

The Biblical Basis for Home Groups

by David A. Huston

This paper is presented to show from Scripture why we believe home groups are a fundamental element of New Testament church structure.

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

John 1:18 –

WHEN THE INVISIBLE GOD DECIDED to make Himself visible in a human body, He constructed that body according to the pattern of the Word. The result of this incarnation, called the Word made flesh, was the man known as Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Bible identifies as the Son of God (John 1:14). God's Son is not a divine person distinct from the Father, but rather the manifestation of the invisible Father in humanity. The Bible affirms clearly that God is one, and that it was this same God who was manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16).

The Greek word translated Word in John 1:14 and elsewhere in the New Testament is *logos*. According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, *logos* means the expression of a thought. It comes from the root word *lego*, which means to lay forth; to relate in words usually of systematic or set discourse (*Strong's Greek Dictionary*, #3004). In ancient Greek literature, *logos* could mean speech, account, reason, definition, rational faculty, proportion (*Greek Philosophical Terms*, F.E. Peters). The word *logos*, as used with reference to the God of the Bible, includes the entirety of God's expressed thoughts to mankind, including all of the divine laws, patterns, and principles by which He governs all aspects of His creation, both physical and spiritual.

Christian writer David K. Bernard has described *logos* this way: *Logos* can mean the expression or plan as it exists in the mind of the proclaimer—as a play in the mind of a playwright—or it can mean the thought as uttered or otherwise physically expressed—as a play that is enacted on stage. John 1 says the Logos existed in the mind of God from the beginning of time. When the fullness of time was come, God put that plan into action. He put flesh on that plan in the form of the man Jesus Christ. The Logos is God expressed (*The Oneness of God*, pg.60).

Since God is not the author of confusion but desires that all things be done decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:33,40), we can view the Logos as God's orderly, rational pattern or plan. This is evidenced by the English words we use today which are derived from the Greek word *logos*: logic, logical, logistics, and the suffixes -logy and -logue.

Understanding the biblical concept of the Logos and the true humanity of the Son of God are fundamental to understanding the Oneness concept of Deity. The Bible differentiates between the Father and the Son in the same sense that it differentiates between deity and humanity. Those who understand this concept understand the essential oneness of the Supreme Godhead, not in spite of this differentiation, but because of it.

God's Manifestation Through the Logos

God has always manifested Himself to man exclusively in and through the divine pattern called the Logos. The Bible teaches that the pattern of the entire creation is the Logos (John 1:3, Hebrews 11:3). Thus, as Romans 1:20 states, the invisible things of God, including His eternal power and Godhead, can be clearly seen in the things that are made. Similarly, the Bible itself is the Logos in written form. As Jesus said, it is the Scriptures that testify of Him (John 5:39, Luke 24:44). The apostles also revealed the invisible God through their Spirit-anointed proclamations. They did not cease preaching and teaching Jesus Christ (Acts 5:42). And according to Titus 1:3, God has in due time manifested His *logos* through preaching. ”

Clearly the creation, the Bible, and the preaching of anointed men are all ways through which the invisible God has revealed Himself to man. All three are expressions of God in and through the Logos. All three are likewise consistent in their affirmation of God's oneness; however, all three fall short of revealing God in the fullness of His being. This occurs only in the Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9).

Jesus of Nazareth does not, however, constitute the entirety of God's Christ, for God, in His greatness and majesty, desires to fill for eternity far more than a single human being. Jesus of Nazareth is the head of God's body (Ephesians 1:22). The remainder of the body of Christ is the Church, which is expressed throughout the earth as local assemblies.

Jesus Christ identifies so closely with the Church that when members are persecuted, He asks, "Why do you persecute *me*?" (Acts 9:4). He feels this way because the Church is literally *His* body. The body of Jesus of Nazareth was never

meant to be the sum total of the Messiah's body: Jesus was to be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29). He is the Head; His brethren comprise the body. Just as a shepherd needs a flock, a husband needs a wife, and a head needs a body, so it is that Jesus needs the Church to complete His purpose. According to Paul, the Church is the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:23). As incredible as it sounds, the eternal God, who fills all space and exists in all time, considers Himself to be incomplete without the Church.

Having established that the Church is the body of Christ, let us now examine the structure or form of this body; for if the body of the man, Jesus of Nazareth, was constructed according to the Logos pattern, then the universal body of Christ should also be structured this way. Since both the pattern of Christ's body and the Bible are the Logos, then if the Church is to be truly the Church, it must be structured according to the biblical pattern for the Church. The question then is, what is the biblical pattern?

Traditionally, most local churches of all types have been structured according to the pattern of the clergy-laity concept. The clergy has consisted of the professional ministers: those who have been called to preach, have been properly licensed, and receive the tithes of the Church as personal income. The laity has consisted of the unlicensed church members who are not ministering professionally.

Operating under this traditional concept, the clergy (that is, the local pastor and his immediate paid staff) has had the sole responsibility for preaching, winning the lost, caring for new converts, counseling saints, visiting the sick, and administering over the affairs of the assembly. The church members have been expected to come to church, pay their tithes, and live right. But where did this concept of church structure come from? The answer is, from the pseudo-church of the Dark Ages. It is a deceptive amalgamation of the Church leadership established by the New Testament and the Levitical priesthood of the Old. But in the New Testament, all believers are priests, Jesus Christ Himself being the High Priest (1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 4:14). The Church has its priests; what it needs is leaders.

The Church in the Wilderness

Acts 7 speaks of the church in the wilderness. This is a reference to the people of Israel whom God delivered out of bondage in Egypt through the leadership of Moses. Since the time in the wilderness is the first instance recorded in the Bible where God is leading His people as a collective group (a congregation), let us examine the structure of this extraordinary assembly of people.

Because of its enormous size, the congregation of Israel was far more than one man could lead by himself. Therefore, in Exodus 18, God told Moses through his father-in-law, Jethro, to select and train leaders, even before moving the people toward the Promised Land. These verses reveal that before God ever gave the Law, He gave the biblical pattern for the structure of a congregation and its leadership.

At the beginning, Moses sat from morning to evening *pastoring* the people and trying to solve their unending personal problems. His role was comparable to that of many present-day pastors. Finally, Jethro asked Moses, "What is this thing that thou doest *to* the people?" (AV). Moses' answer indicates that he thought he was helping the people to know the statutes of God. Jethro's response, however, shows that Moses was actually harming both himself and the people. Moses thought he was doing something *for* the people, but Jethro showed him that he was actually doing something *to* the people. Moses was standing between them and their ministry—between them and a greater maturity in their relationship with God (Exodus 18:1-17).

As a result, the Lord instructed Moses to pick out able, faithful men who feared God and to place them in positions of leadership. Moses was to lead them, and they were to lead the people. God promised Moses that this method of leadership would greatly lighten his load: "Then you will be able to endure." He also promised that the people would then be able to go to their places in peace (Exodus 18:18-23). These Scriptures reveal the fundamental concept of the ministry of saints in the Church.

Surely Moses did all he knew to do as a man; yet God showed him it would never work. The end result of Moses' method was a weary, beleaguered leader and a stagnant, frustrated congregation. On the other hand, when Moses trained the leaders under him and allowed them to teach and minister within the framework of smaller groups, it resulted in blessings and benefits for both Moses and the people. (It should be noted that Moses is not a type of the New Testament pastor, but rather a type of the Head of the New Testament Church, Jesus Christ.)

The New Testament parallel of Exodus 18 is found in Acts 6:1-7. The apostles were in the same predicament in which Moses had found himself. They realized that they could never fulfill their principal calling while trying to meet all the individual needs of the people. Once they appointed others to minister to the congregation's daily needs, they had the time and energy to minister more effectively in prayer and in the Word. From that time forward, the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem (Acts 6:7). Thus the concept of the ministry of saints is revealed in both the Old Testament *and* the New—and is shown to directly impact the effectiveness of oversight

ministry and the growth of the Church.

The Church in a Home

During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ Himself frequently ministered in private homes. When He declared that Mary had chosen that good part, He was communing with her in her home. Moreover, Luke 5:17-20 shows Jesus teaching and healing in a home. And in Luke 19:5, Jesus said to Zaccheus, "I must stay at your house. In verse 9 He said, "Today salvation has come to this house." Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He consistently visited people in their homes. Isn't it reasonable to believe that He desires to do the same today?

Again, in Luke 10, Jesus sent out seventy disciples to go ahead of Him to every place He intended to visit. He told them, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' (v.5). Should not the 21st century disciples of Jesus be going into houses preparing the way for His entrance. If we do, He will send communion, teaching, healing, salvation, and peace. All of these aspects of Jesus Christ's ministry took place in homes, not church buildings.

In the New Testament, the word church always refers to people — never buildings. In the entire Bible, *ekklesia* is not used even one time to refer to a building. In fact, there is no historical evidence that a church building even existed until the third century. The Bible says, "The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48); "Do you not know that you are the temple of God" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Today God dwells in human temples, not those made of concrete and steel. Throughout the Bible, the Church, *ekklesia*, is always people.

Ekklesia is used three different ways in the New Testament: 1) to refer to the world-wide Church (Ephesians 1:22); 2) the Church in a particular city (1 Thessalonians 1:1); and 3) the Church in a home (Romans 16:5). The idea of a church meeting in private homes is a new concept to many in the 21st century Apostolic movement; yet, it was the method the apostles used to make disciples of the thousands of converts they made during the first decades of the New Testament period.

Immediately after Pentecost, for example, the apostles are found breaking bread from house to house...and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:4&47). From the very beginning there was a Church, but there was not a church building. God could have allowed the apostles to take over the temple completely if His plan had been for the Church to meet exclusively in a large centralized hall; but that was not His plan. He wanted His ministers out

on the streets and in the communities, touching the lives of people where they lived.

Further evidence of this plan can be derived from the phrase “house to house.” It is translated from the Greek term *kat' oikon*, which can also be rendered “various private homes.” The same phrase is used in Acts 5:42: “And daily in the temple, and in every house [*kat' oikon*], they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. The apostles met with the people both in the temple and in various private homes; both dimensions of ministry were necessary to fulfill the biblical pattern.

The Bible contains many other references to meetings taking place in private homes. For example, because of Peter’s boldness he was thrown into jail. When an angel delivered him in response to the prayers of the saints, “he came to the house of Mary... where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12). Later, when God extended salvation to the Gentiles, it all began in the *house* of Cornelius (Acts 10:22).

Following these events, the Church prospered and grew as the apostles ministered in various private houses throughout the Gentile world. Paul, for example, taught the saints at Troas “in the *upper room* [part of a home] where they were gathered together” (Acts 20:8). He also told the elders of the church at Ephesus that he had taught them both “publicly and from *house to house* [various private homes]” (Acts 20:20). When Paul arrived in Rome, “many came to him at his *lodging* [his house], to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus... from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

A home is a very private and personal place where the most intimate moments of family life take place. Knowing that the most meaningful teaching and fellowship could not be achieved in a large public gathering, the Lord ordained that His people also gather for ministry within each other’s homes. The home environment is unthreatening and comfortable—the ideal place for the teaching and intimate personal ministry of Jesus Christ.

The concept of ministering in homes is found throughout Paul’s epistles. For example, Paul wrote from Philippi to the Corinthians saying, “Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with *the church that is in their house*” (1 Corinthians 16:19). Romans 16:5 indicates that Aquila and Priscilla, his fellow-laborers from Corinth, ended up back in Rome with a church meeting in their home. Also, in his greeting to Philemon, Paul wrote, “To the church in your *house*” (Philemon 1:2). And in his final greetings to the Colossians, Paul wrote, “Greet... Nymphas and the *church that is in his house*” (Colossians 4:15).

Finally, the Book of Acts itself, the record of the original Apostolic Church, which begins with such dramatic events as the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit, concludes with Paul ministering in his home. These words conclude the Book of Acts:

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him (Acts 28:30-31).

Conclusion

In summary, God's pattern for Church structure is established by the revelation of Christ Himself. He has a body; but also a Head, which oversees and directs His body. The equipping of this body for ministry is done through what has come to be called the fivefold ministry or the equipping gifts, which consist of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). The oversight of a local assembly is the responsibility of elders (Acts 14:23).

Jesus foreshadowed His pattern for leadership when he fed the five thousand in the wilderness. The Bible says, "And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down" (John 6:11). The Lord's pattern is that He gives to the leaders, and the leaders give to others.

Preaching and teaching to the body as a whole takes place in congregational meetings; teaching and individual ministry takes place in homes. The fivefold ministry equips the saints for ministry, and the saints then minister to the body in love unto edification. This is the biblical pattern ordained by God and taught in His Word as the foundational structure of His body, the Church.

Note to the reader:

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