

A Clever Scheme

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The average “Christian” gathering is so far off the mark that many have tried to make “church” attendance under the tutelage of the clergy mandatory - at times persecuting, ostracizing, oppressing or even executing those who would not comply with that sect’s “Sabbath laws.” “Forsake not the assembly...” (Heb. 10:25), they say. Let’s look at that passage more carefully so that we may be freed once and for all time from that lie of the rulers of darkness.

When we examine this passage in Hebrews, we must first notice that this instruction to assemble is given in two contexts: First, we may boldly enter the Holiest (a reference to the innermost part of God’s dwelling place) because Jesus’ blood has purified us. (Heb. 10:19) That is (to use John’s vernacular), because Jesus has removed the barrier between sinful man and holy God, we may abide in Him. Second, we *have*

...a High Priest over the house of God... (Heb. 10:21)

We don’t need a priest (clergy) ruling over the house of God and we certainly don’t need a substitute god because the role of priest over the people of God has been completely filled by Christ. There is neither need nor place for any other - neither man nor spiritual being - in that capacity. (see also 1 Tim. 2:5)

With these two understandings in place, the writer gives three instructions, the third of which is the one about assembly.

1) *Let us draw near to God.* (Heb. 10:22)

2) *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope in Him who is faithful.* (Heb. 10:23)

3) And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day [of the Lord’s return and His judgment] approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:24-29)

It is indeed amazing how much different this passage sounds when one reads it in its proper context! Let us analyze it further by turning it into a formula that shows the direction of thought of the author. It would read something like this:

Because of [A,B], let us [1,2,3], not [-3] but [3a] or else [C]. [C₁] = 10; [C₂] = 10¹⁰. [C₂] = [X,Y,Z]

Now, let's put that back into English.

Because:

[A] we may boldly enter into the fullness of God and

[B] Christ is our High Priest,

let us:

[1] draw near to God,

[2] hold fast our faith, and

[3] stir one another to love and good works;

not:

[-3] forsaking our assembling together

but:

[3a] exhorting one another

Or else:

[C] expect judgment from God that devours His enemies.

[C₁] The judgment for rejecting Moses' law was death.

[C₂] The judgment for:

[X] trampling Christ underfoot,

[Y] devaluing the blood of Christ, and

[Z] insulting the Spirit of grace

is exponentially worse.

If we look at the penalty alone -

...a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries... (Heb. 10:27) -

we must conclude that this is indeed a serious offense. If we were to apply the “church’s” spin - that the weekly lecture given by the clergy is “the assembly” and “not being in church” is “forsaking the assembly” - then we could reasonably conclude that those exiting the “church” building should be the ones to expect to be hit by lightning or, at least, a speeding truck! After all, every time they leave the “church” or miss a sermon, they’re “forsaking the assembly.” (This is often exactly how this passage is explained by “church” leaders!) But, as we examine the passage in its context, since there are three exhortations, we must conclude that the penalty applies to those who fail to obey all three exhortations, not just one of the three. Under the “church” spin, the penalty - fiery judgment - does not match up to the crime and the “church” application breeds only fear and guilt.

So what does it mean to *assemble*? While there is not a point for point comparison, it can nonetheless be stated that points [X], [Y] and [Z] correspond to points -[1], -[2] and -[3]. That is, one who does not [1] draw near, does not [2] hold fast and does not [3] stir up *is* one who [X] tramples, [Y] devalues and [Z] insults. Using the same kind of comparison of the text to itself, it is thus true that [3] stirring up and [3a] exhorting one’s brothers and sisters in Christ *is* the same activity as *assembling together*. Now we have a much more clear definition, from the Scripture itself, just what *assembly* means.

So with this correct view of *assembly*, let us now picture ourselves in a usual “church” “service.” Unless one is the “pastor” or someone who enjoys his favor, is there any chance we might truly *assemble* in that “church” “service”? That is, could we actively stir up and exhort the other people in the audience? (And that’s assuming we actually know somebody in that crowd well enough to *consider* what might stir them into godly, loving action! - Heb. 10:24) No! We would quickly be the recipients of the zealous attentions of the “bouncer ministry”! One simply **cannot** *assemble* (that is *consider*, *stir up* and *exhort*) within a modern “church” “service” - it is forbidden to do so in the average “church” gathering today.

Let us look more deeply at these ideas contained in true assembly. What does it mean to “consider” one another. Jesus instructed us to consider the ravens and the lilies of the field and be strengthened in our faith in God. (Lk. 12:24, 27 - same Greek word, *katanoeo* [2657], meaning to “observe fully.”) We are to so pay attention to one another that we truly know what the other needs to grow in his relationship with Christ! Staring at the back of someone’s head while enduring this year’s 50th or 100th or 150th lifeless sermon at “church” does not constitute “observing fully.” In addition, coming to “church” because of a selfish desire to be “fed” by the “pastor” - and allowing *him* to attend to the others’ needs - is considering one’s self, not one another. The few minutes given to greeting one another (the “fellowship” moment in some “churches”) is not adequate to enable such consideration - neither is listening to Sister Beth’s gossip reports over the telephone. To consider one another, we must be in one another’s lives. There simply is no other way to accomplish this instruction.

What does it mean to “stir up” one another? The only other usage of this Greek word (*paroxusmos* [3948]) in a similar context is Paul’s instruction to fathers to not provoke or stir up their children to anger. (Eph. 6:4) It is the idea of inciting to action. Bringing people to routinely and passively sit in a pew or chair and listen to a lifeless (no matter how bouncy or peppy) sermon is not inciting to action. And anyone who does manage to stir up any of the people enough to get them out of their pews and out of the “church” building to actually do what Christ is commanding them to do is going to be ostracized, criticized and ultimately driven off after being labeled as disruptive and divisive!

What does it mean to “exhort” one another? This word is used extensively throughout the New Testament so let us choose a few facets of this word so that, having laid the preceding as a foundation, we may see the fallacy of seeing the “church” merely as an imperfect collection of fallible human beings and that we may more accurately discern the clever trap called “church” that has been laid before the feet of the people of Christ. To exhort (Greek *parakaleo* [3870]) is to encourage, warn, admonish the people as God sees their needs to be. It fits hand and glove with stirring up to action – action that is in keeping with the fruit and character of God’s Spirit.

Jude’s fiery letter is an exhortation to contend earnestly for the faith which was given once for all. (Jude 3) After Paul was stoned at Lystra, he and Barnabas exhorted the disciples at Derbe saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) John the Baptist’s fiery warnings and practical applications are called exhortations. (Lk. 3:18) Paul writes exhorting all who follow Christ to abound more and more in how to live pleasing to God. (1 Ths. 4:1) And this is but a sample.

What happens when, as is true where the “church” produces only passive listeners, exhortation from God’s fiery and uncompromising messengers is repressed, forbidden or funneled through the ear-scratching, crowd-pleasing “pastor”? The writer of Hebrews gives us a clue: “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but *exhort one another* daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. 3:12-13 - emphasis added)

Let us note with grave sobriety that all the elements of the great falling away from the faith, the apostasy, are mentioned here. Departing from the living God because of unbelief. (see 1 Tim. 4:1-3) The deceitfulness of sin. (see 2 Ths. 2:3, 11-12) This is the backdrop against which we live in the last days before Christ returns. (Mt. 24:3-4)

But let us take heed to this instruction. It is written to all brethren and it is a primary protection against falling away from the faith through deception. We are to exhort one another wherever we see sin gaining a foothold of control over our brothers. It is to be obeyed by all – not just by the “pastor,” the “church” staff and those who support them having bought into the deceptive “church” paradigm. That the “church” prevents and prohibits us from obeying this instruction to exhort one another is no accident. It is evidence of who the true author of “church” really is.

There is yet one more layer of deception here. Luke records:

When [Barnabas] came [to Antioch] and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged [exhorted, warned, urged – (3870)] them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. (Acts 11:23)

Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted [urged, warned, consoled, encouraged – (3870)] the brethren with many words and strengthened them. (Acts 15:32)

Exhorting and thereby strengthening the disciples of Christ is a key aspect of the work of the prophets. (see also 1 Cor. 14:3) By eliminating the exhortation of one another from our midst, the “church” becomes the tool by which the prophets are prevented from attaining to spiritual maturity in their gifting and the prophets are thus stunted and effectively silenced - except for those who persist against the “church” and suffer the attending persecution and

ex-communication. As a result, whatever genuine saints there are in the “church” are not being completely and adequately equipped for ministry and are prevented from growing up into the fullness of the measure of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

Isn't it amazing that one simple disobedience (failure to exhort one another) can have such far-reaching, devastating consequences? And when we see the “church” training people to disobey this instruction, asking us to believe this came about by mere coincidence is like asking us to believe a tornado can rip through a junk yard and produce a working 747 or that life can spontaneously produce itself in some pond scum. No, it is much more reasonable to believe that the father of lies, Satan, the devil, has successfully deceived men into doing his will yet again.

One of Satan's most effective deceptions has been to get us to believe he is not very proficient at what he does. He is both a liar and a murderer (Jn. 8:44) and those who underestimate his ability to deceive and kill may yet discover this truth. We can only pray that we make this discovery before it is too late to defend ourselves.

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