

HOUSE CHURCH *or* DEDICATED BUILDING?

There is a controversy among many professing Christians regarding where believers ought to assemble. The *place* of meeting, whether in a *home*, a *dedicated building*, in a *tent*, in the *open-air*, or *under a tree*, is of little consequence. All these locations have been used in times past with God's blessing and could be appropriate, depending on practical needs, for any local body of believers. Interestingly enough, those who frown on believers who meet in *homes* are deluded by the same spirit of religious error that deceives those who chide local churches for meeting in a *dedicated building*, namely, *they're distracted by the location of the meeting*. The '*house-church*' folks criticize the '*dedicated church-building*' folks and '*church-building*' folks criticize the '*house-church*' folks for the exact same traditional error: *they are both hung up on the place of meeting*. If you believe the '*meeting place*' or the '*building*' really doesn't matter, then it consequently won't make much difference to you.

No Bible-believing Christian will dispute the fact that the early church often met in *houses* and churches can likewise meet in *houses* today (*Acts 2:46; 20:20*, etc.). However, every Bible-believing Christian should dispute the false assertion that churches *must* meet in a *house*.

One Biblical example of the early church not meeting in a *house*...

"For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating everyone taketh before other his own supper and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not." —1 Corinthians 11:18-22

The *Apostle Paul* is talking about when the members of the *church at Corinth* "*come together therefore into one place*." Where did they come together? What *building* did they use? He does not exactly say. However, what he does do, is point out where they *did not meet*...

*"What? Have ye not **houses** to eat and to drink in?"* says the *Apostle Paul*. Remember, this statement was made under divine inspiration, and we dare not suppose the inspiring agent, the *Spirit of God*, was mistaken in the choice of words. So, if we are honest with this passage, what can we conclude regarding the topic at hand? We can logically determine the *Corinthians* were not meeting in their own *houses*. This is an absolute. The Bible does not tell us where they met, but it does tell us that they did not meet in their *houses*.

To assert that God demands/expects *local churches* to exclusively meet in *homes* and *should not* or *cannot* meet in a *dedicated building* is both unscriptural and absurd. There is no such command in the *New*

Testament, and as shown above (*by Scriptural reference / proof*) and contrary to what many believe, the early church did not always meet in *homes*.

Our *local fellowship* began meeting in my *home* in 1995. Within a year, we had a small *dedicated building* and later moved into a rented *storefront*. After 15 years we lost the rented building. Because we're located in a very rural area, finding a suitable building was difficult. Therefore, we were forced to meet in a sister's home who was gracious enough to allow us the use of her *living-room* (*even though we had 65-75 people and it was a very uncomfortable fit*). After approximately a little over a year, we finally secured a *dedicated building* that we purchased. So, we much experience in meeting in both *houses* and *dedicated buildings* and beside the practical aspects, there is no discernable difference. Besides, how do we define a 'house'? If someone lived in a *dedicated building*, would it then qualify as a *house*? If a church met in a building typically defined as a *house*, yet no one lived there, should it then be considered a *dedicated building* and would be unfit for believers to assemble in? Such questions expose the petty and unscriptural reasoning of those who are distracted by where believers meet.

Again, there is certainly nothing wrong with meeting in a *home*, but those that teach it's God's explicit *will* that believers meet in *homes* and any other meeting place is unbiblical, are misled. In my experience, those who espouse and teach such ideas (*who are generally part of the 'house church movement' in America—exceptions implied*) are often fueled and motivated by an independent, anti-authority, anti-church attitude that spawns a super-spirit who *loves to teach* but *refuses to be taught*. More than once I've heard such men suggest that meeting in a *dedicated building* is essentially to hold to 'the traditions and doctrines of men'. Such statements, at best, reveal a shallow understanding of religious deception. The 'traditions of men', according to the Bible, are teachings that cannot be verified by the authority of Scripture. Thus, the pet doctrine of 'meeting only in houses', which cannot be irrefutably confirmed by the *New Testament* (*no explicit command and an example to the contrary*), is actually a 'tradition and command of men'. So ironically, those who assert churches can only meet in *houses*, in a vain attempt to curtail *religious tradition*, are blindly promoting *religious tradition*.

Granted, it's true, a *home* is generally more personal than a *dedicated building* and some might assert that encourages the 'family atmosphere' which is a big part of true Biblical fellowship. I agree, a 'family atmosphere' is very important for local churches. However, I believe such an ambiance and atmosphere is not maintained by the size/type/location of the building (*lest 'buildings' take precedent over spirit*) but rather—the attitudes of heart, the level of spiritual commitment of the believers, and co-operation with the *Spirit* and *grace of God*.

—B.W.