

The Error Of The House Church Movement

I. Introduction: “Many house churches start among people who first meet in an institutional setting, and regular attendance at a good institutional church is encouraged as a source of Christian teaching. But can one really worship at an institutional church? The fellowship pictured in Mt. 18:20 (the source of the house church doctrine of church) is two or three gathered together....” (<http://hccentral.com>).

A. There is a growing movement of meeting in homes with focuses on the following: “Eating, meeting, small groups, and the meeting after the meeting... Although eating (usually a meal) is one of the elements of a house-church gathering, sometimes there may not be food. One week the house church may help someone trim their shrubs and have a time of prayer afterward, and the next week they may come together for a whole smorgasbord of worship, prayer, teaching, and fellowship. Every week should be fresh and informal as people meet to discuss the life of Jesus and life with Jesus” (<https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2008/how-to-start-house-church.html>).

1. The focus is social: “Cross-generational, diverse gatherings of people in a home who share a meal, meet each other’s needs, and help one another grow in their faith” (<https://housechurchnetwork.com>).

2. “The most universally-overlooked feature of the Lord’s Supper as practiced in the primitive house church is that – from all appearances – it was observed in conjunction with a fellowship meal. That is, a normal, ordinary meal with the usual variety of food. However, unlike normal, ordinary meals, this combined table fellowship and memorial was shared among the disciples for the special purpose of strengthening, not just their physical bodies, but their common bond in the spiritual body of Christ... From its very inception, therefore, the Lord’s Supper was an integral part of a real meal” (F. Lagard Smith; *Radical Restoration*; pages 145-146).

B. The “House Church Movement” is its own denominationally minded organization. With elders outside of the local assembly, etc. overseeing such. Notice: “Falling in love with the Church of the Bible, but convicted about the culture and structure of the modern church, Church Project began in 2010, with 40 people, and has grown to over 120 House Churches, helped plant 13 Church Projects, representing more than 10,000 people, and has helped redirect over \$8 million dollars to church plants and ministry partners” (<https://housechurchnetwork.com>).

1. “There is nothing to rule out the possibility that the role of elders in the early church might well have encompassed more than one level of involvement-even simultaneously. Perhaps there were elders shepherding the disciples in each house, depending upon their size and makeup. And perhaps elder oversight may have been exercised throughout a group of house churches which collectively comprised a larger, recognizable congregation. More thought-provoking for us, of course, is the third possibility -- that elders in individual house churches might also have come together as a group” (F. Lagard Smith; *Radical Restoration*; page 178).

2. "Titus 1:5, plus other references to appointing Elders is always 'in every City'. I do not believe that Elders can lead more than one Church. Many of the early Christians were forced to meet in small groups (not multiple congregations). I've stood in the catacombs which held 10-20 people about 10-20 meters apart. Recommend that you visit them if you have not already done so" (Frank Shipp; Teacher at Eastridge "A Church of Christ" on Pendleton Road in El Paso, TX; Email to Brian A. Yeager; Thursday April 27, 2006).

II. Body: Our Goal Is To Use Sound, First Century Congregations As Our Pattern Today (**I Thessalonians 2:14**).

A. We know that Christians must assemble, in person, at least once per week (**Acts 20:7**, **I Corinthians 16:1-4**, and **Hebrews 10:22-25**)? So, let's consider locations that are authorized.

1. The local church is authorized to assemble in a house of one of the members (**Romans 16:3-5**, **I Corinthians 16:19**, **Colossians 4:15**, and **Philemon 1:2**).

a. When a house is being used for the congregation to assemble in, the owner of that house must keep in mind that he or she is NOT the head of the church; the household of the Lord (**Matthew 16:18**, **Ephesians 1:22-23**, and **Hebrews 3:1-6**).

b. When the congregation is not assembled, then one can act as head over his/her own house (**Genesis 18:18-19** and **I Timothy 3:4-5** [qualifications of elders]).

c. The point being, using a person's home to assemble in doesn't "put them in charge" of the congregation (**Ephesians 1:19-23**).

d. If a person cannot have a servant's mentality, they should never offer to host the congregation assembling in his/her home (**Philippians 2:3-8**).

2. The local church is authorized to assemble in public places (**Acts 2:46** and **Acts 20:8**).

3. The meeting place is not the focal point (**John 4:20-24**). What we do when we are assembled together as a congregation of the Lord has to be the main focus (**I Corinthians 11:16-18** and **I Timothy 3:15**).

a. Can people set aside modern man-made traditions of "church buildings" (**Colossians 2:20-23**)?

b. Can people set aside the carnality that comes with the mindset that is concerned about outward appearances (**Matthew 23:25-28**)?

c. Can people set aside the common, erring thought; that worship in a "church building" is somehow more than a house, park, school, library, etc.? Wherever the church is assembled, things must be done "decently^[i] and in order^[ii]" (**I Corinthians 14:40**).

i. "Decorously: - decently, honestly" (Strong's # 2156).

ii. “Regular arrangement, that is, (in time) fixed succession (of rank or character), official dignity: - order” (Strong’s # 5010).

iii. With due reverence [awe, fear, shamefacedness] (**Psalms 89:7** and **Hebrews 12:28-29**).

4. We have to understand the principle of separating what is authorized among/by the collective body from individual and concurrent actions of individual Christians (i.e. **Matthew 18:15-17**, **I Corinthians 14:34-35**, **I Timothy 5:3-16**, etc.).

B. What is the meaning of **Matthew 18:20**?

1. The context is in regard to disciplinary matters (**Matthew 18:10-35**).

2. The point of two or three is about witnesses and how with the word of two or three credible witnesses action can be taken (**Numbers 35:30**, **Deuteronomy 17:1-6**, **Deuteronomy 19:15-19**, **John 8:17**, **II Corinthians 12:19-13:2**, **I Timothy 5:19**, and **Hebrews 10:28**).

3. To argue that two Christians being together makes up the local church is to say that a married couple, who are both Christians, having sex is the church assembled (**I Corinthians 7:1-5**). Dumb, right!?!?

C. Can a congregation have organized social meals? Is our gathering together, as a congregation, supposed to be centered around food. Is the Lord’s Supper supposed to be an extension of a common meal? No, no, no (**I Corinthians 11:20-34**)!

1. A brother and/or sister in Christ can certainly use their home for works of hospitality (**Acts 16:13-15**, **Acts 16:40**, **Acts 21:8**, **Acts 21:16**, **Romans 12:13**, **Romans 16:23**, and **I Peter 4:8-9**).

2. Such work however is not a collective, kingdom work (**Romans 14:17**).

3. We, as a local congregation, have ZERO authority from the Lord to assemble for social gatherings! Just as two Christians may be married and carry out relations in that marriage as Christians separate from the assembly (**Hebrews 13:4**), we as Christians must keep the authorized social activities among individuals separate from the assembly.

D. Can an eldership have oversight of multiple small groups of Christians in a given area? Should the local church be governed or patterned after a human organization?

1. Assembling together is supposed to be in “one place” (**I Corinthians 11:20**; **14:23**).

2. Elders have oversight over the local congregation they are among (**Acts 14:23** and **I Peter 5:1-3**).

3. There is no instruction, example, or even implication that elders in the first century oversaw separate small groups within a city. That makes it wrong to do today because it is without authority from the Lord (**Leviticus 10:1-2**, **II Samuel 7:1-7**, **Galatians 1:8-9**, **Colossians 3:17**, **I Thessalonians 5:21**, and **Revelation 22:18-19**).

4. Consider how that the idea of a congregation, divided in multiple places of assembly, is ignorant. The word translated “church” [ἐκκλησία] contradicts the idea entirely when used to describe a local congregation assembled. Notice: “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly...” (Thayer; Strong’s # 1577).

- a. The idea is “among you” (**Colossians 4:15-16**).
- b. “Together” (**Acts 14:27**).
- c. The term is translated “assembly” in texts not even talking about the local assembly of saints (**Acts 19:32; 19:39**).
- d. When such an “assembly” ends it is no longer an “assembly” (**Acts 19:41**).
- e. Thus, we have language such as “in the church” (**I Corinthians 14:27-28**).
 - i. In the text above (**I Corinthians 14:27-28**), you see someone able to be among the assembly, yet doing something apart from the assembly “*let him speak to himself, and to God.*”
 - ii. It is such a simple principle, but one often not considered. It is simple because we know when someone uses a restroom, the church is not using the restroom. However, I have heard people argue that someone doing something while the saints are assembled (a diabetic eating a snack during a worship assembly to stay alive) was the church eating a meal.

E. Does the abuse of something authorized mean we should avoid that which is authorized? NO!

1. The church in Corinth abused singing, teaching, etc. (**I Corinthians 14:26**).
 - a. Even though singing and prayer have been abused, we still must sing and pray (**Colossians 3:15-16** and **I Thessalonians 5:17-18**).
 - b. Though teaching has long been abused (**II Peter 2:2**), the task is to charge that no other doctrine be taught (**I Timothy 1:3-7**) rather than to stop teaching altogether.
2. Abuses were to be corrected, not abandoned (**I Corinthians 14:12-33**).
3. We must just continue to follow the good and not the evil (**III John 1:11**).

III. Conclusion: When assembling in a house of one of the members, we must make sure we are not partaking in the errors of the “House Church Movement” (**Ephesians 5:6-11, Philipians 1:10, and I Thessalonians 5:21-22**).