

## Scriptures and Doctrine :: Eight Scriptural Reasons For House Churches

### **Eight Scriptural Reasons For House Churches - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/22 17:45**

The following is part of an article from New Testament Reformation Fellowship ministries

#### Toward A House Church Theology

That the original church held its meetings primarily in private homes is common knowledge and without dispute (Acts 2 0:20, Ro 16:3-5a, 1Co 16:19, Col 4:15, Phlm 1-2b, Jam 2:3). Less well known is the fact that the early church continued this practice for hundreds of years, long after the New Testament writings were completed. G.F. Snyder observed, "the New Testament Church began as a small group house church (Col. 4:15), and it remained so until the middle or end of the third century. There are no evidences of larger places of meeting before 300." For longer than the United States has existed as a nation, the nearly universal practice of the church was to meet in houses. Again quoting Snyder, "there is no literary evidence nor archaeological indication that any such home was converted into an extant church building. Nor is there any extant church that certainly was built prior to Constantine." Why were house churches the norm for so long?

#### Persecution?

The most common explanation for the existence of early house churches was the pressure of persecution, similar to the situation that exists today in China. However, could there also have been other, equally compelling, reasons for having living room oriented fellowships? Suppose there had been no first century persecution. Are we to assume that church buildings would automatically have been constructed, and that individual congregations would have swelled to enormous size, limited only by the dimensions of the biggest building locally available?

It is often overlooked that the followers of Jesus sometimes met in homes while simultaneously "enjoying the favor of all the people" (Ac 2:47, NIV). Persecution was not always a factor. Based on 1 Corinthians 14:23 ("if the whole church comes together and . . . some unbelievers come in," NIV), it is possible that unbelievers also attended church meetings, so where they met was not always a secret to outsiders. It is simply not true that early believers were always persecuted everywhere and all the time. Persecution prior to around A.D. 250 was sporadic, localized, and often the result of mob hostility (rather than the empire-wide decree of a Roman ruler). Surprisingly, Roman officials are often presented in a somewhat favorable light by the New Testament writers since they intervened to protect Christians from unlawful local harassment by unbelieving Judaism (Ac 16:35, 17:6-9, 18:12-16, 19:37-38, 23:29, 25:18-20, 25:24-27, 26:31-32). Prior to 250, Christianity was illegal, but generally tolerated. The simple fact is that widespread persecution did not occur until Emperor Decius in A.D. 250, followed by Gallus (251-253), then Valerian (257-259) and finally Diocletian (303-311).<sup>3</sup> Someone, somewhere, could have constructed a special church building in the 200 years prior to Decius, but significantly, no one ever did. (Even in China today some believers manage to construct church buildings.) This suggests there might have also been a theological purpose behind home meetings.

When persecution did erupt, meeting in homes did not keep Saul from knowing exactly where to go to arrest Christians (Ac 8:3). The church in Rome later responded to government persecution by meeting underground, in the more protective catacombs. Even the presence of persecution, however, would not necessarily rule out a deeper, purposeful preference for smaller, house-sized congregations. The fact remains that everything in the New Testament was written to a living room sized church, and arguably the New Testament ideal for church life is best realized in a smaller, family like setting.

#### A Purposeful Pattern?

Might the apostles have laid down a purposeful pattern of home churches? What practical effects would meeting in a home have on one's church life? It is a design axiom that form follows function. The apostles' belief concerning the function of the church was naturally expressed in the form that the church took on in the first century. Some of the distinct practices of the early (house) church are worth considering.

1. The overarching significance of the house church lies in its theology of community. The church was depicted by apostolic writers in terms which describe a family. Believers are children of God (1Jn 3:1) who have been born into his family (Jn 1:12-13). God's people are thus seen as part of God's household (Ep 2:19, Ga 6:10). They are called brothers and sisters (Phm 2, Ro 16:2). Consequently, Christians are to relate to each other as members of a family (1Ti 5:1-2; Ro 16:13). (In fact, in China today, house church is called family church.) Out of this theological point that God's children are family arises many church practice issues. The question becomes, what setting best facilitates our functioning as

God's family?

2. Many scholars are persuaded that the Lord's Supper was originally celebrated weekly as a full, fellowship meal (the Agape Feast). Each local church is to be like a family (1Ti 5:1-2), and one of the most common things families do is to eat together. Early church meetings, centered around the Lord's Table, were tremendous times of fellowship, community and encouragement (Lk 22:16-19, 29-30, Ac 2:42, 20:7, 1Co 11:17-34). Rather than a funeral-like atmosphere, the Lord's Supper was in anticipation of the Wedding Banquet of the Lamb (Re 19:6-9). The larger an individual congregation, the less family-like it becomes, and the more impersonal and impractical the Lord's Supper as a true meal can become. Thus in later centuries, as the church abandoned home meetings, the Lord's Supper was eventually stripped of everything save the token ingestion of a small piece of bread and one swallow of wine.

3. Early church meetings were clearly participatory (1Co 14, Heb 10:24-25, Ep 5:19-20, Col 3:16). Any brother could contribute verbally. The prerequisite for anything said was that it be edifying, designed to strengthen the church. Since public speaking is a great fear for many people, participatory meetings are best suited to living room sized gatherings, composed of people who all know each other and are true friends. Participatory meetings are impractical for large numbers. Once the living room setting was replaced by the sanctuary, interactive meetings were replaced by worship services.

4. The Scriptures are full of the "one another" commands. Church is to be about accountability, community, and maintaining church discipline (Mt 18:15-20). These ideals are best accomplished in smaller congregations where people know and love each other. Church is to be about relationships. A large auditorium of people, most of whom are relative strangers to each other, will not easily achieve these goals. Nominal Christianity is harbored as it becomes easy to get lost in the crowd. Churches that meet in homes best foster the simplicity, vitality, intimacy and purity that God desires for his church.

5. The New Testament church had clearly identified leaders (elders, pastors, overseers), yet these leaders led more by example and persuasion than by command. The elder-led consensus of the whole congregation was paramount in decision making (Mt 18:15-20, Lk 22:24-27, Jn 17:11, 20-23, 1Co 1:10, 10:17, Ep 2:19-20, 4:13-17, Phlp 2:1-2, 1Pe 5:1-3). Achieving consensus is possible in a church where everyone knows each other, loves each other, bears with one another, is patient with one another, and is committed to each other. However, the larger the fellowship, the more impossible it becomes to maintain relationships and lines of communication. In a large congregation, the pastor necessarily functions more like the CEO of a corporation.

6. The first century church turned their world upside down (Ac 17:6), and they did so using the New Testament house church. House churches are low cost, generally lay led, can reproduce quickly, and have great potential for growth through evangelism. We need to think small in a really big way! God does not equate bigness with ability. Paul reminded them that "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him" (1Co 1:27-29, NIV).

7. The New Testament urges the generous support of missionaries, evangelists, qualified elders, and the poor (1Co 9, 1Ti 5:17-18, 3 Jn 5-8). Which group of believers would better be able to fund church planters and assist the poor, a thousand believers organized in a single traditional church that meets in their own church sanctuary, complete with a Sunday school complex and family life center (gym), or a thousand believers networked together in cooperating house churches? Surveys of Protestant congregations in America reveal that on average 80% of church revenues goes toward building, staff and internal programs; 20% goes to outreach. In house church networks, those percentages are easily reversed. Being freed from the burden of constructing church buildings and their resulting expenses would also allow greater sums of money to go toward the support of church workers and the needy.

8. Since they met almost exclusively in private homes, the typical congregation of the apostolic era was small. No specific number is ever given in Scripture, but there were generally no more people than will fit comfortably into the average living-room. The pattern is for smaller, rather than larger, churches. Regarding the size of first century homes, Fuller seminary professor Robert Banks, wrote that "the entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold around 30 people comfortably—perhaps half as many again in an emergency . . . it is unlikely that a meeting of the "whole church" could have exceeded 40 to 45 people, and may well have been smaller . . . In any event we must not think of these as particularly large . . . Even the meetings of the "whole church" were small enough for a relatively intimate relationship to develop between the members."4

Conclusion

We are not arguing for meeting in houses simply for the sake of meeting in houses. We are suggesting that the apostolic church did not erect church buildings in large part because they simply didn't need them. God intended the typical church to be living room sized. The letters which were written to the various New Testament churches were in fact written to house churches. Because they are written to house churches the instructions contained in them are geared to work in a smaller congregation — they were never meant to work in a large group setting. Consequently, they don't work well in such a setting. To attempt to apply New Testament church practices to a contemporary large church is just as unnatural as pouring new wine into old wineskins (Mt 9:17).

— Steve Atkerson [www.ntrf.org](http://www.ntrf.org)

**Re: Eight Scriptural Reasons For House Churches - posted by passerby, on: 2010/7/22 21:29**

Like others, I am not inclined to carry this concept on home churches into extreme or orthodox position. At some point it can result to divisiveness and from what compelling evidence or arguments so far presented\_ are they not rather tainted with speculations.

**Re: - posted by Miccah (), on: 2010/7/22 22:53**

I lead a House Church out of my home for the last 3 years. That being said, being a part of a House Church is not in everyone's calling. The Body has many different limbs and parts. All work for the greater function, and that function is bringing glory to the Lord.

House Church is the way for my family and I, but I understand it is not for everyone's family, unless lead so by the Lord.

Blessings!

**Re: - posted by hoochoou (), on: 2010/7/22 23:03**

Quote:  
-----unless lead so by the Lord.  
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**Re: - posted by mguldner (), on: 2010/7/22 23:04**

I am in the moment training to be a home church leader, not by any school or anything but everyday by the Holy Spirit and His leading. God has placed this on my heart along with my wife's and we are excited to start a home church. God has yet to call us out of current church and I suspect He is waiting for me and my family to be prepared for such a task. My wife and I are looking at letting people live with us that need a place to stay and doing a home church and counseling center type thing. Like Christian said its not for everyone but it does have its function and purpose. I understand having biblical reasonings for using the Home Church model but I see nothing wrong with the modern model of a church building. I would suggest attending whichever the spirit leads and be obedient to that :)

God Bless,  
Matthew

**Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/23 13:45**

passerby wrote:

"Like others, I am not inclined to carry this concept on home churches into extreme or orthodox position. At some point it can result to divisiveness and from what compelling evidence or arguments so far presented\_ are they not rather tainted with speculations."

I agree that we should not make this a matter of orthodoxy and thereby causing unnecessary division among Christians. My main contention is with believers from traditional churches who do just that. They see all house churches and house

church members as having no Biblical support for doing things the way they do. And many say that one cannot be in God's will if they are not part of an established traditional church. They see the traditional establishments as "The Church or Body of Christ". Some even say you cannot have assurance of salvation unless you are part of an established traditional church.

**Re: Eight Scriptural Reasons For House Churches - posted by narrowpath, on: 2010/7/23 17:57**

Dear osandoval,

Thank you very much for this post; it really speaks to me. We had meetings in our home for many years but I was never part of a house church. In the mainstream church model pastors often take on the role of a priest and mediator. They either assume this role or the congregation expects it. Few people can then really exercise their gifts and bring fruit. I am inclined to say that the house church model is probably the most biblical. Future persecution may tell us which model will survive.

**Re: , on: 2010/7/23 20:32**

Paul, in I Cor speaks of the love feast and people hoarding things to themselves ...and even getting drunk at it, and then he says something to the extend of, "don't you have homes to do that?"

House churches in the NT were as a necessity and not as a standard. (How do you fit 30+ into a house when the Lord adds to your number...and if He doesn't, something is not right somewhere in the congregation.)

Look at the first church in Acts.

They met on Solomon's porch, and to be perfectly honest, how do you fit 8000 men + families into a house?

House churches have their place, but open air assemblies are better. (Unless there is persecution, what's the purpose in hovering 10-15 here and there? That what the Islamic cell factions do. Should we hide our faith?)

I have participated in house churches and there is a certain lack of the bigger picture: there is so much busyness about the little group and little about those outside of it: right there in their own community; outreach more often than not takes the form of sending money somewhere, rather than encouraging and sending those in the group to go out.

I can agree that persecution was the key to them meeting house to house rather than on Solomon's porch.

Jesus attended Synagogue and Temple, yet the other time was spent as a wandering Jew, through prayer as the Spirit led.

Why persecution?

Well if one can put a thousand to flight, what were 8000+ doing?

Sometimes it's thought that house churches are segregation.

On the other end, it's been seen of bigger churches eventually dying out.

In both instances, it's been seen to be the lack of adherence to church discipline due to a lack of interactive community.

House churches and larger churches are good when they are active in making disciples.

Thing is, when house churches are making disciples, they do not stay that small that long and outgrow the house capacity. (This has been seldom seen to happen.)

Anything else is lopsided.

If a house church is doing their job, they will not remain a house church.

As for the other things mentioned, these can be and are done in larger assemblies.

There are 'roles' assumed in any gathering no matter how big or small.

There will always be the unfaithful many and the faithful few.

One thing that wreaks havoc unseen, and ruins any gathering of believers is when those without or with little faith put their foot forward.

Faith works by love: not doubting and questioning God's ability and purpose.

Are these things correctly stated?

Agape,  
g  
Acts 20:32

**Re: - posted by Miccah (), on: 2010/7/23 23:43**

Phanetheus wrote

"If a house church is doing their job, they will not remain a house church"

I disagree brother. If a House Church is doing its job, then that House Church is making passionate and radical followers of Jesus Christ. If a House Church is doing its job, it cannot stay the same as when it started. It HAS TO expand BECAUSE leaders will arise from within. When a House Church gets to the point of expansion, new leaders need to step forward and begin to lead their own House Church, breaking off from the original. The making of disciples of Jesus Christ is the focus of the leaders of the House Church.

It is a beautiful thing when the Lord is in control of a House Church, and man takes a seat at the feet of Jesus. I cannot tell you how many times the Spirit has changed the direction of our House Church meetings. Last week was a great example. I have been feeling lead as of lately to teach on the Sermon on the Mount. The week before I let everyone know that we need to be reading Matthew 5-7 every day until the next weeks House Church. When the next House Church arrived, the Lord changed the topic and direction of the HC. We ended up praying and laying hands on one of the newer members who may have cancer (still waiting for the results). The Lord had us (all of the HC members) pray and weep for her healing. We wait on the Lord.

The point I am trying to make is that each and every House Church is supposed to be different. They are not all to look, act or even feel the same. Yet, if they are not completely focused on making disciples of Christ and passionate Christians, then there is no reason for them... They would be just another self help group, or cell group.... and I have no time to lead a middle aged self help group...that's what girl friends or guy friends are for.

Come prepared to learn about His word and how to truly give your life over to Christ. He taught us how to live, and we as leaders are called to teach others how to live that life, and then those that we teach, to pass on what they have learned to others.

The cycle repeats. The Kingdom grows. Christ is glorified!

**Re: - posted by mguldner (), on: 2010/7/24 0:06**

The idea that a house church wont remain a house church is a noble idea but to me the appeal to a house church is quality over quantity. I have seen little groups expand and grow greatly in numbers and people turn into a big mega church setting and we can all say praise the Lord that church must have been doing something right but at the price of numbers we lose fellowship and people forget the very thing that brought them all together because there are so many people that only a select few are familiar faces anymore.

I am looking for long lasting Christian Brothers and Sisters and believe that the House Church is the best model for this for me. A group of people that are weak but working together for the kingdom of God.

\*Added\* We in our modern day churches are so impressed with numbers but we look at Paul in his letters and he praises the churches for their great Love for one another and unity of Spirit. We all have what works for us my opinion stick to what Challenges you to be like Christ.

**Re: , on: 2010/7/24 0:24**

My BIL and sister in Missouri started one after they had lived there trying to find a suitable congregation to settle in with.

What started as 11 is now over 60 and last heard, they borrowed an old school house.

Miccah and Matt,

Good points and I agree to a certain extent -->(as the first church began on a portico with 120, not 10-15).

Following sure of our weakness and more sure of His strength) in prayer, scripture, and worship -(instead of leading)- seems to be the major key.

Where we currently attend, this is the way it happens.

Is there something I'm missing because we are not (currently) part of a house church? Is the form of such an imperative nature that nothing else is valid or useful. I mean, God works and does as He pleases and as long as we go along with His lead, what can end wrong?

I could care less how few or many are with us as long as we have Jesus and His clear message.

gregg

**Re: - posted by Miccah (), on: 2010/7/24 0:41**

Phantheus wrote:

"I mean, God works and does as He pleases and as long as we go along with His lead, what can end wrong?"

You hit the nail on the head. As long as we follow His lead, what can go wrong?

Romans 8:31 (NKJV)

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

**Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/24 3:27**

Dear narrowpath, you're welcome. I'm glad to hear it was edifying to you.

**Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/24 5:01**

Dear Phanetheus, thanks for the feedback. You made some good points.

You wrote:

"House churches in the NT were as a necessity and not as a standard. (How do you fit 30+ into a house when the Lord adds to your number...and if He doesn't, something is not right somewhere in the congregation.)

Look at the first church in Acts.

They met on Solomon's porch, and to be perfectly honest, how do you fit 8000 men + families into a house?"

In Acts 2:46 we read, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts"

And Acts 5:42 says, "And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

From these verses in Acts we do see that the very first Christians met in Solomon's Porch at the Temple. But they also met in homes at the same time. We see that they met in Solomon's Porch to hear apostolic teaching and preaching. But they also met in homes for that.

Another reason for them meeting in Solomon's Porch was for evangelistic outreach. Remember, the Temple was run by the Pharisees and Sadducees, not by Christians. So this would have provided them much evangelistic opportunity.

However, one thing they did not do in Solomon's Porch is celebrate the Lord's Supper. That was done in homes. Also, the kind of church meeting described in 1Cor. 14:26-36 was not held at the Temple with all that many people present. It was impossible. Why? Because that kind of meeting was to be open, interactive and participatory. You could not have that kind of meeting with 3000 plus believers.

The Temple meetings had their place for good things to be accomplished there, but it was not to be where Christians met for their regular church meetings. My question to you at this point would be, 'How could you have the kind of meeting described in 1Cor. 14:26-33 in a large setting of 3000 people?' Its impossible. That is one of the primary reasons they were broken up into house churches of smaller size. It only makes sense. Lengthy teachings and preachings done by one person had their place in certain large settings, but not in the regular Sunday church meetings. So your premise that the first church only met in Solomon's Porch is incorrect, with all due respect, for we see clearly that they met in homes at the exact same time.

You also wrote:

" Thing is, when house churches are making disciples, they do not stay that small that long and outgrow the house capacity.

(This has been seldom seen to happen.)

Anything else is lopsided.

If a house church is doing their job, they will not remain a house church"

I agree that a healthy house church will be making more and more disciples. But that does not mean they should therefore get a bigger building with all the expenses that come along with it. The early church had networks of house churches. As they grew in numbers of disciples, they grew in numbers of house churches. And as the article points out, it was in this setting that they turned their world upside down. If they did that back then, we can do it now by God's grace.

You also wrote:

"Is there something I'm missing because we are not (currently) part of a house church? Is the form of such an imperative nature that nothing else is valid or useful. I mean, God works and does as He pleases and as long as we go along with His lead, what can end wrong?

I could care less how few or many are with us as long as we have Jesus and His clear message"

I would say that most Christians are missing the biblical pattern, and the biblical principles of what church meetings should



Id be like.

But that is not to say one cannot be blessed in many ways being part of a healthy traditional church, especially if they encourage home bible studies or cell groups.

But the thing that is missing even in these types of smaller groups is the open, interactive participation prescribed in 1Co 14. Church meetings were not intended to have just one person who does all the speaking or sharing.

Now suppose a traditional church only has meetings once or twice a week and in those meetings there are large crowds of people who for the most part do not know each other. And suppose there is no encouragement to meet in smaller groups. This to me is a tragic thing indeed. It creates an individualistic Christianity where everyone fends for themselves and there is no accountability, fellowship, or looking out for each other.

Brethren, this ought not to be. And from what I've seen it seems that this describes the vast majority of evangelical churches in the west.

Another disadvantage of bigger traditional churches is in the cost of buying and maintaining the buildings. There is so much of God's money unwisely spent in this way and so little going toward the real work of God, such as evangelism/missions, feeding and clothing the poor and widows and orphans.

And there is much more that can be said, but I'll get off the soap box for now because its very late here and I'm tired. Blessings.

Oracio

**Re: small house churches - posted by Lysa (), on: 2010/7/24 10:54**

My personal belief is that any one who chooses to teach or preach the Word of God in love and in deed will not have to worry about growing beyond a house because not many want just that.

My pastors from years ago started in their barn and then moved to a small house they gutted. The Lord told them to NOT set their eyes on numbers but that people would come for the help they needed and when they got they would return to their church.

They were instructed to "Go out into the country and teach a few people My ways." And they obeyed the Lord in that instruction.

And that is why in my first paragraph I stated why I believe that if someone teaches what the Lord wants to teach each and every time, not many want to go along for THAT ride!! (huge grin)

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/24 11:57**

Brothers, I am very sympathetic to the house church movement. But I must say, I personally see examples of both in the New Testament, small gatherings and larger assemblies. And I think if we read the Bible with an open mind and heart, as much as I am a fan of open-participatory meetings, it seems the larger services were "run" (for lack of a better term) by those who were more seasoned in the faith. And I think while those who are younger in the faith should feel free in the Spirit to participate in an assembly, honor should be given to those who are older in the faith, especially those who we recognize as apostles, prophets, and teachers.



**Re: - posted by whyme, on: 2010/7/24 12:39**

the title to the thread is "eight scriptural reasons for house churches". I didn't see eight, in fact I didn't see one. this is not said to argue against house churches. I am always lost when we add any other words to the spiritual body called the church. House church, Building Church..... where is that?

**Re: The true model., on: 2010/7/24 12:43**

In general, I think it seems to be the most pragmatic structure to facilitate an equality and reality for Spiritual meetings to function. However, I have never seen one endure for very long, producing good fruit.

If we believe that the Holy Spirit has given all gifts and functions, then we must have a vehicle that would allow it, and the small home meeting seems to have the most possibility for real transparency. You can remove the church from religion, but it is much more difficult to remove religion from people. Often, it can be a smaller model of the very thing we think we are fleeing; but a bit more homey.

As has been said, only God can build the house, if it is true. As the age we are in is barreling toward closure, I see isolated home meetings arise out of necessity; the day that is coming when we really value our believing brothers and sisters, to lay our lives down for them.

**Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/24 20:28**

I appreciate all the replies so far brothers, very good feedback.

Brother KingJimmy, you wrote:

"Brothers, I am very sympathetic to the house church movement. But I must say, I personally see examples of both in the New Testament, small gatherings and larger assemblies. And I think if we read the Bible with an open mind and heart, as much as I am a fan of open-participatory meetings, it seems the larger services were "run" (for lack of a better term) by those who were more seasoned in the faith. And I think while those who are younger in the faith should feel free in the Spirit to participate in an assembly, honor should be given to those who are older in the faith, especially those who we recognize as apostles, prophets, and teachers."

I think your assessment there is very well-balanced Scripturally. I agree almost completely. The only thing I would disagree with is in viewing the larger meetings as acceptable in terms of the regular gathering of the saints.

I believe there is more biblical evidence supporting the smaller, open participatory meetings as the primary gathering of believers, and viewing the larger meetings as "secondary". Yet today this is completely reversed in traditional churches. The larger gatherings are primary, while the smaller gatherings are not important or necessary to the spiritual life of the church. I believe this reversal has had huge ramifications on the Body in general.

I am convinced we need to get back to the New Testament pattern in order to see a better expression of the Body.

BrotherTom, you wrote:

"In general, I think it seems to be the most pragmatic structure to facilitate an equality and reality for Spiritual meetings to function. However, I have never seen one endure for very long, producing good fruit. "

I agree. Probably most home churches that start do not last that long. I have been part of those types, and there are a few primary reasons for that. However, I do know of some that have lasted 20 plus years and have grown into networks of house churches in the same region. A good example of these are the ones planted by the brother who wrote the article I posted, Steve Atkerson. From what I understand there are about 4-5 which have grown from the first one he planted. The best example of healthy house churches I can think of are the underground churches in China. From what I've heard and read, they have been experiencing revival for many years through their house churches. I would encourage the brethren to look for articles on the Chinese house church. I think there are some on this site. One of their leaders said they have been living in the book of Acts for years, in terms of many coming to the Lord, intimacy among the brethren, and seeing signs and wonders by the hand of God, etc. I recall there is a good sermon by Denny Kennaston on the Chinese church, in which he retells an interview he did with a few of their leaders.

Yet one interesting thing about the house churches of China is that they have been under heavy persecution by the gov

ernment, and it seems that that has played a big part in them being so on fire for the Lord. Maybe sometimes that's what's needed. And maybe it will come down to that being needed in the west. And once it does come, we will have no choice but to meet in homes. My argument is, 'why not start now?'

BrotherTom, you also wrote:

"You can remove the church from religion, but it is much more difficult to remove religion from people. Often, it can be a smaller model of the very thing we think we are fleeing; but a bit more homey."

Very true. I have heard of house churches having the same format as a traditional church, with no open participation being allowed. And that is the exact thing I and most in the house church movement argue against.

Bottom line for me here is this: I think one of the strongest, if not the strongest Scriptural arguments for house churches is based on the issue of open, interactive participatory meetings. These kind of meetings were the norm in the early church. Yet we have almost completely forsaken that biblical prescription.

**Re: , on: 2010/7/24 23:25**

Reading through these posts, one thought keeps popping into this head:

If house churches were the eventual standard norm, which eventually led further to living in catacombs, mountains, caves, etc...

Why is there no persecution now?

Godliness is sadly lacking.

Recalling Brother Yun's China home-church testimonies, there are big churches out in the open that government leaves alone...and are not doing much but detracting from the kingdom of God.

How is North America so different, if not worse?

I somehow equate home-churching with hiding, especially saying that this is a good way to prepare for persecution compared to Jesus saying "let your light so shine before men."

I continue to pray for persecution that joy may be fully realized in all our lives. Still, godliness (to what degree) is key to the advent of this.

Some are proly saying this one's a lamb just looking for slaughter; but, in truth, it is the quest for more godliness amongst us all.

Changing the format might build smaller communities, but is this the initial 'one accord' mentioned in Acts?

Anathema: in the (Non-Messianic) Judaic community did not just mean cursed to eternal damnation; but because of this pronouncement, nobody of the Synagogue or Temple is to have anything what-so-ever to do with them because of this---> no familial, social, or commercial connections at all.

It was when the first church was pronounced 'anathema' that they were forced from meeting on Solomon's porch, did they meet and eat together and truly shared all things in common.

Will meeting in house churches bring a more vibrant faithfulness to God in "let(ting) your light so shine before men?"

Isn't that jumping the gun a bit, and rather than bringing persecution through the presence of Christ manifest through us, one step closer to aversion from it? Is this lifting up Jesus before all men?

I say, let the hogs and dogs come and try to do whatever they think they can. Some might be allowed by God to take our lives, but they shall never have our souls.

There is a time and a place for house-churches, but is that now?

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them...

II Tim. 3:12-14

Agape,  
g

#### Re: House Church, Building Church...Where is that?, on: 2010/7/26 1:45

Whyme, regarding your question as to "where is that." I'm sure you're familiar with the references to Christians meeting in homes (Romans 16:5; I Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2).

Aside from the large meetings on Solomon's Portico in the book of Acts, the only place other than homes I've seen people meet regularly was when Paul held daily evangelistic/teaching meetings in the "Lecture Hall" of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9).

I hope most people here are aware that Christians only "went into real estate" in a big way after the conversion of Constantine.

In my opinion, Constantine was the single greatest corruptor of the church ever. He not only transferred pagan temples to Christian control, but he introduced iron-clad demands for orthodoxy and uniformity that did not exist previously.

Under Constantine, a whole imperial philosophy of hierarchy and external controls was introduced into the churches, from which we have never recovered.

The Protestant reformation was far too limited in its scope.

House churches are in the Bible. "Building churches" are not, although people who are committed to the status quo can make an argument for them based on Solomon's Portico, Hall of Tyrannus, and pragmatic convenience.

\* \* \* \* \*

I personally despise church buildings for the damage they do and have done to the Body of Christ over the centuries. There is a huge difference: Christians ministering to one another face to face in a living room or courtyard, and Christians all facing forward toward the pulpit and altar.

In one setting we are able to minister to one another as the Scripture exhorts, in the other we are told what to believe and controlled by ordained clergy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Although the situation in China is instructive and important, I don't view house churches in terms of their relationship to persecution.

House churches are important because, ideally, they allow local expressions of the Body of Christ to grow and mature together as people build one another up in love.

The main downside to house churches: they can allow carnal Christians to dominate and lord it over weaker personalities. In these situations, hopefully people are not damaged too badly before they vote with their feet.

I greatly regret that I am not sufficiently gifted to minister in a house church setting.

**Re: - posted by Lysa (), on: 2010/7/26 6:56**

My personal experience is that large churches will control what a person preaches and teaches because they are denominationalized somehow, somehow. The leader or leaders control what is preached.

In the home churches it seems like people are more hungry for the Spirit of God and want the freedom that comes with it. But if you are going to control the Holy Spirit in your house church, you might as well stay in the church building because you're doing the same thing they are doing; different day or place but the same exact stuff.

God bless,  
Lysa

**Re: Lysa - posted by RainMan, on: 2010/7/26 7:02**

Quote:  
-----My personal experience is that large churches will control what a person preaches and teaches because they are denominationalized somehow, somehow. The leader or leaders control what is preached. In the home churches it seems like people are more hungry for the Spirit of God and want the freedom that comes with it. But if you are going to control the Holy Spirit in your house church, you might as well stay in the church building because you're doing the same thing they are doing; different day or place but the same exact stuff.  
-----

That was the exact reason I left last house fellowship. The Holy Ghost was not welcome I felt. People wanted to limit the spirit to their experience of the Holy Spirit (very cold I might add) all gifts of the spirit were subtly outlawed.

**Re: - posted by Lysa (), on: 2010/7/26 7:04**

Quote:  
-----RonaldGoetz wrote:  
"There is a huge difference: Christians ministering to one another face to face in a living room or courtyard, and Christians all facing forward toward the pulpit and altar."  
-----

Amen and amen, Ron!

I didn't read your post until after I posted but I definitely agree with you. Thanks for your input!!

God bless you,  
  
Lysa

**Re: , on: 2010/7/26 8:31**

Lysa and Ronald,

Thanks for the various pieces of input.

RainMan, your input is mostly what has been experienced here.

This whole thread--(thanks for starting it Osandoval, and everybody's response is just awesome.

Though I hardly advocate much of Gothardism (as emphasis seems lacking regarding Jesus' finished work), I was given a book written by Mr. Bill. Its title is something like, "The Seven-fold power of the House Church.

I'm gonna read it through.

Though Miccah and Matt really have not tried to prove anything except there is a right towards this, these texts hold alot of sway. i never have advocated one form over another; but reading one short post by Greg Gordon on another thread really got me thinking about all this.

i have always considered the emphasis on structure, be it building or heirarchy, whther big or small to be residual lues of Romanism along with emphasis on doctrine that does not point us directly to Jesus Christ.

This ordained carpenter has to go to work another long houred week, but i really am so grateful how God manifests His provision in the bad economic times more-so than when things are rolling along good for most.

i'll be back, yet presently, i remain undecided.

Love, Hope, and Faith,  
g

**Re: - posted by Solomon101, on: 2010/7/26 9:54**

It seems to me that neither house churches/fellowships, nor churches/fellowships that meet in set aside structures, are good or bad. Neither one is the "correct" model with the other being a "lesser" option. They each have a place. The issue is not whether people meet in a large set aside building or in someones living room. The issue is the heart, gifting, passion, anointing, and call of God upon those leading in either circumstance.

I think it seems reasonable to find that balance when we consider the reference in Acts.

Day after day, IN THE TEMPLE COURTS AND FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 5:42 NIV (capitalizations mine)

It seems they had the leadership ability and heart for the Lord to be used by God in EITHER circumstance. One is not better than the other. They are just different... and are both very helpful models in the Kingdom when used properly with the correct attitude and heart. imho.

Blessings!

**Re: - posted by Miccah (), on: 2010/7/26 10:13**

Phanetheus wrote:

"Though Miccah and Matt really have not tried to prove anything except there is a right towards this..."

And you will not hear me trying to prove House Church to anyone. You will hear me say that House Church is not for everyone and that you should follow the lead of the Lord.

Folks, I could care less if you like, love, hate or think that house church is evil, same goes with institutional churches. It is not my place to judge how another brother or sister chooses to worship the Lord, as long as they are not in sin doing so. I will speak out to anyone who says that only one way to worship is mandated (and that one way is usually a personal opinion on how to worship), or that if you don't worship in the way that they feel is right, you are in sin. This line of thought is against scripture, that we need to worship similarly to each other. Some like big buildings, some don't. Some like both. I fall into the last category.

If the Lord meets you in House Church, fantastic! If the Lord meets you in a church building, fantastic! If the Lord meets you in a jail cell, fantastic! If the Lord meets you on your death bed, fantastic! But I am pretty sure that the Lord will not meet you on this forum nit picking over how his children prefer to worship Him.

If the Spirit of God is not in what you are doing, then you are doing something wrong.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/26 10:38

Quote:  
-----Brothers, I am very sympathetic to the house church movement. But I must say, I personally see examples of both in the New Testament, small gatherings and larger assemblies. And I think if we read the Bible with an open mind and heart, as much as I am a fan of open-participatory meetings, it seems the larger services were "run" (for lack of a better term) by those who were more seasoned in the faith.  
-----

Hi Jimmy

I was wondering what you base this statement on? If you are using 'assemblies' as the local covenant community I am not sure there are any examples of their meetings in large numbers.

The gathering in the courts of the Temple was certainly large but was it a 'gathering of the local covenant community' or was it simply a 'meeting'.

I think we have two models for meetings in the NT. (I don't mean model as in a prescriptive blueprint). There is the School of Tyrannus model...

Act 19:9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

but this seems much more of the nature of an 'outreach' than the gathering of and for the saints.

Then we have the 1Cor 'model' which is highly participatory and has no mention of elders at all. I don't think that means they didn't have them but simply that they were not the focus of the gathering of the saints.

I doubt that they would have had 'hymns' or even 'prayer' in the Tyrannus model. I think it was the a platform for the propagation of the gospel.

One of the struggles is that many of our meetings are a not very subtle blend of the two models and we then have the question as to whether the 'meeting' should be 'seeker sensitive' or 'saint sensitive'.

I have been involved in 'house churches' for 40 years now in various roles and am very convinced of their flexibility, but there is always the temptation to settle into a pattern and it needs a constant flow of the Spirit in the midst to ensure we don't produce another 'tradition'.

Re: - posted by mguldner (), on: 2010/7/26 10:54

"Day after day, IN THE TEMPLE COURTS AND FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 5:42 NIV (capitalizations mine)"

Good point Solomon, I was wondering if maybe all of this discussion on which is proper or correct to use has slowed down the second half of this verse any. "they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ"

Seems God doesn't really have a preference as long as this is being done. :)

God Bless,  
Matthew

**Re: - posted by RainMan, on: 2010/7/26 11:19**

Recently took a week off from working out in the Gym. I was completely beaten up. I mean i was physically hurting i was training twice a day before and after work. So i decided to change my grueling regime to 3 weeks on 1 week off. So today i have started the first day of another cycle. What does this have to do with this thread you ask? eh.. patience all will be revealed.

I was sat in my local mcdonalds having a rather un-healthy burger and i got thinking. I eat literally whatever i want to because i know that each day i will have a calorie deficit. So while a burger would not make me gain weight the 300 pound lady wolfing down the super sized meal was eating herself to an early grave... (Stay with me im going somewhere)

i reflected back on myself and realized that if i had exhibited a bit more self control in the past i would not have the 25 pounds of weight i was trying to shift (More vanity than health).

I ask the question, if we are walking Spirit led lives shouldnt we naturally exhibit self control?

Whats the importance? Well for me its important that the Spirit is present and allowed to take control of anywhere i fellowship. But even when the Spirit is present the flesh is present as well. If we could leave our flesh at home and go to bible study in the spirit literally without leaving our homes that would be awesome. But the fact is this horrible flesh of mine God has chosen to be his temple and other also. The flesh wars against the Spirit and will naturally do what is contrary to the Spirit. Self Control can be the difference between being a Spirit Man or a Carnal Man.

"Blessed are those who are not offended in me"

Now watch this!

We are no longer slaves to the flesh. We dont have to be angry, malicious, rude, short-tempered know it alls. Jesus demonstrated such humility by washing the feet of his disciples. We can choose this humility and meekness cant we? We can choose to love. We can choose to be gentle and meek and patient. We dont have to get angry when someone rebukes us or challenges us in some way. Pride says "i am theologically always right". Meekness says "Lord i dont care about being wrong or right only that you teach me your word that my soul may prosper"

Paul didnt have the internet around in his time so there is nothing about the internet in new testament (and dont try to prove to me with ancient greek Paul had a computer) If we treat Sermon Index as electronic fellowship how do we do most of the time with the needless arguments that can be avoided with a little self control?

i.e.

1 not judging to rashly before we know where someone is coming from \*excluding heretics\*

2 being patient even when someone says something that upsets us (actually admitting we are upset would be the first step)

3 being vessels of rhema and not just logos

The point is lets use SI as a template for and an ideal church/fellowship we are the temple of his Spirit. The promise was he would live in us. If we have arguments over what is ideal isn't it ironic we all long for the ideal church?.

is it the church that must change or us?

If we rearrange structures with the same kind of people will the results be any different?

Anyway i feel hungry after all that typing i need a health bar.

2 Peter 1:5-10 (New International Version)

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is n



earsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,

**Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/26 14:34**

Quote:  
-----"Day after day, IN THE TEMPLE COURTS AND FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 5:42 NIV (capitalizations mine)"  
-----

This does seem to point towards the evangelistic thrust of the church in Jerusalem, whereas...

Act 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

...sounds much more like the saints gathering.

**Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/26 18:49**

Dear RainMan,  
thank you for that much needed reminder. It is easy for us to get in the flesh here if we are not watchful or prayerful. I am encouraged by how this thread has been flowing for the most part, with much respectful dialogue.

RonaldGoetz, you wrote:  
"There is a huge difference: Christians ministering to one another face to face in a living room or courtyard, and Christians all facing forward toward the pulpit and altar.  
In one setting we are able to minister to one another as the Scripture exhorts, in the other we are told what to believe and controlled by ordained clergy. "

I think you hit the nail on the head in those statements. With regard to close fellowship, I've heard it said that in a typical church, the only thing you really get to know is the back of the head of the person sitting in front of you.

With regard to the issue of Solomon's Porch/Paul's School of Tyrannus vs the house church settings, I think it's clear that those two kinds of settings were very different in nature and had different purposes. The larger settings seem to have been more evangelistic and instructive, with one person doing all the speaking; the smaller ones more focused on building one another up in the faith, through the mutual exercise of spiritual gifts/ministry toward one another, though some evangelism took place there as well. Both settings are good and have their place in accomplishing certain things in the kingdom of God. And I would say both should be encouraged for the glory of God.

Our contention is that throughout the centuries we have forsaken the latter, and thus disobeyed and ignored several scriptural commands/exhortations regarding the fellowship of the saints; exhortations to be a closely knit community/family.

Some pros of focusing exclusively on large traditional types of settings are:

- 1)The preaching of the gospel with the result of sinners being saved and brought into the kingdom.
- 2)Instruction/exhortation to the saints with the result that they will be encouraged and exhorted to live a godly and Spirit-filled life.

Some cons are:

- 1)Believers being used to live an individualistic Christian life, having an attitude of indifference toward the brethren within the church.

2)Believers not being encouraged or exhorted to develop their spiritual gifts within the assemblies, thinking that only certain 'clergy' or special class can exercise their gifts.

That said, I agree that house churches are not the answer to overcoming lukewarmness or apathy. I have seen house churches that foster lukewarmness/self-centeredness and have no evangelistic zeal. And sadly to say, it seems that this is the case for most house churches in America.

There are believers on fire for the Lord in both types of churches.

What I would like to see is the right heart as well as the right setting which fosters genuine Christian love and community.

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/27 12:19**

Quote:

I was wondering what you base this statement on? If you are using 'assemblies' as the local covenant community I am not sure there are any examples of their meetings in large numbers.

Good question. Well, I do have in mind chiefly the open-air gatherings that went on in the Temple. No doubt, they doing such would've served an evangelistic purpose. But like the Lord, there can be little doubt that such served to further the discipling of the community as well. But I also have in mind Acts 19:9 where we read about Paul officially breaking with the synagogue, and taking "away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus." (NASB)

To me, this implies the Christian community was meeting in a rented assembly hall of sorts, and that the apostle Paul had some sort of priority in the teaching ministry being conducted there. Such might have evangelistic overtones as you suggested, but to me, it seems Paul's official outreach was over, and at the school of Tyrannus was the place he was using to teach from. I don't think I'd go as far as to say he was conducting a formal church service as we commonly think of it today. But, this seems to be a larger gathering than just a home gathering, and it does seem to be a gathering where Paul would've had some priority.

Quote:

Then we have the 1Cor 'model' which is highly participatory and has no mention of elders at all. I don't think that means they didn't have them but simply that they were not the focus of the gathering of the saints.

Do consider that though Corinthians does not mention elders, it does seem to give some sense of priority to apostles, prophets, and teachers in regard to their function within an open-assembly.

1 Cor 12:28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. (NASB)

I know exegetically it is probably not Paul's intention to try and give some sort of pecking order here. But, these ministries/gifts seem to be in the foremost of his mind when talking about the subject. So, while services were to be open to the leading of the Spirit, and free for all to minister according to their gift, these ministries seem to help facilitate and guide the meetings in some loose sense of the word.

Just my thoughts :-)

Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/27 13:27

(quote)

Good question. Well, I do have in mind chiefly the open-air gatherings that went on in the Temple. No doubt, them doing such would've served an evangelistic purpose. But like the Lord, there can be little doubt that such served to further the discipling of the community as well. But I also have in mind Acts 19:9 where we read about Paul officially breaking with the synagogue, and taking "away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus." (NASB)

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(quote)

I think Acts 19:10 indicates that these meetings were primarily evangelistic in nature with some Christian instruction included as well. It says, "This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

Verse 11 says, "And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,"

It makes sense that many would want to hear what Paul was preaching and teaching at this lecture hall after seeing and hearing of the miracles. This is similar to the Lord's ministry to the multitudes in the gospels.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/27 13:44

Quote:

-----reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus." (NASB)

To me, this implies the Christian community was meeting in a rented assembly hall of sorts, and that the apostle Paul had some sort of priority in the teaching ministry being conducted there. Such might have evangelistic overtones as you suggested, but to me, it seems Paul's official outreach was over, and at the school of Tyrannus was the place he was using to teach from.

I think this is a very interesting note culturally. The pattern of philosophers was often to 'dialogue' in the modern sense of the term and this would have meant quite a bit of two-way communication. This fits very neatly into the pattern of other 'teachers' of his day and I think is an indication of the way that Paul used the cultural patterns of his day in his outreach.

Have you ever read 'The Normal Christian Church Life' by Watchman Nee? He suggests that a distinction can be made between the work of Paul 'in the assembly' and his role as a Herald/Apostle outside the local assembly. It is interesting that we read quite a bit about Paul in the last chapters of the Acts which detail his 'Herald/Apostle' ministry but hardly anything of his relationship to the saints in Rome.

If you have a 'resident big hitter' in a 'house church' setting it can be very daunting for the younger saints, making the 'ministry of the body' a very difficult concept. I am not a 'big hitter' of Paul's league or anything like it but even in a 'home group' it becomes difficult not to become the 'question answering machine'. I think the presence of someone of Paul's stature would inevitably change the nature of the meeting.

I preach in many different 'house church' settings but I know that my presence changes the dynamics of the group dramatically. A 'time slot' is carved out for the 'visiting preacher' and that can prevent the meetings developing in a 1 Cor pattern.

**Re: , on: 2010/7/27 16:37**

by Miccah on 2010/7/26 6:13:49

Phanetheus wrote:

"Though Miccah and Matt really have not tried to prove anything except there is a right towards this..."

And you will not hear me trying to prove House Church to anyone.

-----  
Bro,

That was an error in the sentence.

It should have read, " ...there is a right way towards this."

i was rushing to get going to work...  
and tonight i have to go do repair work at two places.

Anyway, sorry for not double checking b4 sending.

**Re: - posted by Areadymind (), on: 2010/7/27 21:09**

Having been a part of a particular movement on the West Coast of the USA my whole life, I can say I honestly appreciate a healthy emphasis on "Both" methods. The home fellowships are emphasized right along with the preaching method in buildings. I have seen great growth in both venues, but have seen hard hearts in both as well. I have seen people heavily involved in a corroboratory forms of discipleship for years, and now I could hardly tell them from a demon. Some, praise God, are the opposite!

I am of the persuasion that faith is the key element to under-gird method. Someone may be practicing a sub-par method while doing it in faith, all the while someone else is practicing what I would view as an ideal method but are doing it out of a Pharisaical motive. It seems to me that God will honor that which is done in faith, over that which is done in a jello-mold.

I am convinced that the keys to the life of the early church were not found in the outward appearances, but the outward appearances were rather an overflow of the inner life of Christ through utter submission to the 'comforts' of the Holy Spirit bodily.

The axe today needs to be laid at the root of the tree. If method, no matter which one, trumps the shepherding of Christ through His Holy Spirit in the church, then who cares whether we meet in the Temple or in the Home? No one can receive the river of life by swimming up its stream, for this stream flows from the heart...its head-waters are the throne of Christ. May the church as a whole re-discover the sweetness, the purity, the radical torrent of this flood of life...

Also, Ron's concern is a valid one, there were also "Famous" brothers in the New Testament that would draw large crowds. There must be a place for the "Preaching" of the word as a demonstration of the Power of the Holy Spirit.

All that being said, I completely identify with the pragmatic concerns raised by Osandoval in the original post. It hurts my heart that we spend so much on ourselves and not on others in the West.

If you think about it, many of us here on this website would not be so spiritually benefited by the sermons available here if it were not for the buildings, sound systems, computers, sound crews, and MP3 Files...

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/27 23:05

Quote:

Have you ever read 'The Normal Christian Church Life' by Watchman Nee? He suggests that a distinction can be made between the work of Paul 'in the assembly' and his role as a Herald/Apostle outside the local assembly.

Yes, I've read the work, and I find the distinction he makes a very interesting insight. If memory serves correct, he at some point goes so far as to say that most Christians have never been to a local assembly, only apostolic assemblies. Nee is probably right in his insight here.

I think either way a gathering has the potential to go towards either style on its own, or to experience some sort of blend. I'm not in a house church per se, but I have a several years experience meeting in "small groups" or "cell groups." I've been in some that were very open. I've seen others where it was mostly a one man show. I've also seen others have a mixture of both elements.

Quote:

If you have a 'resident big hitter' in a 'house church' setting it can be very daunting for the younger saints, making the 'ministry of the body' a very difficult concept.

Yes, I've seen this as well. One author I read suggested something along the lines of that those who elders should deliberately not show up at some gatherings, so as to keep from ever becoming a dominating force (as can naturally happen), and to force the rest of the brethren to learn how to function on their own.

I'm not an elder in my church, but even with that, I always try to be very careful when gathered in small group settings to try and keep focus away from me, as often I am the most apt to teach. Sometimes I will go to a meeting determined to say nothing at all. Most of the time I wait a long time to chime in.

Re: - posted by Miccah (), on: 2010/7/27 23:15

Phanetheus wrote:

"Bro,

That was an error in the sentence.

It should have read, " ...there is a right way towards this."

i was rushing to get going to work...  
and tonight i have to go do repair work at two places.

Anyway, sorry for not double checking b4 sending."

No problem my friend. I am not above making mistakes in my typing or mis-quoting scripture at times. Reference the AG thread. Blessings!

**Re: Multiplication of House Churches, on: 2010/7/28 1:19**

"If a House Church is doing its job, then that House Church is making passionate and radical followers of Jesus Christ.... When a House Church gets to the point of expansion, new leaders need to step forward and begin to lead their own House Church, breaking off from the original."

Amen and Amen. This is the idea. Unfortunately, as human beings we get excited by success, by bigger numbers.

Also, I think it can be hard to trust God to work in someone who seems less gifted or less qualified to lead, and let them begin a house church in their home. People with passion for the work usually have strong convictions regarding how to do it.

In my life, when I have been the most passionate, I have also been the most stubborn and unyielding--not "easy to be entreated" as we are exhorted to be.

"For an overseer, as God's manager, must be blameless, not arrogant, not quick tempered,...not a bully." (Titus 1:7)

When I think back on how arrogant and quick-tempered I used to be (can still be?!), and occasionally a bully, I cringe!

**Re: What is the Main Reason We Gather Together?, on: 2010/7/28 2:01**

Different traditions have different answers to the question of why we gather together.

Catholics: To Receive the Sacraments

Many Protestants: To Hear the Scripture Expounded

Many Protestants: To Worship God

Despite the risk of over-simplification, I believe each of these privileges one quality over all the others.

One of these privileges the hierarchy because only duly authorized agents of the hierarchy are allowed to administer the sacraments.

One of these privileges human intellect, because only the most intelligent are able to speak on a single topic for 30 to 45 minutes.

One of these either privileges human emotion or privileges the ability to endure boredom! (Nowhere in the New Testament is Worship described as the primary reason for gathering together. Nowhere.)

\* \* \* \* \*

Answer: The main reason we gather together is to encourage one another.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Why are we not supposed to give up meeting together? So that we can "encourage one another." Encouragement and exhortation are why we meet, to encourage and exhort ONE ANOTHER. We don't meet to be encouraged and exhorted by one woman or man at the lectern.

Note: "Let us consider how." We need to think about HOW we can spur one another to love and good deeds. Love and good deeds take many forms, depending on the giftedness of the individual.

Spurring one another to love and good works, encouragement and exhortation, do not occur automatically. We can't assume that simply because we meet in a living room that we automatically will encourage one another.

Ya' gotta think how!

Like others have already remarked, this is one of the "one another" passages.

If we privilege Bible exposition, communion, or worship (so-called) above other ways we encourage one another and spur one another to love and good deeds, then we are missing out on what God intended to result from us gathering together.

\* \* \* \* \*

When people quote Hebrews 10:24 to support mere church attendance, where there is NO encouragement taking place, where we are NOT spurring ONE ANOTHER to love and good works, then Hebrews 10:24 is being PROSTITUTED to empty institutional goals--often just to keep attendance up, offerings up, and keeping the doors open.

\* \* \* \* \*

Since Jesus called us friends, then we should certainly be friends to one another. We must not downplay the value of friendship.

Personally, I have a hard time making friends. But I have learned not to pooh-pooh other people's giftedness in having friends. They are ministering in ways I can't.

I try not to denigrate other people's areas of giftedness. For me, that's a kind of "sour grapes," a way of privileging my area of giftedness above the giftedness of others.

\* \* \* \* \*

I try to be a source of encouragement to my pastor. Besides being his friend over coffee, I let him know how his sermons have helped me solve dilemmas. I give him input on possible sermon ideas. And I occasionally rail against his traditions.

I am quite frank with him regarding the hierarchy, his sacramentalism, my disdain for "the building," the requirements for ordination--everything.

And he listens to me. I have heard "some" of my convictions echoed in his sermons. I'm helping my traditional congregation in this mainline denomination through my friendship with one man.

**Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/28 12:04**

I wonder what the optimum size of a group would be to enable the admonitions of 1 Cor 12-14 to be thoroughly implemented. I have one passage particularly in mind...

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 1Cor 14 NKJV

This envisages a gathering in which those gathered can have eye contact with each other. It presupposes that even as the prophet speaks he is submitted to the other prophets and ready to stop on a dime to make way for his brother.

What size of meeting would this be? ;-)

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/28 12:22**

From what I remember in my studies, the average home in those days could've contained about 30 people in the living room. Wealthier Christians, who had larger homes with larger meeting spaces, are estimated to have had homes large enough to seat about 100. Which interestingly enough, is about the average size of the average church in America anyway.

Building a sanctuary to meet in would have been very impractical in those days. Granted, in my opinion it's not very practical today. Just imagine the chore it would've been back then?



**Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/28 13:43**

around a 100 is an interesting number. If the local church is to function as an institution there is hardly any upper limit to their numbers providing you have an efficient administration system, but if the local church was designed to function as a family... 100 would certainly be close to an upper limit.

**Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/28 14:04**

Thought some of you might be interested in this decoration from British House church c400.

<http://bit.ly/cxTAqz>

It is at Lullingstone Roman Villa in Kent, UK

**Re: - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/28 14:26**

(quote)Building a sanctuary to meet in would have been very impractical in those days. Granted, in my opinion it's not very practical today. Just imagine the chore it would've been back then?(quote)

The Jews had their synagogues and the pagans had their temples. Being that there were wealthy Christians back then, and that there was generous giving among Christians, I don't think it would have been hard for Christians to build their own church buildings. Yet the oldest church building dates to around the third or fourth century, around the time of Constantine.

I actually think it would have been easier back then because there were less expenses than today, such as electricity bills, etc.

I have no problem with Christians erecting buildings today for certain purposes, given that there are wealthy Christians who can afford to pay for them; and given that the buildings are not used as the regular meeting places of Christians. I see nothing wrong with using these buildings like Paul did, for evangelism and teaching. Yet we may not even need to buy these things for those purposes, since we have many public places where this can be accomplished freely or at a minimal cost, such as public parks, etc.

The sad thing is to see the "tithes" and offerings of poor Christians being used to keep these things up and running, as if they were such a necessity to the life of the church. We think that unless we have a church building we cannot really have a church.

Many of these buildings are seen as temples, sanctuaries, or houses of God, something holy or sacred in an unbiblical sense. Such a view comes from the old testament, Catholicism, as well as from paganism, not from the new testament. We are the temple and house of God, not some man-made building. We can use them for the glory of God but we must be careful not to idolize them or see them as that important or essential.

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/28 15:23**

Well, my thought about erecting buildings back then being somewhat impractical would have to do with the sheer speed at which the early Church grew. Also, while there were no doubt wealthy Christians in the early Church, Paul's letters seem to indicate that the wealthy were few.

**Philologos and Osandoval, on: 2010/7/28 19:38**

Philologos, the I Corinthians chapters you brought up are the most comprehensive description of the kinds of things that can or should happen when Christians gather together.

It would be difficult, however, to print up the order of worship for such a meeting. And to some it would appear "disorderly."

Unfortunately, sanctuary design works AGAINST the body functioning as it should. We have allowed the institutional benefits of "warehousing" Christians to trump our ability to have Biblical koinonia.

\* \* \* \* \*

"We are the temple and house of God, not some man-made building. We can use them for the glory of God but we must be careful not to idolize them or see them as that important or essential." (Osandoval)

We know from Bible history that God tolerates things that he never intended. The office of the king, for example, was not God's idea. It was man's.

The Bronze Serpent was God's idea, but it became an idol, and had to be destroyed.

Church buildings are supposedly an "aid" to the Body of Christ. Unfortunately, it interferes with so many priorities of the community of believers that I don't see it as an "aid" to believers. The buildings are only an aid to a self-perpetuating institution, allowing an army of "hirelings" to make a comfortable living.

I know that's harsh. Unfortunately, too many young men and women are seduced into thinking that ministry = ordination. Young men and women prepare for "the ministry" before they know enough to see the trap laid before them.

This is closely related to the emphasis on and preoccupation with "authority" in the church in another thread.

**Re: RonaldGoetz - posted by osandoval, on: 2010/7/28 20:45**

"Church buildings are supposedly an "aid" to the Body of Christ. Unfortunately, it interferes with so many priorities of the community of believers that I don't see it as an "aid" to believers. The buildings are only an aid to a self-perpetuating institution, allowing an army of "hirelings" to make a comfortable living." (RonaldGoetz)

The only way I would think it is ok to keep the buildings would be if most of them were completely remodeled and used entirely differently for different purposes. The stained glass windows, the steeples with crosses, etc. would have to go, so that they would look like regular buildings instead of "religious" ones. The notion of a building as a "sanctuary" is completely foreign to the New Testament.

I agree with you regarding the hierarchical system, but like you said, I think it's a whole other thread.

**The notion of a building as "sanctuary" is unbiblical., on: 2010/7/28 22:02**

"The notion of a building as 'sanctuary' is unbiblical." (Osandoval)

There are a host of Biblical words & concepts that have been hijacked/usurped/prostituted by Christendom.

Church = Building, Denomination, Organization

Worship = Singing (cf. Rom. 12:1)

Fellowship (koinonia) = Coffee & Donuts, and Chatting

Sanctuary = Building

New Testament = Books (cf. Jer. 31:31ff)

The Ministry = Ordained Employment

Sound Teaching = Systematic Theology

With this whole-scale hijacking of so many key words, is it any wonder the "church" is in such bad shape?

\* \* \* \* \*

But it is too easy for me to carp and criticize.

All religions, Christian and non-Christian alike, eventually "settle down" into routines, with routine avenues to leadership, typical "sacred" buildings, competing doctrinal systems, etc.

Jesus' disciples wanted to shut down some people's preaching who were not "one of them." Jesus said, "Anyone who is not against me is with me."

Ultimately, in reality, each of us ends up living and ministering in a situation more or less suited to who we are as individuals.

And it seems that most people here agree that there is no one perfect way of "doing church," especially regarding house churches vs. traditional buildings.

Or am I making excuses for myself for not being in a house church? Oh well...

**Re: The notion of a building as "sanctuary" is unbiblical. - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/29 5:13**

We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.  
Winston Churchill

Churchill said this after the House of Commons had been damaged during an air-raid in WW2. Some had suggested rebuilding/repairs might alter the design.

I have always reckoned that I know the practical outworking of a 'church meeting' within 30 seconds of stepping into the building. It is all in the architecture.

Incidentally, I am part of a house church which also has a meeting hall! The building is 'church hall' but the culture is 'house church'.

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/29 8:31**

Just out of curiosity, how many people will your church hall hold. And do you rent it, or is it the common property of your house church network?

**Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/29 9:20**

KingJimmy on 2010/7/29 10:31:34 writes

"Just out of curiosity, how many people will your church hall hold. And do you rent it, or is it the common property of your house church network?"

We gather as about 150 of us Sunday mornings, about 40-50 Sunday evenings and Prayer Meetings. We also have a number of 'home groups' which meet mid-week. Our 'house church network' is a very loose association, we don't hold anything as 'common property' in this association. We own the hall. It is part of a compound which has 2 houses and a meeting hall.

This is where we meet...

<http://earley-christian-fellowship.org.uk/>

we are not very 'web conscious' as you will see from the Website!

**Re: - posted by mguldner (), on: 2010/7/29 9:29**

Quote:

-----We gather as about 150 of us Sunday mornings, about 40-50 Sunday evenings and Prayer Meetings.  
-----

Woah you have a megachurch in UK standards then :) or so a missionary told me a while back, said if you have over 50 people coming to your church then its partially a megachurch because there is a lot of fall away from the church. But you would probably know more than him :)

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/29 9:33**

Interesting Ron. Seems like a pretty big group and facility for a house church network. I don't think I know anything like it here in the states. Although the church I attend has about 2700 attend every week, and we have about 80 home groups, which from what I can tell, seem to be the backbone of the church. Granted, only about 800-900 people belong to a home group from that 2700, but, such isn't such a bad percent of the church if you ask me, especially considering they have only been having these groups for about a year. Our groups probably aren't as essential to the life of our church, yet, as they are to yours.

**Re: - posted by whyme, on: 2010/7/29 9:40**

My sense from this thread is that what is cherished in worship by many is a community of participating believers who share in the ministry to each other of God's grace and reflect in praise back to Him in intimacy His glory. This is the Biblical model that we see in the early church. Houses or halls or buildings aren't the issue unless they interfere with this goal. If this type of worship is extant, God's church is present. What I object to is turning a few references by the apostle Paul in his salutations to the groups in communities he was writing to in the Epistles into a regulative principle for worship. This is not a Biblical attempt but rather a misguided effort to reclaim the spirit of worship that was so powerful and satisfying in the early church. Participatory worship ( fellowship ) is the key.

**Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/29 11:38**

Jimmy

I see you have taken up the word 'network' that I used in any earlier post. We have a heart link with several other churches which have similar outlooks to us and we do gather for occasional conferences but we have no central administration and no doctrinal statement. We are really like an extended family with closer links with some than with others.

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/29 11:54**

What?!?! No doctrinal statement?!?!? How do you keep the heretics out?!?! Very bold of you guys to do so. I had to resist the strong temptation to craft one for my personal website. I've debated if I will ever do such when I plant a church one day. I probably won't. Somebody even sent me an e-mail letting me know I should have such, so people know who I am and what I'm about. But my thinking was, they'll know who I am and what I'm about simply by getting to know me. And in getting to know me, maybe they'll get to know the Jesus inside of me.

I guess my choice of the word "network" comes from the ever so slight influence of C. Peter Wagner and those in the New Apostolic Reformation group. I read him early on, and some of his vocabulary has stuck with me, even though I by and large reject everything that group is associated with.

**Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2010/7/29 12:15**

KingJimmy on 2010/7/29 13:54:46 writes:

"How do you keep the heretics out?!?! "

We welcome them but they tend not to stay too long!

Here are two favourite quotations from AN Groves

"what a blessing it is that the Lord's heart is so large, that He can help whenever He sees some good thing; whereas man withdraws because he sees some evil thing, which is generally found to mean something that wounds his own self-love in the little scheme he had set up as perfection"

"as any system is in its provision narrower or wider than the truth, I either stop short or go beyond its provisions, but I infinitely rather bear with all their evils, than separate from their good."

One day I want to write a book on church polity. I have the title ready...

"little schemes of perfection".

**Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/7/29 12:18**

Sounds awesome.