

# Do We Need the Church?

Romans 12:3-5

## Introduction

Harry Ironside was preaching about the return of Christ one night. As he was in prayer, he was conscious of a woman getting up and leaving the service. ‘When I finished my prayer and went to greet the folks at the door, I found a woman pacing back and forth in the lobby.’

She came up to him with a rebuke: “How dare you to pray like that — ‘Come Lord Jesus?’ I don’t want him to come. It would break in on all my plans. How dare you!”

Ironside responded, “My dear woman, Jesus is coming whether you like it or not.- if you know Him and love Him, your heart will say, “Come, Lord Jesus!” - - - and you will make every effort to be ready when that day comes

Jesus is coming back – and will separate the wheat from the chaff

Some will hear – ‘enter in to the joy of your master’

Others will hear – ‘Depart from me you who practice lawlessness’

Reverend Lura Groen – pastor at Grace Evangelical in Houston [ELCA] – Groen is a woman married to a biological woman – who identifies as a man

She also sponsors an LGBT support group on the side

As far as Groen’s theology - - - She says that Jesus never meant us to take John 14:6 literally – ‘I am the way . . .’

She says that Muslims / Hindus / Jews and even atheists have relationships with God that are just as valid as any Christian’s

**Pastor Tom Brock: 'I never thought that the Lutheran Church of my youth would become this evil.'**

The St. Paul Area synod of ELCA will be electing a new bishop soon  
3 out of the 5 candidates offered are partnered in homosexual relationships [it is a religion]

Jesus is coming back!

Hebrews 10:23 - 'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.'

Hebrews 10:24-25 - 'and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.'

The author of Hebrews says our faith is shown by holding to the truth - - - gathering together with the people of God in worship - - - all the more as we see the day drawing near

A lot of our Christianity flows from the way we view the church

In Romans 12 – Paul begins to zero in on the church itself – and our role in it / our participation

One writer outlines Romans 12

vv. 1, 2 – The Christian and His relation to God

vv. 3-13 – The Christian and his relation to the church [other believers]

vv. 14—21 – The Christian and his relation to a hostile world

If we have embraced the Savior - - - we have been made part of the church - - - how are we to function in that church?

### I. Humility - v. 3

Paul begins this section referring to the grace that has been given him

The church is a work of grace

If we are in the church – it is grace that has put us here

Grace is utterly undeserved – it does not come to us because we deserve it

We could just as readily be a drunk on the streets / one of the many lost in sexual confusion / sexually immoral / driven by anger / lust / greed

It is grace that has called us out of the world into this community -- - the word for church in the Greek is εκκλησια - - - 'called out ones'

The church makes a claim to seeing the world for what it really is – and offers a new and better way of living – one that ultimately glorifies God / lives in submission to Him

'through the grace given me.' – v. 3

Paul was called by grace to be an Apostle – even though he had been persecuting the church

Galatians 1:15 - 'But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles . . .'

Paul's entire ministry is an outgrowth of grace given to Him – it was God's doing

Paul had been running in the opposite direction - - - when God in His grace – called him to be an apostle

Paul taught the same principles in church after church – doctrine / ethics

He wrote to the Corinthians

**I Corinthians 4:17 - 'For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.'**

Paul recognized something we would call apostolic authority

He was part of the foundation of the church

**Ephesians 2:20 - 'Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.'**

The question comes up: Do we [as Christians] have to accept everything Paul says?

Are we free to say: 'I disagree with Paul'?

What if Paul was wrong about this doctrine / etc. - - homosexuality or women preachers / etc.

It didn't take long for the church to recognize the authority of Paul's epistles

**Colossians 4:16 - 'And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.'**

The church collected his letters into the NT – as authoritative body of teaching on the Christian faith – we are studying one of those letter – the letter to the Romans

When Jesus originally chose the twelve apostles – it was a purposeful move

**Mark 3:14 - 'He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach.'**

They were eye-witnesses of His miracles – they became witnesses to the resurrection

Acts 2:32 - 'This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.'

Paul was called shortly after – on the Damascus road – He became a witness of the risen Lord / hearing directly from Jesus – [blinding light]

Acts 9:4-5 - 'And he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" and He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

Jesus Himself spoke to Ananias to lay hands on Paul – so he could regain his sight

Acts 9:15 - 'But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.'

That's who Paul was – a chosen instrument of God – 'grace was given him'

As the church – we recognize Paul's apostolic authority – and the authority of his writings

One area where Paul is being ignored is in calling the church to have male pastors

Interestingly – if you ask google which denomination has the highest percentage of women pastors – it says the Unitarian / Universalist church – 57%-60% - [which is not a true church]

About 35-40% of ELCA pastors are women  
30% of United Methodist clergy are women  
UCC – around 50%

Paul wrote a letter to Timothy on church practices

I Timothy 2:12-14 - 'I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.'

James White: 'Many mainline denominations have concluded either that this text is completely conditioned upon 1<sup>st</sup> century culture, and hence is no longer relevant, or, more honestly, in my opinion, have dropped their view of the authority and nature of Scripture so low that their leaders and teachers are given the freedom to say, "I disagree with Paul." In any case, many women "priests" and "bishops" and "reverends" dot the religious landscape.'

In Romans 12 - Paul cautions against an attitude of high-mindedness

Thinking too highly of ourselves is pride and God hates pride

**Proverbs 16:5 - 'Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.'**

An abomination is something God despises / hates

A mind renewed by the Word of God is a humble mind

But – it's not humility to accept every foul and contrary position into the church under the banner of humility or love

The humble mind says – what the Bible says – that is my guide

**Isaiah 66:2 - ". . . But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.'**

It's pride to set ourselves above the Scriptures - - - and say – 'I have a better way' – than Paul or Jesus / etc.

In the OT – one of the kings of Judah who did what was right in the sight of the Lord – King Uzziah - - - but after experiencing so many victories - - - his heart was lifted up in pride – and he thought he could do whatever he wanted – but he found out different

**II Chronicles 26:16 - 'But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.'**

That was a foolish move – and the priests tried to prevent him – telling him it was not for kings to burn incense – God has a particular order and structure to their worship - - - the priests were to be descendants of Aaron / the king was of the line of Judah / etc.

The priests tried to stop him

**I Chronicles 26:19 - 'But Uzziah with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the Lord had smitten him.'**

His pride – caused him to first – disregard God's Word / then secondly – it led to his leprosy

If we are going to proclaim to the world that we have a better way than the ways of the world - - - we must walk in humility – in submission to God's Word

MLJ: 'The church is the body of Christ, and therefore we should always think of ourselves not as isolated individuals, but as parts of this great body.'

We have been brought into God's church

It's easy to be a lone ranger Christian - - - never mixing it up with other Christians - - - never needing to forgive another – or show grace to another - - or pray for another – or disciple another – or teach or encourage another . . .

The lone ranger Christian's mantra is: leave me be!

But – Jesus came not just to call individuals to salvation but to build His church

C.S. Lewis: 'The New Testament does not envisage solitary religion: some kind of regular assembly for worship and instruction is everywhere taken for granted in the Epistles. So we must be regular practicing members of the Church.' [Letters, p. 515]

For the teaching of the NT to be operable in our lives - - - we have to be a regular part of a church body - - - gathering for worship

There often seems to be a kind of law of reciprocation in the church – where we get out of it what we put into it

If you put love into the church - - - you find love flowing back to you

If you put service into the church – you find others serving you

If you commit yourself to other believers – they become committed to you

Don Whitney: 'I have a good friend who is in the construction business and is also a skilled handyman at home. For a while - his wife was a Christian while he was not - and he used to tell her that he never wanted to join a church because he was certain that he would constantly be asked to fix something for the church. Then after he became a Christian - he began repairing things all over the church building and at the pastor's home without being asked. Why? Because Jesus Christ had changed his life and had given him a concern for the needs of others, especially those of his Christian family.' [Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church, p. 125]

That's how grace operated in that man's heart

Grace will lead us to worship with one another / bear with one another / encourage one another / and serve one another

## II. Members of the Body - vv. 4-5

Paul assumes we will be part of the body of Christ – functioning in relation to one another

There are many members on this team – in this body – carrying out different functions and roles and purposes

That is one of the great beauties of the church

\*\*\* Every single believer has something to bring to the table – to contribute to the overall mission

Jesus came to build the church – a collective body of redeemed sinners who make up a distinct grouping of humanity – and who confess Jesus as Lord

Adrian Rogers: 'We belong to Jesus and to one another. It is in the context of the body that the various members discover their function. A hand severed from the body is not only useless but also grotesque. Gifts are best discovered in the fellowship of the church. Get active in the church, and your gift will come to the surface.'

Paul here introduces briefly the idea of spiritual gifts

I Corinthians 12:7 - 'But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.'

A gift is something we use to build up the body / another believer

I Corinthians 12:17-21 - 'If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

If you had started dating your wife - - - and you sat across the table from her at a restaurant – and you looked up and she had turned into one big eyeball

You'd say – 'Wait a minute – what happened to the rest of you?'

When someone pulls away from church fellowship – the body of Christ is incomplete - - - He needs his hands / his feet / etc.

So – we are reminded that in our ecclesiology – **church** isn't just about coming to get fed – it's also about coming to serve and encourage one another

To bear corporate witness to the lordship of Christ in song

When a Christian stays at home away from the church gathered for a period of time – even if they listen to good teaching . . . [this doesn't apply to elderly shut-ins]

They still are doing something fundamentally opposite to the Christian faith – they are forsaking the body life of church fellowship – failing to exercise their gifts for the greater good of the body of Christ

People will sometimes avoid commitment to a local fellowship – by always looking / always searching – church shopping

Story is told of a man stranded on a deserted island – a ship finally came by and rescued him  
The captain noticed there were three huts – and so he asked the man what they were

The first one is my home  
The 2<sup>nd</sup> one is my church  
The 3<sup>rd</sup> one is the church I used to attend

C.S. Lewis points out the danger of church shopping incessantly [Screwtape Letters]

C.S. Lewis: 'Surely you know that if a man can't be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighborhood looking for the church that 'suits' him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches.'

C.S. Lewis: 'The search for a 'suitable' church makes the man a critic where the Enemy wants him to be a worshiper.' [Screwtape Letters]

Why do we go to church? / we come to worship / sit under the word / to serve

Spiritual gifts are God's way of saying: plug in – serve – bless – encourage – teach – exhort – show mercy – lift up – show up

God has a place for each of us in the body of Christ – a place to serve / something to contribute

God has sovereignly placed you in this body – with your particular gifts and abilities to glorify His name by loving others in Jesus' name

Charles Drew: 'The Caller orders both our hearts and our circumstances, which means that if we look around with a heart to serve, we will invariably find something worth doing that resonates with who we are.'

## Conclusion

Do you and I need the church?

God says we do

Jesus came to die for her [Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her]

We have been brought together by the grace of God into this thing we call the church

We become part of the church when we put our trust in Jesus and His finished work

Mike Erre: 'To those who think stepping on others is the best way to get ahead, we witness to the reality that we gain our lives by losing them and sacrificing for others. To those who seek revenge, we acclaim that forgiveness and reconciliation are refreshing and liberating. To those who are lost in the wilderness of sexual confusion, we proclaim the simple purity and fidelity that exists between bride and groom . . . The church is a place that simply tells the truth about the world and its destiny. Here you find a group of people who resist the values of greed, consumerism, materialism, revenge, power, manipulation, lust, and self-indulgence. The church proclaims and embodies a new and better way.'

He died for me – I'll live for Him

I Peter 2:9, 10 - 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. For you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God.'