

# Why the local church is small

I have explained the New Testament doctrine of the church in many places, but here I want to be as simple and concise as possible in demonstrating that the local church cannot be large. If we understand the scriptures and seek to obey the Lord, then the gathered church will always be relatively small in numbers.

## **The church is the family of God.**

This is the foremost figure to represent the fellowship life of the local church (Matt 10:25; Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19). The church is where we meet together as brethren to listen to our Father (1 Jn 3:1). It is impossible for a large church to represent the Biblical image of family.

## **Jesus called his disciples a, 'little flock'.**

Large flocks were a common indication of wealth and are mentioned often in the Old Testament. Yet when Jesus wanted to comfort his people he calls them a little flock (Lk 12:32). In comparison to the large gatherings of the world around them, the local body is a little flock.

## **Biblical churches always met in homes, not in hired halls.**

The only descriptions of the meeting places of churches are homes (Acts 8:3; Rm 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm 1:2). There is no instance of a church worshipping in large numbers in a hired hall. When Paul spoke in the Hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9) it was for public preaching and debate to explain the Gospel. This was a common occurrence in public lecture halls as Greek sophists often spoke in such places.

## **There is one loaf and one cup.**

Paul teaches this emphatically in 1 Cor 10:16, 21, 11:25, 26, 27-28 cf. Matt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 20:7. Though 'took bread' could possibly be construed as more than one loaf, the context shows that it is a single loaf of bread that is intended. It is impossible for there to be one cup and one loaf made available for hundreds of people celebrating the Lord's Supper.

## **The church is interdependent and relational.**

Paul's teaching on the body in 1 Corinthians 12 makes clear that there is not only common knowledge, but also common feelings for one and all; when one suffers all suffer. This requires small, intimate numbers. It is impossible for everyone to suffer when someone is in pain in large churches since they would rarely even know the individual at all. Many large churches are guilty of having very needy, suffering people in their midst and yet not even the leaders know their problems.

## **The local church is a community.**

The gathering of local saints is a place of one-anothering. At least 60 times the phrase 'one another' is used in the NT to emphasise the importance of *koinonia* (fellowship). Thus we are to love one another, care for one another, edify one another, admonish one another and so on. These things cannot be done in formal or large meetings. The essential meaning of *koinonia* is to give a share and to receive a share. The church is a place where everyone gives what God has given them and receives from the gifts of others. Such to and fro activity cannot be performed in large meetings.

### **The local church is a place of mutual edification.**

The reason we gather is to break bread and remember the cross, but the way we gather is by mutual edification (Rm 14:19; 1 Cor 14:12, 26; 2 Cor 12:19; Eph 4:29; 1 Thess 5:11). Saints edify one another as they share their divinely given gifts to build each other up. This cannot be done in a large meeting.

### **God's kingdom is spiritual**

It is the world that measures success in terms of large numbers and a public testimony, God never does. Christ's kingdom (in other words the church, the place where God reigns through Christ in his people) is heavenly (Jn 18:36); it is not based on earthly features of any kind. Thus his people do not fight, do not build on human methods, do not utilise management techniques, do not have authoritarian leaders, do not have a hierarchy of any kind, and neither are they large communities.

### **At any given time the church is few.**

Matt 20:16 gives the lie to the notion that there is to be a great revival where the majority of the population is converted, and that towns have meetings filled with thousands of worshipping, powerful people. To hold such a doctrine is to contradict the Lord's clear word.

### **God's purpose in history has always been with a remnant**

Let us review Biblical history:

- At the time of the flood, the vast majority of the earth was destroyed; that is millions of people were condemned and judged by God. Out of this realm only eight people (one family) were saved in the ark. This establishes a principle of God's sovereign choice of elect people. [Note 1 Pt 3:20; 2 Pt 2:5.]
- When God condemned Sodom and Gomorrah, the whole populations were destroyed except for one family (Lot, Gen 19:16; note 2 Pt 2:6-7).
- When God wanted to raise up a nation in righteousness he chose one family out of all the Chaldeans (Abraham).
- God chose Israel in his plan because it was the smallest of nations and not even moderately sized (Deut 7:7).
- In his judgments God even made this nation to be few in number (Deut 4:27, worked out in history in exiles and judgment).
- Throughout Israel's history God cut off the majority of the population to leave only a remnant (Isa 1:9, 10:20-22; Amos 5:15; Rm 9:27, 11:5 etc.).
- At one point in Israel's history there were only 7,001 elect people (1 Kg 19:18).
- When Christ came to his people, they rejected him and only a small remnant had faith (Matt 21:42; Lk 17:25).
- After the cross, not many affluent, wise and privileged people were saved (1 Cor 1:26; Matt 11:25; Lk 10:21).
- Even at the end there is a great apostasy from the truth and the faithful church is small and persecuted (2 Thess 2:3ff; Rev 12:17, 13:7).

There is no Biblical precedent for a global revival when the earth is filled with large churches full of power. Supposed support for this is taken by misquoting texts and misrepresenting verses that are applicable to the time after the last day, when God restores the earth and his kingdom is built on it.

**Conclusion**

There is absolutely no support for large churches; none whatsoever. Such entities require a large organisation to function and this in turn necessitates many features that are unbiblical in themselves such as dedicated buildings, ranks of leadership, administrators, etc. It also requires large amounts of money to keep such structures afloat, and this in itself is wrong since God's money is to be used primarily for the poor, and ministry when required.

All in all it is sinful to build such large structures, as they have no scriptural warrant. They celebrate men who are at the forefront of large gatherings, and take the attention off God, who is to be our sole focus. It is impossible to build large churches without committing sin and rebelling against God's very clear word.

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