

THOUGHTS ON THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

False Community:

The model of meeting in homes is often put forward by its proponents as one that embraces a community or familial spirit, unlike its counterpart, the traditional church. The traditional church, in this sense, meaning a structured meeting, taking place in a building strictly used for the worship service or other meetings of the church. Homechurch, it is said, fosters a sense of family in the meeting of the brethren. These meetings are supposed to imitate the gatherings of believers in the book of Acts. It is often commented that two types of meetings can be observed from the New Testament, the first being the meeting of believers at Solomon's Portico during the day (Acts 2:46; 5:12). The purpose of this meeting seems to be twofold: the public preaching of the word, and more specifically the teaching of God's people by the Apostles. The second type of meetings that took place in the early days of the Church, were the informal gatherings of believers in their homes. Believers gathered in each other's homes to break bread and fellowship with one another. Many homechurchers believe that the meeting at Solomon's Portico was primarily an evangelistic meeting, while the gatherings at each other's homes should be the precursor to our modern understanding of the Church meeting. They argue that the Church today should adopt a model whereby believers are gathered with one another in the comfort of their homes to discuss and teach the things of God. There are many advantages and disadvantages for the people of God in adopting this model. This paper will address only one of the disadvantages that poses a significant problem to the model and lifestyle of homechurching believers: the false sense of community and its effect on the lives of church members. It is not the purpose to discredit the practice of meeting in homes, which is thoroughly justified by scripture (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15 Phm 1:2), but rather to examine one of the attitudes that is often associated with doing so.

If we are to use the text of Acts as the foundation of how we participate in the meeting and organization of a church, as most homechurchers request, we must look at the early believers lives in a general sense. While homechurch proponents are inclined to think of the house gatherings, opposed to temple meetings, as the dominant type meeting of for

early believers, or the one that should frame our understanding of Lord's Day meetings, they may actually have their order of importance all wrong. This misunderstanding actually leads to a diminished view of community. Their common inclination is to place a higher importance on the meetings in homes, assuming the meetings at the temple were for evangelistic reasons. The meeting of believers at the temple and in their homes however, is given equal weight and significance in the book of Acts (2:46; 5:42). The gatherings of believers in each others houses shown in the book of Acts should not be seen as a formula for how the meeting of the church should be held, but rather as an example of how the Christian life should be lead. These believers were excited to hear the teaching of the Apostles daily at the temple, and so they went. They were eager to hear of their Lord from those who knew Him better than anyone else. Their gathering from house to house to break bread together was a manifestation of their inherent belief in the covenant community. They existed as a body of believers, thoroughly entwined in each other's lives.

It is common for believers participating in a homechurch model to substitute what should be a lifestyle of community during the week for a lifestyle of community on Sunday. In championing the Acts model of meeting in the home, they take what should be a common occurrence of believers during the week and make it a grand once-a-week event. This does not mean that anyone who participates in a homechurch *never* meets with others during the week, but it is a common flaw. It is easy for people gathering in each other's homes on Sunday to feel a false sense of community with one another. Since their meeting time is seemingly more intimate in those few hours than with any other relationships they have outside the church, it can be easy to feel a sense of accomplishment. They talk with each other of their struggles throughout the week, their battles with the broken AC unit, or problems at work. Homechurch members tend to think that because they have shared in the fellowship of the saints, while at a brother's house, they have somehow fulfilled their duty of community for the rest of the week. But just because a brother has seen another believer's bathroom, it does not mean that they are living out the covenant community.

Our obligation to commune with one another does not stop after the Sunday meeting. We are encouraged to gather together in order to uplift and teach one another. We are commanded to participate in the corporate gathering and worshipping of the Lord on

Sunday, and then to go and manifest our love for another, gathering together throughout the week. So many homechurch participants feel so justified by their high and lofty act of meeting in a brother's home, that they assume they are ahead of the game community wise. They do not recognize that they are forsaking the fellowship of the saints during the other six days. In traditional churches that have chosen to pursue a biblical example of covenant community, the members sacrifice the comfort and intimacy of their homes in order to gather on Sunday for worship together. In their sacrificing, they realize the sweetness of Christian fellowship every other day of the week, as well as Sunday after church. They desire to have the people of God fellowshiping in their house on Monday, because they did not get to talk about everything on Sunday. They devote their Sunday to God, and find out about their sister's broken AC unit while fellowshiping on Tuesday. The community that homechurchers praise themselves for having on Sunday, is actually the community that should be taking place outside the meeting of the Church during the rest of the week. It could be noted that this supposed flaw with the homechurch model might really just be a flaw in the people who would fall under the condemnation of this argument. If this is the case, it could also easily be said that the kind of person who might have this flaw, is commonly the kind of person who prefers homechurch.

If homechurchers are to thoroughly adopt the model put forth in the book of Acts, then they must begin to break bread with one another daily, go from house to house, meet together in the public square for worship, and then think about selling all they have. But nobody really wants to be that literal, they just want to be *comfortable*.