

THE CHURCH IN YOUR HOUSE

The early Christian church began with people of Jewish descent and Christianity is derived from the true teachings of Judaism of which Jesus taught and from which the Jews had strayed. We know from the biblical accounts of Jesus and his apostles that they preached the gospel of the new dispensation first in their own synagogues to their fellow Jews and then later to the Gentiles. ***"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cypress, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only."*** Acts 11:19; ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jews first, and also to the Greek."*** Romans 1:16; ***"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."*** Acts 9:20.

Jesus himself not only gave exhortation in the synagogues, but was also in the streets of towns and cities. The Scriptures often describe him preaching the message of God in open fields, by a lake or river sides. But ***during*** his time on earth, Jesus only preached to the Jews: ***"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom..."*** Matthew 4:23a; ***"And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables..."*** Matthew 13:2, 3a. There was no place that Jesus would not go to speak the message that God had given him. ***"But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter."*** Mark 1:45; ***"And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country..."*** Mark 6:56a.

After Jesus was crucified, the time had come that Jesus' disciples were to preach to Jews and Gentiles alike. ***"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..."*** Matthew 28:19a. Many of the early Christians often met in houses, either owned by one of the believers or a sympathizer but regardless of which, the early Christians did not assemble in meeting halls or buildings of worship. The numbers of Christian converts in the early years after Jesus' resurrection did not warrant building churches or such. ***"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting."*** Acts 2:1, 2. This is just one of the many examples in the New Testament where it describes churches in peoples' homes.

Many people are skeptical of Christian churches and in some cases, with good reason. To many of these people, Christian denominations do not follow the teachings as taught by Jesus, the Christ of God given his teachings have been polluted and distorted mainly for the purpose of pushing the specific ideologies of each denomination. Even Jesus agreed with this to a degree: ***"But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."*** Matthew 15:9. While this is true for many churches, this is NOT true of all churches. If one is searching for the truth, he/she will find the true church that adheres faithfully to the Scriptures and can support its teachings from the words therein. If the church's doctrines or traditions cannot be supported by Scriptures, then you can bet the teachings have been polluted.

The Church of God believes in complete submission to the teachings of the Christ who likewise submitted himself totall to God's Will. ***"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true."*** John 5:30, 31; ***"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."*** Matthew 7:21. If we submit ourselves to God's Will as Jesus did, then we equip ourselves with the truth by searching the Scriptures. ***"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."*** Acts 17:11. Once our eyes are opened to the truth and we start putting behind us the worldliness that we were entangled in for so long, we are ready to start propagating the truth as a fellow soldier in Christ. Some of the questions we need to ask ourselves when we consider living a life after Christ are: Are you ready to announce Christ's truth to

friends or relatives when involved in a religious conversation? Would you go door to door to propagate Jesus' teachings? Would you use your home for Christian assembly for learning about Jesus? For most people, the answer would be 'no' to all of these questions. Jesus himself knew that being a true Christian involves work and that there would actually be few who would answer the call of performing his ministry. **"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with them."** John 6:66. The majority of people want as comfortable a life as possible and don't like the thought of going through discomfort which makes the life of a Christian unappealing to them. Only a few will submit to God's Will. **"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."** Matthew 7:13, 14; **"So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."** Matthew 20:16 – see also 22:14; **"Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us, and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are."** Luke 13:23 to 25; **"Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few."** Matthew 9:37 – see also Luke 10:2. Pay close attention to the fact that Jesus said there will be few true followers; there will be MANY that claim to be followers but Jesus said he will not acknowledge them because pay lipservice to him but don't actually follow his teachings.

What the Scriptures tell us is that a true Christian must have faith and works, or else it means nothing. Our works are evidence of our faith. **"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone... but wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?... ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."** James 2:17, 20, 24, 26. For a person to have the truth of God's Word and not share it with his/her neighbour is actually not demonstrating love toward their neighbour. Salvation is in the Word of God so we should share it with others. **"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."** Matthew 5:15, 16. Part of being a Christian is sharing the Word of God with others and being willing to opening your door to those interested in learning the truth. Remember the early church mostly comprised of members congregating in homes. **"And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room where abode Peter and James and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James."** Acts 1:13. We should not feel ashamed to meet in a room or house; the "church" is not the building or other structure that we worship in but is the assembly of believers worshipping together. **"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."** Acts 20:20, 21. Many people may be reluctant to go door to door in today's world, not because of embarrassment, but because certain religious groups have abused this practice until the general public has become annoyed by door knockers. There are, however, other ways of delivering the Word of God especially with today's computers. We are not suggesting abandoning door-to-door evangelism, however, if we choose this type of evangelism, we need to respect other people's wish not to hear the message and move on; a persistent attitude by a Christian to an uninterested party only gives the church a reputation for being pushy.

We should clarify that while by and large, Jesus' followers met in homes of believers, there were some groups that met in halls, but that was the exception rather than the rule. James 2:2 describes one of the exceptions: **"For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring..."** The word "assembly" should actually have been translated "synagogue" in this verse, so we know that in rare instances, fellow believers actually used larger buildings to assemble together and worship in. If one is looking for a church that assembles in a building made of stone or brick and has a large

congregation with social groups, then it may not be the truth they are seeking but more a glorying in a physical building and a desire to socialize. But as we have already discussed earlier in this study, Jesus' true church will not be large in numbers so one cannot expect that they will always assemble in a meeting hall or their own church building; in fact, this would be the exception just as it was during the time of the early church. As a Christian, we shouldn't be surprised if only our family and a few others outside the family share the same beliefs as us. ***"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*** Matthew 18:20. The Holy Spirit will be present when believers assemble to learn and discuss the Word of God. ***"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*** Colossians 3:15, 16.

Church services held in homes were commonplace in the early church and included both Jews and Gentiles families. A few more examples of home churches: ***"... unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow-labourer. And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house."*** Philemon 1b, 2; ***"Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house."*** Colossians 4:14, 15; ***"The churches of Asia salute you, Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."*** I Corinthians 16:19. Even when Jesus sent his disciples out to evangelize, he did not expect that they would be speaking in assembly halls but in people's homes: ***"And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it."*** Matthew 10:11, 12.

From this study, we have learned that the true church of Jesus will be comprised of few people and for that reason, will often meet in homes. If God blesses you in your particular area and you get enough people that requires a need to rent a hall or some place bigger than that, then praise God. But do not be ashamed if all you need to assemble with one another is your own home: ***"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."***