

The church in the house

It is unequivocal that the apostolic church only met in houses and nowhere else. However much modern church leaders wish to affirm the practicality of purchasing dedicated buildings for the church to gather in, they cannot avoid the simple fact that the apostles never used this option. In many cities there were buildings available for public rent big enough to house large numbers. We see Paul use this for preaching the Gospel and holding debates in the Hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus for instance, but we know that Paul and the other apostles never used dedicated buildings for church meetings.

Not only do we see clear statements that when the church gathers on Sunday it meets in a house (Rm 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philem 1:2), every instance of the church meeting in the New Testament is in a home and nowhere else. This is over and above the statements about churches in the house. This is the case early in the church's history, as in Acts 1:13, but also later in mature apostolic church history, as in Col 4:15 (60 or 61 AD). We will demonstrate this in this paper.

Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished *and* prepared; there make ready for us. Mk 14:14-15 ['Upper room' is *anogeon* meaning a first storey, i.e. 'upstairs', which more wealthy people were able to build above the main ground floor rooms. This was the prototype church meeting established by the Lord.]

And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room [*huperoon*] where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son of* Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son of* James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. Acts 1:13-14

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison. Acts 8:3

So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. Acts 12:12

Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. Acts 20:7-8 [This was an upper room (*huperoon*) in a private dwelling; this may refer to more temporary structures build on the flat roof of a house (cf. 2 Kg 4:9-11, 21, 32-35.)

Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. Rm 16:5

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 1 Cor 16:19

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that *is* in his house. Col 4:15

For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?). 1 Tim 3:5 [In other words there is a direct correlation between a father ruling his own family in a house, and an elders ruling the family of the church in

a house. There is a big difference of management practice and structure between leading a small group in a house and a large group in a big building.]

I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 Tim 3:15 [The church is the household or family of God (*oikos*), meeting in a house.]

To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house. Philem 1:2

The church only moved into large public buildings (basilicas, hence classical church architecture) after the supposed conversion of Emperor Constantine when the church became acceptable to the world after the Edict of Milan in 313. This caused the ruination of pure church experience. After this time more and more formal errors of practice crept into the gathered church, such as:

- Formal, single, authoritarian leaders in churches and monarchical bishops in districts.
- Formal establishment of clear separation between clergy and laity.
- Introduction of new unbiblical leadership jobs. [These three items had been in gradual development for a hundred or so years but were formalised and set in concrete after 313.]
- Greater authority of large metropolitan city churches over provincial rural ones.
- Gradual dominance of the Roman church, and the Roman bishop as pope, over all western churches.
- Preoccupation with formal feast days, and especially Easter, based upon pagan celebration holidays.
- Slow incremental introduction of instrumental music over the next 900 years, not universally accepted until about 1200 (and later removed by the Reformers).
- Introduction of choirs.
- Introduction of rigid and formal liturgy.
- Introduction of rigid seating plans and pews.

Since it is the clear apostolic practice that the church is small, acts like a family and meets in a house, why is this universally ignored? If modern Reformed church leaders wish to be absolutely Biblical and contend against others for errors, why do they all disobey this precedent? How will they feel when the Lord calls them to account for wasting tens of thousands of pounds (in some cases millions) of his money on something material and unprofitable. This is to say nothing of the effects on his people who were shut into church systems and meetings that precluded and inhibited their participation; something meeting in homes was designed to encourage, 'But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all' (1 Cor 12:7).

The beginning of genuine church experience is a home church where open participation under godly teachers is practised.

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