

The Home Church

House churches, cell groups, and other terms refer to a popular movement today. Some have made a principle of separating themselves from denominations and emphasizing that only the house church is a viable representative of *apostolic Christianity*. Others have used the small group movement to infuse more vitality into a spiritless congregation. Others take a middle-of-the-road attitude, and engage in house churching for practical reasons.

Both the Bible guidance and practical considerations are important. The simple fact is that there is not one single denomination in existence that adheres to all ten

commandments. Most of them adhere to a majority of the commandments, but none to all of them. In fact, there is no denomination that adheres even to the three least kept of the commandments: one God, the Sabbath, and prohibition of killing. So for practical reasons, the true believer simply cannot participate in any religious establishment.

While there are other issues to take into consideration besides the ten commandments, these form a good rule of thumb. They rule out all of the churches from the beginning. But just attending a house church is no solution at all. House churches can and do participate in the same false doctrines that the denominations do. Finding or establishing a house church requires careful adherence to Scriptural guidance.

The first [home church](#), the one that remains the ideal, is that of Adam and Eve. They met with God for worship every evening as well as Sabbaths. (Gen 3:8) "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."

Walking with God is the basic form of worship. It continued with Enoch (Gen 5:24) "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." This daily, family meeting with God for worship, this walking with him, is the preparation for being taken from this earth one day to meet the Lord in the air. Those in the days of Enoch who neglected the form of worship instituted with Adam and Eve were eventually destroyed in the Flood. Only those who maintained it were saved. (Gen 6:9) "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations (that is, family or home church), and Noah walked with God."

The original home church practice expanded greatly by the time of Abraham. (Gen 14:14) "When Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, three hundred and eighteen, born in his own house, and pursued them unto Dan." Even with such a large number, the home church of Abram had been divided as described in Genesis 13:8ff. While the reason for the separation was conflict, the separation resolved the conflict, rather than continuing it. That is precisely the opposite of what generally happens within the house church movement today, and that should be a warning indicator. The house church movement today, unless the group is based on truly Biblical principles, is just another



expression of Babylonian faith.

One of the reasons house churches go astray today is because they are merely fields for the abuse of authority. They are founded by people who were bitter because they could not get the power they sought over the congregation they were in. The Bible contains a principle that goes far to prevent that. Responsibility for the organization of home meetings should be that of the oldest son. The principle of the birthright was central in the home churches in the book of Genesis. When children are given their rightful responsibility in reading the Scriptures in the hearing of those gathered and otherwise functioning visibly, then there is neither a problem of restless behavior on the part of children nor the danger of adults angling for power, as they do in home churches sometimes even more overtly than in established congregations.

In fact, the worship service can be made so simple that rather young children are capable of leading out. If it begins with silent prayer, where those gathered may break the silence with their petition, then continues with the leading child reading the Scripture lesson, after which study or discussion may take place, there is no point at which the leading child need feel that his role of leadership has been shunted aside. The elders can contribute to the Bible study, give testimonies and exhortations, all without taking over the leadership of the meeting.

The birthright principle is in fact the thing that was given up when a national system of worship was instituted among the Israelites. The birthright was kept in principle, but in practice the firstborn was redeemed by giving money to the priests, who then took over their natural duties. This system prevailed under the judges and the kings. But like polygamy, this was not God's original plan.

There were reasons for changing institutions during the times of the judges and kings. At the coming of the Messiah, this was reverted to the original plan. [Yahushua](#) (Jesus) established the original format of small-scale worship in Matthew 16-18, giving precise details for how worship should be organized.

The basic institution is in (Mat 18:19) Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. (Mat 18:20) For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Yahushua reduces the Jewish minyan or least number necessary for congregational prayers to two or three. Two or three can bind a matter, that is, establish a church that follows the Gospel order exactly. The principles are these:

The church is founded on the declaration of Peter that Yahushua is the son of God. Matthew 16:16-18.

The church is the authoritative representative of the kingdom of God on earth, Matthew 16:19.

The church keeps a low profile, even at times a secret one, as it is at war with the kingdom of Satan in this world. Matthew 16:20.

The church is based on the plan of salvation of which the death and resurrection of Christ is central. Matthew 16:21-23; 17:22-23.

The church is the practice ground for that denial of self that is necessary for salvation. Matthew 16:24-26.

The church is based on the expectation of the soon coming of Christ. Matthew 16:27-28.

The church is visionary and prophetic, bringing the gathered into direct contact with the prophetic revelation from heaven. Matthew 17:1-9.

The church is the vehicle of divine blessing to the world in teaching and healing, empowered by prayer and fasting. Matthew 17:14-21.

The church wisely does what it must to avoid conflict with Rome. Matthew 17:24-27

The central value the church is to maintain is humility, and a tender attitude toward the lowly. Matthew 18:1-14.

The church is a vehicle of reconciliation in the event of conflict, and it has the obligation to eject those who engage in offenses to their brothers. Matthew 18:15-17.

The church is established by the action of two or three gathering in the name of Christ for that purpose. Matthew 18:18-20.

Christ is invisibly but personally present in the gathering of the church. Matthew 18:20.

The church is the vehicle of divine forgiveness, which is relayed in the same measure as its members forgive one another. Matthew 18:21-35.

These fifteen Gospel principles are essential to the kingdom of God of which the Gospel is a proclamation. If any are missing, the institution ceases to be a valid church. The church is not an institution transmitted by apostolic succession. It is established directly by Yahushua Himself, who is present at its establishment and at every meeting.

The apostolic church generally gathered in homes or in secluded places out of doors.... That was the prevalent system



before imperial Christianity, which started building large structures in order more easily to control the people and indoctrinate them with apostasy. Home churches were established quite close to each other, such as that kept, apparently in her home, by the deaconess Phebe in Cenchrea, well within walking distance of Corinth, where another church gathered.

The Gospel church does not include the necessity of elders and deacons. These are offices that were established in the *apostolic church* to meet the specific needs of the times. During that time the mystery religions were very popular in the Roman empire.

They were semi-secret home groups that had a form of initiation similar to baptism, but sometimes involving horrid rites of being washed in blood, had a sacred meal, worshipped a man-god who was claimed to have died and resurrected, and sang hymns and read scriptures to that effect. The similarity with the Gospel church was very close, so close that both Jews and Gentiles sometimes had difficulty telling the difference. Within this context, the offices of deacons and elders were necessary to maintain Gospel order. Given that we are faced today with the same challenges, hundreds of forms of paganism all claiming to be Christian, deacons and elders serve a valid and often necessary role today as well.

Paul writes in detail about these offices in 1 Timothy 3. While many today think that apostolic succession makes a valid ordination, this is not true. Only Christ himself can ordain, and Christ is only present in the gathered in his name to do so. Ordination by prayer and laying on of hands by those gathered in a valid Gospel church is the only valid ordination.

The church has the obligation to perform certain ordinances besides ordaining elders and deacons, generally through these officers, if they exist in the gathering. They include:

The ministry of the Word. Revelation 1:3.

Baptism by immersion of those giving witness of their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. Romans 6:4.

The washing of feet at the beginning of the communion service. John 13:14.

The Lord's supper of unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice. 1Corinthians 11:23-33.

Blessing of children. Matthew 19:14.

Prayer for the sick. James 5:14.

The church in Greek is ecclesia, which means the group of those called out, and is never used in reference to a building. They are called out of the synagogues of Satan, which are the established faiths of the world. The church includes people with specific spiritual gifts to benefit those around them. These are discussed in detail in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The list of such gifts is given in (1 Cor 12:28) "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

All of the fifteen Gospel principles, the eight spiritual gifts, and the institution of elders and deacons, appeared among the early commandment-keeping Adventists. The earliest writings of Ellen White give vivid descriptions of such gatherings. The home church of the White family was led in worship by the eldest son Henry, their "sweet singer." Ellen White describes the training necessary to give children the ability to lead out in home worship. "Instruction in vocal culture should be given in the home circle. Parents should teach their children to speak so plainly that those who are listening can understand every word that is said. They should teach them to read the Bible in clear, distinct utterance, in a way that will honor God. And let not those who kneel round the family altar put their faces in their hands and in their chair when they address God. Let them lift up their heads and, with holy awe and boldness, come to the throne of grace."--Adventist Home, p. 435.

The principle of the home church meeting was already understood and practiced as early as 1844 among commandment-keeping Adventists. "It was not long after the passing of the time, in 1844, that my first vision was given me. I was visiting Mrs. Haines at Portland, a dear sister in Christ, whose heart was knit with mine; five of us, all women, were kneeling quietly at the family altar. While we were praying, the power of God came upon me as I had never felt it before."--Christian Experience and Teaching of Ellen G. White, p. 57.

Failure to establish a home church is justified by lack of means, both economic and personal. We have already seen that it is enough that there is one person available who is old enough to read from the Bible. Even if no literate person can be found, a church can be gathered around the Word that is known from memory. And if no one is present who can repeat a Bible text by heart, then silence together is golden, and the voice can always be lifted in prayer and petition to God.

"Poverty need not shut us out from showing hospitality. We are to impart what we have. There are those who struggle for a livelihood and who have great difficulty in making their income meet their necessities; but they love Yahushua in the person of His saints and are ready to show hospitality to believers and unbelievers, trying to make their visits profitable. At the family board and the family altar the guests are made welcome. The season of prayer makes its impression on those who receive entertainment, and even one visit may mean the saving of a soul from death. For this work the Lord makes a reckoning, saying: "I will repay."--Adventist Home, p. 451.



The role of the man and the woman in the home worship carries over from the daily practice to the Sabbath gathering as well. "Before leaving the house for labor, all the family should be called together; and the father, or the mother in the

father's absence, should plead fervently with God to keep them through the day. Come in humility, with a heart full of tenderness, and with a sense of the temptations and dangers before yourselves and your children; by faith bind them upon the altar, entreating for them the care of the Lord. Ministering angels will guard children who are thus dedicated to God."--Child Guidance, p. 519.

It was mainly the influence of the Seventh-day Baptists that turned the early believers towards establishing institutions. The institutions founded in the latter part of the 1800s were modeled after the Baptists, with boards, associations, and conferences. These, though perhaps not wrong in themselves, were eventually abused through overdependence on organisation, so that the early, proper home church principles were lost. Ellen White called for a reform in this matter, and a return to the original home church principles as found in the book of Genesis. "You who profess to love God, take . . . [Yahushua] with you wherever you go; and, like the patriarchs of old, erect an altar to the Lord wherever you pitch your tent. A reformation in this respect is needed,--a reformation that shall be deep and broad."--Testimonies, vol. 5, pp. 320, 321.

We do not need a new organization, nor do we need to participate in the institutions engaged in apostasy. The home church that was established in Eden, affirmed in the Gospel, and maintained by early commandment-keeping Adventists exists today and has not changed. It is the same church to which Ellen White, James White, the Waggoners, Joseph Bates, and scores of other belonged and participated in. It is sufficient to gather as a family at the family altar daily, and come together with like-minded believers in a designated house on the Sabbath day and as occasion permits.