



BBC UPDATE

THE UNASSEMBLED ASSEMBLY



Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

Introduction

The Lord's churches are under indirect or passive persecution by Satan through the instrumentality of COVID-19. This clever attack from the "subtle one" has effectively undermined the Lord's *ekklesia*, the visible assembly of baptized believers. What is so troubling in this instance about "*the wiles of the devil*" (Eph. 6:11) is that many pastors and church members have willfully accepted without pause his clever ploy for the sake of the physical wellbeing of the saints. If authorities outside of the NT assembly say "stop meeting for health reasons," the response of many church leaders without a whimper seems to be based on a misplaced love of the physical health for the saints above all else. Of course pastors care for the overall wellbeing of their church members, but pastors conduct funerals regularly because saints die. In the face of COVID-19, any effort to assemble the assembly seems unloving, uncaring and even reckless, and receives the scorn of the world and of some of the saints.

As a pastor with the gift of teaching over a small flock, I would like to address four challenging considerations for the biblical edification and spiritual growth of the audience under the headings of The Design, The Dilemma, The Doctrine, and The Duty.

I. The Design

Only the dimly-illuminated would not understand that COVID-19 is the diabolical attack upon the Lord's assemblies. After all, the Lord Jesus declared to Peter, saying, "*That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" (Mt. 16:18). The Lord knew His enemy and the spiritual battle over His assembly that would immediately ensue. Later, Peter rebuked the Lord about not caring for His health and safety and received a severe reprimand for being the spokesman for Satan (Mt. 16:21-23). Satan's design from the beginning has been to thwart God's plan for His creation, and the *protoevangelium* passage of Gen. 3:15 sets the stage for the major and only real conspiracy of human history, Antichrist against Christ. In this dispensation the "*spirit of antichrist*" (I Jn. 4:3) is opposed to the Lord's assemblies. For instance, the Apostle John averred, saying, "*Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time*" (I Jn. 2:18). Satan's design is to hinder and destroy the ministry of the *ekklesia*, as Paul indicated, saying, "*Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us*" (I Thes. 2:18), and as Peter warned the churches of his audience, saying, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*" (I Pet. 5:8). Even the fallen world along with the ecumenical churches recognized that something nefarious was afoot when churches could not meet on "Easter" Sunday. Satan's primary design is to destroy the Lord's churches, this time through COVID-19, albeit he has secondary purposes as well, such as undermining the world economy, subverting the national election, promoting a cashless society, tracking individuals, and preparing the way for a global dictator, etc. (cf. Dan. 8:23-25).

II. The Dilemma

It is as obvious as it is true that the governments of the world with their overreach have caused a great dilemma for pastors and churches. Pastors are facing a civil, theological, and spiritual dilemma as they consider their responsibility to the national and state governments, their care for the flock, and their obedience to the Lord. First, Paul addressed the need for prayer for governmental leaders to fulfill

Article continued on page 2

their divine responsibilities, saying, *"We may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty"* (I Tim. 2:2). The main responsibility of government is to give security and stability for the inhabitants, and the application of Paul's instruction perpetuated the *Pax Romana* wherein Roman citizens were relatively secure because of the maintenance of law, order, and stability. The Peace of Rome gave Christianity the opportunity to advance by planting churches throughout the empire. Moreover, the Apostle also asserted the responsibility of Christians to obey the governmental laws (Rom. 13:1-7), as did the Apostle Peter (I Pet. 2:13-17). Certainly government has the responsibility to protect the citizenry with clean water, air, and basic hygiene and safety. However, it is hypocritical for any government to claim the care and concern for each citizen's health and safety and yet openly promote the murder of babies (a sophisticated form of Molech worship).

On the other hand, Scripture gives an exception as the first century disciples were forbidden to preach about the name and person of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 4:18; 5:28). Peter queried saying *"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye"* (Acts 4:19), and then later declared about the exception, saying, *"We ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29).

Herein is the dilemma. Have the federal or state governments prohibited the preaching about Jesus? No; they have "merely" prohibited the assembling of assemblies, ranging from almost "house arrest" of the citizenry/congregants to very small or moderate sized gatherings. This has prompted the ramping up of the use of the internet and other media for preaching about the name and Person of Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel (Bible Baptist Church does record messages on her website). Anecdotal reports indicate many have trusted Christ as Saviour. Amen, this is great! The biblical expectation is that when all of the social restrictions are lifted, the Lord's churches will see these converts come forth for baptism and begin to become faithful church-member attendees. However, churches are not preaching stations (as Protestantism teaches and practices) with no assembling, no pastoral oversight, and no personal accountability. One should recognize that after 9/11 there was no national "revival" sweeping across America, albeit some no doubt were saved. The only biblical "revival" that occurs is when the church member submits daily to the Lord being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The Lord Jesus knew about easy professions and committed converts (cf. Jn. 6:66).

Now, the obvious observation and related frustration begins for pastors and churches as some in authority continue to push out the timeline for social interaction. How long will pastors and church members be enslaved to the diabolic doctrine of the invisible church and impossible practice of such? Passive and tacit approval for ecclesiological isolation becomes much more untenable as three weeks becomes two months, and two months becomes a half of a year. Much damage has been done to the Lord's doctrine of the assembled assembly, and some decisions may be irretrievable. How do pastors resolve the theological and spiritual dilemmas of caring for the flock and obeying the Lord? For the future, one should consider the Doctrine of ecclesiology and the Duty of the saints.

III. The Doctrine

Faith and obedience give safety and protection. This truth finds support in many places of the Bible. For instance, the LORD protected the children of Israel from the Egyptian Plagues by putting a division between His people and the Egyptians (Ex. 8:22-24; 9:4-6). The Lord promised Israel that He would bless them physically if they obeyed (Dt. 28:1-14), but send the *"botch"* and *"diseases of Egypt"* upon them if they disobeyed (Dt. 28:27, 60). Moreover, the psalmist affirmed when Israel obeyed the LORD (Ex. 12:12 ff.), saying, *"He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was **not one feeble person** among their tribes"* (Ps. 105:37). Again, this truth finds emphasis when Israel used the health and safety of their vulnerable ones to disobey the LORD, as Jehovah warned, saying, *"Moreover your **little ones**, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it"* (Dt. 1:39; Num. 14:31). Again, in the New



Pastor Cas Reeves

ABOMINABLE PRIDE

"Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 16:5).

When the Lord uses the word "abomination," He is referring to something or someone, which is disgusting or sickening, an abhorrence to the character of godliness. An abomination is the description God gives to a proud and haughty person.

As Christians, we are told: "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward (or unruly) mouth, do I hate" (Proverbs 8:13). If God hates pride, then if we fear the Lord, we will hate pride. We understand, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). And with this wisdom we learn two things that pride brings. First, "when pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2). And second, "only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom" (Proverbs 13:10).

God warns us and exhorts us against being proud in heart. He encourages us to be humble in spirit and to live in the wisdom of

His words. "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them" (Proverbs 14:3). Jesus said, "that which cometh out of man, that defileth man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, murders, deceit, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:20-23). Pride is a terrible thing and every one of us needs to turn to God's for His help to overcome it (Philippians 4:13).

Finally we are told that abominable pride is destructive. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). If God says it, then we can believe it. This kind of pride will bring us down. "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Proverbs 29:23). Many have died and gone to hell because they let pride stand between them and the Savior, Jesus Christ. Today turn to Christ for strength and salvation for in Him is victory (Rom:8:37): "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." –CAR

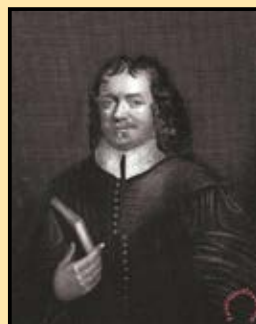


The assembled assembly on Resurrection Sunday

Quotes From the Past:

John Bunyan
1628-1688

Baptist Preacher
and Author



"He who bestows his goods upon the poor shall have as much again, and ten times more."

Testament the Lord warned about physical judgment when the Lord's Table was not observed in sincerity of heart by church members, as Paul stated, saying, *"many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep"* (I Cor. 11:30). Does this mean that no church member will ever get and die of COVID-19? Obviously not, but when he/she does the saint had better be spiritually healthy to meet the Lord. Spiritual health is superior to physical health, as the Apostle John affirmed to Gaius, saying, *"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth"* (III Jn. 1:2).

How does a saint maintain spiritual health? Spiritual health can only be maintained in the institution of spiritual health, the assembled assembly. What is at biblical stake when the Lord's scriptural churches are denied assembling? First and foremost, the assembly (*ekklesia*) is the designated place (location of assembling) on the designated day (Sunday) where and when the God of Creation and Redemption wants to meet with His people: *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Mt. 18:20), *"And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle"* (Rev. 1:13), and *"when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place"* (Acts 2:1). The LORD has always had a visible place for His saints to assemble and meet with Him. Jehovah has met, meets, or will meet with the following: with Adam and Eve in the Garden, with Noah and his family in the Ark, with Moses and the Israelites in the Tabernacle, with Solomon and the Jews in the First Temple, with the exiles in the Second Temple, with the Baptists in the immersionist assembly, with the Tribulation Jews in the Third Temple, with the Millennial saints in the Fourth Temple, and with all saints in the New Jerusalem. In this dispensation His designated day is Sunday, the day of the Resurrection of Christ.

Second, the pastor is the bishop or overseer who must oversee the visible flock: *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood"* (Acts 20:28), and *"he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:11-13). Overseeing the flock cannot realistically be done via Facebook, live streaming, or Skype. Corporate accountability is quickly diminished; heretical preachers' sermons become fodder.

Thirdly, the assembly must come together for fellowship as Luke recorded, saying, *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42). The great apostle of love, John, declared, saying, *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ"* (I Jn. 1:3). How do church members show their love one to another outside of personal contact in the assembly? Again, the apostle of love averred, saying, *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death"* (I Jn. 3:14), and *"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth"* (I Jn. 3:18). The assembly is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; I Cor. 12:27), and as with all bodies she must be visible! Again, the assembly must be convened for the practice of the public ordinances of baptism (Rom. 6:3-5) and of the Lord's Supper. Concerning the latter, Paul taught, saying, *"Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another"* (I Cor. 11:33; see also vv. 17-18, 20, 34; 14:23, 26). Furthermore, corporate prayer is very powerful, as John promoted, saying, *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him"* (I Jn. 5:14-15).

Although some may think that this biblical doctrine is unloving, Paul claimed under inspiration, saying, *"charity...rejoiceth in the truth"* (I Cor. 13:4, 6). Attempting to show love for church members by protecting their physical health **at the detriment** of care for their spiritual health is not biblical love! How do pastors and churches recover from this subtle, passive aggressive, indirect attack upon the Lord's assemblies?

IV. The Duty

Did the Lord Jesus Christ know that pathogens would be passed among believers when He instructed them to assemble, to lay hands on, to give the right hand of fellowship, or to give the holy kiss? What kind of social distancing occurred when the Lord met with His disciples the night before His death? How large was the upper room where the one hundred and twenty met on the day of Pentecost? Was social distancing practiced? Significant to notice that the only social distancing that New Testament assemblies have practiced or should practice is that of church discipline (I Cor. 5:2, 13)!

Once the government permits the invisible church to assemble again [*sic*], pastors and churches would be wise to implement the following:

1. Recognize that some church members may be reluctant to return to the *ekklesia* because of habit, comfort, or complacency.
2. Encourage one another through strong biblical teaching about the spiritual responsibility of being in all the services all the time to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the *ekklesia*, and for each to exercise the individual spiritual gift in service to the Lord.
3. Caution the assembled congregation about visiting the internet and YouTube for sermons from any but their shepherd. There are the potential problems of some seeking sermonic entertainment (read Ezk. 33:30-32) and of others following theological heretics and prophecy gurus (II Pet. 2:1-3). The members must be loyal to the biblical feeding of the flock from their scriptural pastor.
4. Counsel the confused, reluctant, and rebellious members about their failing spiritual health so that biblical social distancing in the form of church discipline will not be needed.

As a pastor, I recognize the autonomy of every New Testament *ekklesia* to deal accordingly, and the importance to grant liberty to every church member to exercise individual stewardship at this time. I also have a great concern and responsibility for the wellbeing of my church membership, including each one's body, soul, spirit! I trust that I will not be misunderstood as I have observed the present phenomenon and have desired to help and encourage the Lord's saints of the assembled assembly movement.



The Strouse Family and the Gagnon Family were thankful to be able to assemble on Resurrection Sunday!



Pastor Strouse and Bill Gagnon celebrated their birthdays with cupcakes. They were born 15 years and 1 day apart!



GROW IN GRACE DEVOTIONAL FOR WOMEN

Grow In Grace

6

Devotional for Women

WAITING UPON THE LORD

Psalms 25:5 Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.

Proverbs 20:22 Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Lamentations 3:25 The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

Reflection: Here are several verses written by King David, King Solomon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah regarding waiting upon the LORD. Interesting that they all have the same view. One would think that this is a lesson the Lord taught each of them.

Do you trust the Lord with your future? Do you

trust Him for the next hour, week, month, year? Do you trust Him for your next breath, with your children, with the provisions you need to make ends meet? Do you get tired of waiting for the Lord and decide to move forward without Him, especially during trials? Do you want the Lord in your circumstances or out of them? How do your choices demonstrate this?

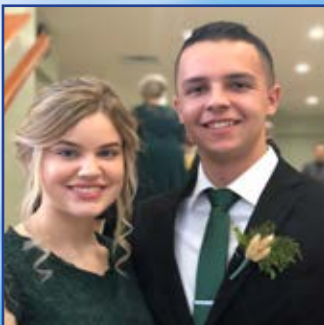
Has God proven Himself to be trustworthy and faithful? Who are some people mentioned in the Bible who 'waited' on the LORD by faith (there are many)?

Challenge: Do you have this testimony of waiting? What is something that you are struggling to wait for? Are you pushing, demanding, and making your way priority? How do these verses encourage you to trust the Lord with your life? Memorize one of these verses.

If you would like to receive Grow in Grace morning devotions emailed to you Monday through Friday, please send an email to: Elenas6259@gmail.com

UPDATE ON THE GAGNON-REEVES WEDDING

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and mandated restrictions put in place by the Governor of the State of Connecticut, the wedding ceremony will only be attended by immediate family. There may have been some confusion regarding the invitations that went out recently, and we wanted to clarify. Many of you had received "Save the Date" cards, and we wanted you to know that Amanda and Mark would still be getting married, however, the guest list has been greatly reduced.



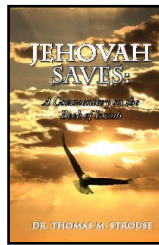
We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

Bill & Kirsten Gagnon

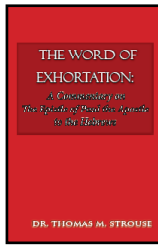
THE BOOK CORNER

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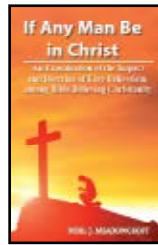
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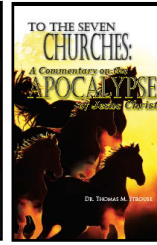
Isaiah
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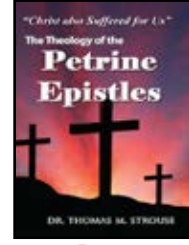
Hebrews
\$30.00



If Any Man Be ... I & II Timothy
\$10.00 \$20.00



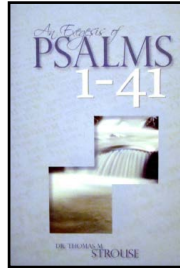
Revelation
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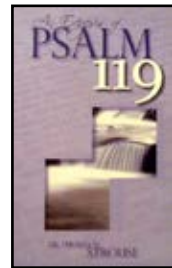
Peter
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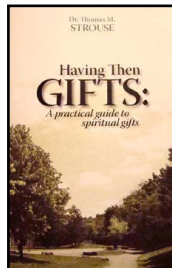
I & II Thessalonians
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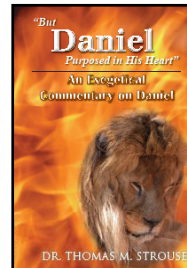
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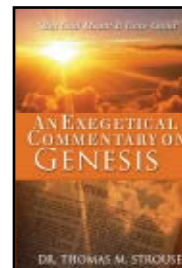
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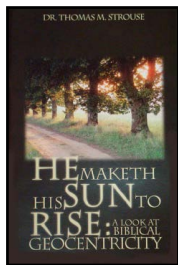
Spiritual Gifts
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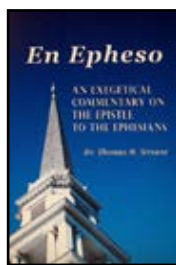
Daniel
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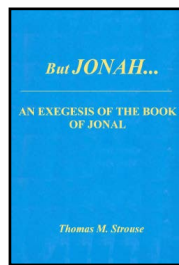
Genesis
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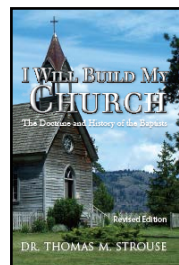
Geocentricity
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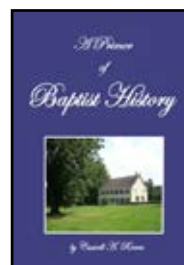
En Epheso
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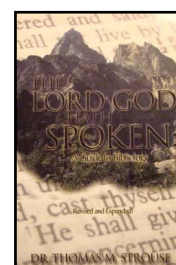
Jonah
\$10.00



I Will Build My Church
\$15.00



A Primer of Baptist History
\$20.00



The Lord God Hath Spoken
\$15.00

BBC 2020 SCHEDULE

May 17
BBTS Graduation

May 30
Gagnon-Reeves
Wedding

June 8-12
Quakertown, PA
"Eschatology"

June 22-26
Quezon City
"Ecclesiastes"

July 20-24
Plymouth, NH
"The History of the
English Bible"

August 24-28
Fairhaven Baptist
Church
"Minor Prophets"

September 7
Labor Day Cookout
Strouse House

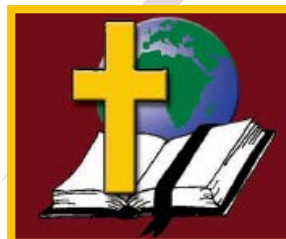
September 14-18
BBC of Nashua, NH
"Bibliology"

October 6-17
Israel Tour
October 25-28
Willow Grove Baptist
Church
"Timeless Truths Bible
Conference"

November 13
BBTS Fall Lecture
Series

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