

History :: THE PROBLEM WITH THE HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT AND A SEARCH FOR THE UNITY OF HIS

THE PROBLEM WITH THE HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT AND A SEARCH FOR THE UNITY OF HIS BODY by Andy Zopp

We in the house church movement in many ways are taking the same path as those in previous movements. We have accurately pointed out the major faults and flaws in the institutional church: pastor, pews, programs, buildings, indifference, denominationalism, hierarchy-- the list seems a mile long. We all agree that this institutional system of church is absolutely different from what we read about in the early forming of the body of Christ. It is, without exaggerating, a 180-degree turn from what Jesus and the apostles set up in the early church. At this point we all agree. But have we really looked at the sin in our own camp.

Problems that need to be addressed

1. The spirit of division. Most house churches I have visited are quite content in being "us four and no more." Because they are meeting in the shelter of a house, they have turned inward in believing that somehow they are inherently different from the rest of the church... even New Testament! Most are having little or no impact on their community, the poor, those in prisons, those in need-- and many are not even impacting missions. They easily have forgotten that even the early house church was never meant to be an end in itself. They have forgotten the responsibility of being connected and functioning locally in the city. They reject others meeting in homes in their same area. We now have micro-division rather than macro-divisions.

Jesus made it clear in John 17 that unity was not an option for His disciples. We are either gathering or scattering, we are either for Him or against Him. We don't have many options if we are truly going to follow Jesus and keep Him at the center. Each group or leader clutches their group as though it were theirs. Whose church is it? Whose people are we? The people are scattering looking for shepherds after His own heart.

2. There is a spirit against leadership. House churches often overreact to the false leadership of the institutional church by denying the biblical need of the five-fold ministry. Their kind of "priesthood of the believer" has denied the ministries of function within the body of Christ and denied many of His servants on a universal level. They forget that these ministries are gifts to the church as "God has appointed." (1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Eph. 4:11)

A tremendous price will be paid by denying those whom Jesus sends and anoints. Our individualism and independence have created a false sense of body ministry. Because we deny the diversity of ministry of the universal church, without which we cannot survive in times of shaking, God has withheld from us His power and presence.

Many individuals feel threatened by the experience and revelation of the five-fold ministry and shelter themselves in isolated home meetings. They have forgotten that the diversity of all ministry is not competition but it complements and builds up the body of Christ. This is one reason that the church has such a low level of maturity.

3. No burden for the needy. Ministry has almost come to a complete stop in the house church. When I was an institutional pastor, we would go to the streets to minister and feed hundreds of people. Even the city of Fort Lauderdale stood up and took notice; they asked how they could help. The local newspaper did a full 2-page write-up on us. We went into the jails and nursing homes. We were a light on a hill. Now I feel disconnected from my local brothers rather than us pulling together. The only burden we have is what we shall bring for the meal after the meeting. If we don't have His burden, we cannot know His will, nor can we speak for Him.

4. Giving. Our anti-tithing doctrine has led to a greed where giving is non-existent. It matters little what we believe concerning the tithing issue if our believing doesn't include giving up our selfish attitude toward our finances to pull together locally and trans-locally. If we don't support the poor, we are worse than the institutional church. Paul mentioned over and over his concern for the poor. Jesus said the ministry to the poor was a sign of one being his sheep. Even John questioned the presence of the Holy Spirit being in a person of indifference in 1 John 3:17-18

We often think of homosexuality as the sin of Sodom and the reason that God destroyed it. "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit." Ezek 16:49-50

5. Its conventions are about information not building. Our conventions are no different than the institutional church conventions. We have focused and exalted the prominent speakers to a level of entertainment status. We have experts giving us information while we experience little of the life of the body. Many can't even remember what the speakers have said after the convention. We are more entertained with information expertly presented than a building together. We hope that some holy huddle around a 10-minute break around the table will connect leadership. It is the same old "us four leaders and no more." It becomes exclusive and therefore anti-inclusive. I go to them and feel like a dummy with nothing to add. I feel stupid and am supposed to listen as I sit in my seat as the professionals explain how to do it. I weep and cry to be built with other leaders and am too often disconnected, standing alone. I want to get together in order to pray together, to be one with one another, to share together, to support one another. I am a "lone ranger" in the midst of divisions of every flavor.

When I read the resumes of the speakers, I have flashbacks of institutionalism. Who do we recognize for their suffering, their servant's heart, their loyalty to the sheep? Aren't these the people we need to hear from?

Our meetings are salted with information, strategies, how-to methods, and the spread of house churches. Does this not have the sound of institutional program-ism? We hear much about the why's, how's, and what-to-do in house churches--but we are void of any establishment of being built together and of leaders being reconnected in the body of Christ... true restoration. It pains me to think of all those house churches disconnected in any given locality. Should we not build and not just inform? Is not building an apostolic mandate?

6. A universal disconnect. The universal church, as it is often called, is the unity that gave the early church meaning and power. Without power we are forced to form. Because there is no recognition of the church in the city, there is no understanding of the universal church and the need for universal ministry. The early church started out as a universal church among 120 persons. As it grew, it maintained its universal identity. The church functioned in houses and cities but maintained its identity in universal unity. Leadership was not established in house churches but in the city and in the universal church. Every house church didn't have an elder; but the eldership functioned locally in the city much like Israel. Because there was a universal unity, much of the five-fold ministry could function locally and universally. There were letters from city to city to keep them informed and in communication with one another. There was a body that was connected. Disconnection brings about death. All we need to do is look at our physical bodies for a moment; it has a lot to tell us about being connected and the death that results from being disconnected. How long does it take for a member being separated from the body before it's too late to be reconnected? We need more connection not information.

7. Seeing the house church as the end. Somehow we see the house church in the New Testament as central to changing the world rather than Jesus. In past years I have seen and experienced church emphasis on many issues: Community, government, gifts, repentance, five-fold ministries, discipleship, evangelism... and now the house church movement. The circle of teaching, books, conventions and strategies surround the emphasis. We have come to think that it was the house that changed the world, and we have made it an end.

8. Denominationalism. This is a curse word to those of us who experienced the horrific divisions and competition created out of "naming" a Christian movement. Denominations got their start around some biblical truth or some person. Denominate means "to name". Rarely are we content with just being Christian; we somehow want to name our special movement and separate ourselves from all those who are of "Babylon." It is the name of Jesus that identifies us, not our network. We have subtly fallen into the previous entrapments, which we learned from the institutional church (Babylon) and created streams and networks. We want to box our move under something we can identify as being "us" exclusively. Now, no one will admit this but, the fruit reveals the root of our denominational affiliation. It is a "let-us build" kind of heresy. When the Assemblies of God started around the early part of the 20th century, it wanted to join the divided Pentecostal movement. Today the Assemblies of God is just another denomination among many. What do we think will happen with all our streams and networks? They too will become another denomination with a label. Comenius says, "The great number of teachers is the reason of the multitude of sects, for which we shall soon have no names left..."

Where did this come from? Gen 11:1, 4... 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name (denomination) for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'

It was the first inclination of Peter when he saw Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah: "Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'"

I can hear it now, "Which tabernacle do you go to?" Once we name it, we divide it. For years I heard these defensive excuses: "We are just setting up networks to Â..." and then they go on to explain. I just can't see Apollos coming into a city and leading a number of people to the Lord and then setting up a network or stream-sourcing to his apostolic ministry. Denominationalism comes in many forms. If we are of the same carnal nature as the denominationalist, we will find a way to create a name without looking and feeling denominational. In the discipleship movement we found a way to appear non-denominational-- we called our divisions "streams." In that way we could identify who it is we were "under". Later in the restoration movement we created "networks;" names were given to each network and we related to specific leaders, apostles... whatever. The results are the same. We take something that doesn't belong to us and we put our label on it in order to control it and identify with it. Mankind naturally likes names and titles. So in order to build, we need a name. The name identifies who we are and our group; natural successes give us a sense of achievement that we could not achieve individually. There is power in numbers and recognition in names.

9. False Identification. I keep hearing how we in the house church movement are the largest movement in the world. We use China and others in the third world nations to make this point. But there is no comparison between them and us. I met a brother from China a few years ago; his word to me was that we didn't have life, we had form. We have accomplished a form without life... if we dare to be honest. We are not the same as many in the third world nation. They are not what they are because they meet in houses, but because they have life... Maybe we need to identify with their life and not their house meetings.

10. Numbers: When God sent me into the institutional church as a youth pastor, I learned a powerful inside lesson: it was all about success and numbers. We can't get away from success and numbers. When I go to a house church convention, I hear, "How many house churches have you planted?" or "How many are in your house church?" Whoever has planted the most house churches or has the most successful house church is placed on a pedestal. Is that different from the institution? Many real five-fold ministries cannot become manifest if we continue to judge by such a narrow standard.

11. There is no room for a strong word. We organize till we paralyze. We have created a comfortable environment and a box, which we protect with tooth and claw. Institutionalism is based on organizing to the point where God has no place for moving outside the program or box. I am convinced we need a good strong and hard word now and then. A famous man of God once said, "If you have not gotten a hard word from God, I doubt that you know Him."

I remember one time I invited Art Katz to speak in our church; he blasted us and pointed out every problem. I must say, I loved it. We need to make room for others to speak into what we are doing. Conventions are afraid that "confusion" might set in if such a place is made for this to happen. But we admit that in our local house church meetings we face many hard issues all the time. I had times I wanted to close down the meeting and get with God alone, but if I did, I would have missed the life that comes from confrontation and conflict. Do we organize house churches to end any confusion? No, because to the patient, it is fertile soil to grow.

12. Where do we go from here? If the power of Pentecost was because of the disciples of Jesus and the unity of the body coming together, just maybe we should consider such a humbling position. Let us throw away our differences and come together and pray, fast, and serve one another. Let us let God put us together, build us together. Let us fall in love with Him and one another--no matter how long it takes and no matter what it takes. We cannot dodge such important issues as love, unity and fellowship. Without love we all are nothing and are building on sinking sand. If we don't learn from his story, we will repeat it.

So who am I to make such a request to other leaders? I am nobody, so let's get me out of the picture, something we often don't do, and let's consider a real restoration of the body of Christ. I know that this is the cry of many leaders to whom I have talked and written.

The suggestion I have heard from many is that we meet together and talk first. Then, if God leads, maybe we could have some real weeping between the porch and the altar and repent (Joel 2). Maybe God would give us a prophetic word, where we could sound the alarm on His holy mountain. We need to blow the trumpet with a clear warning and a true word from God in this day of shaking. Let us come together-- because it is good for the brethren to dwell together in unity. It is there He proclaims the blessing... something we all need. Let the Lord separate the wheat from the chaff, but let those who are willing in the day of His power come together.

Dare we come together in unity and build upon Jesus?

from: http://www.therealchurch.com/problems_in_the_house_church_movement.html

Re: THE PROBLEM WITH THE HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT AND A SEARCH FOR THE UNITY OF HIS BODY - posted b

Praise god! let me thank Br. Andy Zoppelt and Br Greg for the post. this is extremely relevant for me personally and I believe a lot of thought provoking points for believers in general. I have been pondering over the topic divisions or separation for some time. God wants us to separate but at the same time not to divide.

On division, Paul writes,

1 Cor 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

On separation the same Paul writes

2 Cor 6:14-17 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.

The difference can be very narrow and hence one has to seek the will of god in even the smallest of decisions. I think one of the clues could be the following.

Separation is about the issues concerning God and Satan. Or about matters concerning Holy Spirit vs the Evil (including spirit of the world). There is nothing to do with people and hence we do not have anything against the people. It is about spiritual.

Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}.

But in the case of divisions, it is about people, organizations etc. This is one test I take before I move a step forward in any direction. I would check myself, if I have an issue with a person or persons, or organizations or is it about the separation AS MENTIONED in the word of God.

Let us seek His grace and light in every decision of ours so that we do not fall in pride.

Praise and glory to god.

Re: THE PROBLEM WITH THE HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT AND A SEARCH FOR THE UNITY OF HIS BODY - posted b

No doubt about it, the house church movement really doesn't have anything much over the institutionalized religious establishment. I really don't know WHAT the answer is. I have often wondered. I mean, even the "bible study" groups and "cell groups" I attended which were linked to the organized religious institutions couldn't even function correctly even though they were held in people's homes and no pastor was present. There was always at least one troublemaker in every group, and the groups were also very boring. I really don't have the slightest clue what the solution is and I don't think anyone else does either.

Re: THE PROBLEM WITH THE HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT AND A SEARCH FOR THE UNITY OF HIS BODY - posted by

I would like to buy into this however know that by myself I am as useless as a onelegged stool and that is part of my point.

Firstly many of us either look to the pastor or the preacher or the home church leader to do the things/stuff/ministry.

As Christians we all have a call on our lives, if you feel deep inside that you want to do something strategic(I steer clear of the word apostolic) have a go, if you feel there is need for direction in your group give it a go If you recognise this is your call to the prophetic office you are responsible to sound the alarm and will be in trouble if you do not. if you feel there is need for more response to the great commission give it a go, if you feel there is more need to put peace and comfort into the hearts of the broken, real soul soothing holy spirit balm into the lives of the crushed or abused or those whose identity is damaged through prison or other things give it a go. If you feel that there is need of correction of dangerous teaching give it a go. The scripture says not to desire to be a teacher as there is double punishment. Can I try to interpret that to what I think is being said? Not that we are meant not to be teachers and in this case I think it means any of the five fold however we must recognise that there is responsibility and accountability with what is in effect leadership. I hesitate to use the word leadership because it tends to mean a person who has a higher position which is wrong. we are all equal. It is when a person in authority thinks they are higher then they are open to pride deception sin and this is why a young person is not advised to take on leadership however we can under the mantle of authority function as a fledgling apostle door keeper, food preparer prophet, the function does not matter it is the heart condition that matters with regard to stepping out and staying safe.

As we step out in faith I believe that how the five fold is to work together will be found as we do it and not leave it to the emulators or the eloquent or the recognised.

We do need mentors and guides and brothers in arms so to speak but we also need to start to move forward in faith and humility.

Joyce Myer says new level new devil and I believe this is true so you may experience some opposition. If on the other hand and you receive some instruction from others that some guidance is required or change needs to be made or the ministry you ventured out on was not yours and it rings true in your heart please consider the advice in light of scripture and your heart and respond accordingly and immediately. This provides a marvelous base for moving forward, like learning to steer a car, the correction gets gentler. If as Joyce has said everyone does not want to experience the challenge of having to adjust their view of you which is psychologically painful sometimes. Or well meaning people may feel they are more deserving to be recognised and you are behind them in years of service of something like that then recognise that and pursue the call regardless. In Australia we have what is called tall poppy syndrome, we tend to hold people down to a unified level and if someone starts to step up they are cut down.

What a challenge it is to step out and step up however may I encourage you to be sensitive to the still quiet voice and be sensitive to the yearning within you for some aspect of the work of the Lord.

Now this might be a bit freaky for some but if you sat down and thought about it if you have a call of God on your life you might think it is natural to die for what you believe in.

For example to see people embrace God's word and understand the process of maturity and to assist them to embark on that is a burning desire of mine. Which is why I responded to this post.

One of the ways to find out yours could be to answer the question if you had unlimited resource or more accurately if resources or money was not a problem and you had all the confidence in the world, in other words there was no barrier to embarking on your mission and you had ten seconds to answer what would it be? What do people always say about your Christian walk? you are encouraging? you love doing street work? you discern God's word accurately without legalism and without shrinking back?

be encouraged because God sent his son for us not only that we get an escape from the flames or better still into heaven but he has a work for you. God's word says to wait on your ministry. In other words seek his face and ask him ask for guidance courage a sign or two or twenty. I have been in the supermarket waiting at the cash register and picked up the readers digest and had the scripture of the month or whatever it is hit me like the back of an axe or to be more precise as the search lights went on.

For example if you are with a friend who confides that he or she has fallen and is genuinely repentant and looking for acceptance or confirmation of still being in the body or love or whatever if it is appropriate have communion with them. lay hands on them for encouragement, speak life over them to them into them.

Yes we are warned to lay hands on no man suddenly and may I add and not in pride as we are as fallen as anybody else however with a broken heart which just means a soft heart and a quiet spirit uplift each other.

Read large chunks of the new and old testaments not only will the word wash you but it will both confirm your ministry and give you guidance in it. we are not to be lone rangers and in danger of rebellion but neither are we to sit and warm a pew for an hour every week.

When Joels outpouring comes which I expect to be greater than Pentecost do not be surprised by how responds and who does not. Paul was a murderer who became an apostle. I would also particularly like to encourage the young to minister but please get guidance and a mentor God will honour your faith and remember we are to pick up our cross daily which may mean being discouraged by those who should encourage.

In this I hope that as we start to move forward the full revelation of how the five fold are to operate.

I believe we are in the great falling away however we are also in the time of preparation prior to the great harvest the wheat and the chaff are being sorted. It is a time of great excitement and I encourage you to step forward in what you feel is a calling on your life, please do it prayerfully in conjunction with others baby steps are good but also decisively and courageously.

If you are spirit filled with evidence of speaking in tongues you will have one or more of the nine gifts of the spirit be encouraged to prophesy out loud in church if you believe you have a word from God, you may need to honour the manner in which this is done as you may need to bring it to one of the leaders before giving it.

Also if the word or vision is fleeting or soft or only just there and you are not too sure and you feel self conscious how do you think you will ever be confident without have a first try.

This may appear to be entirely off topic however I think it is dead on topic, however as I said upfront there are others who will either bring greater clarity to some of the points or correction or direction.

If possible work on ensuring you have several witnesses from God on your calling or other things, however if you are in church and you get a word from God and it lines up with the songs or what some has said or other prophecies give it the roof won't collapse, well hopefully not. Australians can have a zany sense of humour.

Just one thing my moderator friend said with regard to division based on denomination, we tend to put our church, not church or denomination at the top with all the rest at varying levels of decay or unenlightenment. I have had several experiences where God has shown up my prejudices brilliantly so if you have a work colleague who is catholic or pentecostal or seventhday adventist not only can he be your brother but he may be a guide to help you through a particular situation. just a thought.

God bless Oskar