroy the pillar and ground of the truth - the Lord's church - doctrinally, so Christians will become private, disconnected, weak, unaccountable, etc.