

Errors of the Modern House Church Movement

Bob & Terri Jennings

Not anti-house church: Let it be understood from the start, we have nothing against house church. Immediately after conversion in 1971, I attended a house church. After 40 years as a Christian, I myself have spent about 14 of those years in house churches. And now, the church I co-pastor, having been forced out of the house by neighbors in 1987, and though meeting in a simple building for the past 24 years, yet does everything we did in the house and maybe more in some ways. During my last ministry trip to Europe, I myself suggested house churches to one of the leaders. I am not anti-house church.

So much good, but: What we are addressing here is where they have 'gone too far'. So many folks in the modern house church movement have seen the circus of institutional church, but over-reacted and gone to the other ditch. There is so much good in the house-church movement. Many in Christendom would do well to hear what they are saying. It would help Christians out of traditional, commercial, one-man show, empire-building, steeple-house, dead religion. House-churchers are emphasizing and practicing neglected truth. But nevertheless, they have gone too far the other way in some things.

The other ditch: Church history has enough examples of those who have been caught in the 'pitfall of extremes.' Seeing the error of one ditch, folks end up in the other with an over-correction, with an over-statement of a truth, with a bump on their tire, and 'going to seed' on a truth, not on an error. It is a distortion; it is a misapplication, and, as old Tozer said it, "Truth out of balance is heresy." Such is the case with 'the modern house church movement'. You say heresy is too strong? True. But nevertheless it is error, and error is always hurtful, and I hope this treatment of their points of emphasis will be helpful.

The thrust: We give quotes¹ from house-churchers. And it is easy to misrepresent someone that way. And not all house-churchers say all these things necessarily. Some say none of these things. But the quotes do represent the thrust of the modern house church movement, as can be seen on many websites. I have made some sharp statements, but it is only fitting, as it is written, "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." Titus 1:13.

We will examine these topics:

1. Strictly Dialogue in the Meetings?
2. Teaching & Preaching Not Prominent in Meetings?
3. Strangely Silent about Leadership and Authority?
4. House Church Only?
5. Tradition Is Practice?

1. Does The Bible Teach Strictly Dialogue In The Meetings?

House churchers say: But in the New Testament, when the Lord's people come together on Sundays as a church, it's strictly dialogue that goes on...

Sunday church meetings are "strictly dialogue", they say. But we posit that this is false. It is not strictly that. The house-churchers have seen the error of the 'one-man show,' and trying to correct it, have foolishly gone into the other ditch – only dialogue in the church meeting. I am saying this: that the Bible does teach a participatory, inter-active meeting (is it practiced in your church?), but not a dialogue meeting.

They say Acts 20.7ff is strictly dialogue

Paul was at Troas. It was a long meeting. But was it “strictly dialogue”, as the house-churchers say? Yes, indeed questions may have been asked during Paul’s “message” at Troas, but there is no reason to think that that meeting was “strictly dialogue” or that church meetings should be “strictly dialogue,” that is, two-way discussion. Here are reasons why...

First, in Acts 20 the Greek word is not dialogizomai (discussion) but dialegomai (to say through).

- Acts 20:7 And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking (dialegomai) to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message (logos) until midnight.
- Acts 20:9 And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking (dialegomai), he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead.

So then, what is the meaning of this Greek word dialegomai? It means to ‘say through’ – dia (through) lego (to say). It means to put your message through. Paul was putting through his reasons. It is not surprising then that the KJV renders it both times as “preaching.” This word, then, does not teach two-way discussion in contrast to one-way monologue. Dia does not mean two in contrast to one, mono. Dia does not mean two; it means through, such as in the word diameter – measure through. The point? The concept is not group discussion. Rather, it is asserting.

Furthermore, let Scripture itself define dialegomai by comparing other Scripture usages of dialegomai. Look at these six and notice the partner-words:

1. Acts 17:2,3 "And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned (dialegomai) with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence" (paratithemi = to place beside). So it has to do with “explaining and giving evidence.” And the Greek word for “give evidence” means “to place beside,” or as we say, “Let me put this thought before you.” It is not the idea of dialogue or group discussion, as the word dialogue is defined today.
2. Acts 18:4 "And he was reasoning (dialegomai) in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." So Acts 18.4 indicates it had to do with persuading. It is not dialogue-discussion, but rather preaching. It was a thrust on Paul’s part, a sermon. He was trying “to persuade.”
3. Acts 19:8,9 "And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning (dialegomai) and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning (dialegomai) daily in the school of Tyrannus." It is the same thing; Paul was trying to persuade.
4. Acts 24:25,26 "And as he was discussing (dialegomai) righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you. At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse (note: dialogue is not used) with him." Was it a two-way discussion, give and take, mutual input? You know good and well Paul never said to Felix, “Oh, good point; I never thought of that. Thanks for that thought.” Felix indeed said some things in response, but nevertheless Paul was putting through a message.
5. Hebrews 12:5 "You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed (dialegomai) to you as sons, My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him." Is this mutual input? Hardly! Sure, there might be interchange, but nevertheless the father has a message.
6. Jude 1:9 "But Michael the archangel, when he disputed (diakrino = judgment through) with the devil

and argued (dialegomai) about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke you." Sure the devil was talking. But, Michael was putting his 'saying through.' He was putting his 'judgment through.'

Note the context in Acts 20. Does the context itself support the idea of dialogue? No, rather, it says Paul had a "message," a word, a sermon, a presentation, Acts 20:7 "Paul began talking (dialegomai) to them ... and he prolonged his message (word, logos) until midnight." Then they talked: Acts 20:11 "And when he had gone back up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked (the sister word, dialogizomai, or dialogue, is not used even here) with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed."

Similarly, observe what Paul himself calls his two-year "reasoning" (dialegomai) at Ephesus. In the next chapter, he calls what he did at Ephesus "declaring and teaching." Dialogue? Hardly!

- Acts 19:9, 10 But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord.
- Acts 20:20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house.

You see, dialogue / discussion is the idea of kicking things around with everyone trying to contribute and arrive at answers. But Paul had the answers and he was declaring the truth, using Scripture to back it up.

Now, the word for discussion group is in fact dialogizomai. It means to bring together different reasons and reckon them up. It is used like this, Matt 16:7 "And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, It is because we took no bread." Furthermore, this sister word, dialogismos, is used every time in a negative way, for example,

- Rom 14:1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations
- Phil 2:14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing
- 1 Tim 2:8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

That's not what you want in the church.

Do we find dialogue in 1 Corinthians 14?

The house-churchers' favorite chapter is 1 Cor. 14. But this horse is not found in this corral either – not the Greek word, dialogizomai, or even the English word, dialogue. Note: another thing not found is that 1 Cor. 14 defines strictly a Lord's Day meeting. Such an idea is only presumption.

What were the activities in a '1 Cor. 14 meeting'? It was not group discussion; it was not 'strictly dialogue'. Does this list below sound like dialogue, like group discussion? Admittedly, it was not a one-man show, not at all, but still it was not casual group discussion. Three times teaching is mentioned, and once (v.19) it is the Greek word katecheo, from which we get catechize! Does that sound like strictly dialogue?

- Prophecy, v.6 – "strictly dialogue"?
- Exhortation, vv.3, 31 – "strictly dialogue"?
- Tongue, interpretation, v.26 – "strictly dialogue"?
- Revelation, vv.6,26,30 – "strictly dialogue"?

- Teaching, vv.6, 19, 26 – “strictly dialogue”?
- Knowledge, v.6
- Learning, vv.31, 35
- Psalm, v.26
- Praying v.15, blessing v.16, giving thanks v.17
- Worship, v.25 – “strictly dialogue”?

And observe that it is valid to give a ‘stand up sermon,’ 1 Cor 14:30 "But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent." The point? This is more than “strictly dialogue” with everyone sitting around in a circle.

Conclusion? I know former house-churchers who got their belly full of discussion – no one had a 'word'. Yes indeed, the Bible teaches participation in the meetings – asking questions and judging what is said (v.29). But it is not “strictly dialogue.” Preaching and teaching is not forbidden in the church meetings; it is still ok, and as I will show, it is even prominent. As I’ve pointed out, teaching is mentioned three times in 1 Cor. 14, and yet we have the incredible following statements by house-churchers...

2. Teaching And Preaching Not Prominent In The Meetings?

House-churchers say: The teacher is not given the prominence that one sees in today’s typical church meeting.

But it appears that preaching in the New Testament is primarily an activity that took place outside church meetings.

Incredible! Preaching and teaching were not prominent in the church meeting and that preaching is primarily outside the church? Again, it is a foolish attempt to avoid the ‘one-man show, the big man.’

Our point: the above is a false teaching, for...

1. Much preaching is done in the church meeting, and
2. Preaching and teaching is done extensively everywhere.

Teaching and Preaching In the Churches

1. At Jerusalem meetings:

- Acts 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- Acts 5:42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

2. In the church at Antioch:

- Acts 11:26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.
- Acts 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.
- Acts 15:35 But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching, with many others also, the word of the Lord.

3. In the church at Ephesus:

- Acts 20:20 I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house
- Acts 20:25 I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more

4. In the church at Rome:

- Acts 28:31 preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.
- Romans 1:15 Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

5. In the church at Colossae:

- Col 1:28 And we proclaim (preach, kataggello – bring down a message) Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.

6. In the church at Thessalonica:

- 1 Th 2:9 we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
- 2 Th 2:15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

7. At Troas:

- Acts 20:7 And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

8. Timothy's ministry (note: ministry in the church, 1 Tim 3:15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.)

- 1 Tim 4:13, 15, 16 give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

9. Elders – obviously preaching and teaching in the church

- 1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching [the word] and teaching.

Christ's Emphasis by Example of Teaching and Preaching Everywhere

1. Synagogue:

- Mat 4:23 And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel
- Mark 1:39 And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

2. Cities:

- Mat 11:1 And it came about that when Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve

disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.

3. Temple:

- Mat 26:55 Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me.

Teaching – A Great Part of the Pastor’s Work

Though there may indeed be other teachers in a church, yet, by Scriptural requirement (1 Tim 3.2 “able to teach”), the pastors are gifted that way, and we should expect the pastors to do much of that. Peter exhorts the elders, “Shepherd (poimaino) the flock.” Does that include feeding?

Notice poimaino does include feeding, as seen by its use in Jude 1:12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding (poimaino) themselves without fear.

Peter says shepherd the flock, and that includes feeding. Are there other supporting Scriptures, defining the shepherd’s work?

- Ezek 34:2 Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?
- Isa 40:11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, compare the use of the Greek word ra'ah in Gen 29:7 water and feed them
- 1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

We should not be surprised at Paul's exhortation at the Ephesian pastors' conference:

- Acts 20:28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd (poimaino) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Observe the pattern and the connection between overseeing and feeding ...

Reference	The Word Overseer	The Word Feeding
Ac 1.20, 2.42	Overseership	Apostles' teaching
Ac 20.28	Overseers	Shepherd the church, feed
1 Ths 5.12	Charge over	Give instruction
1 Tim 3.1,2	Overseers	Able to teach
Titus 1.7	Overseers	Able to exhort in sound doctrine
1 Pet 5.2,3	Exercising oversight	Shepherd the flock, feed (KJV)

Is It Valid to have Special Speakers? The 'big man'?

Does that create the ‘big man’? Sure it could – I am of Paul. But it does not have to be that way. Don’t worry about it. God doesn’t. God Himself has ordained specialists for the church. This is God's idea. Don't try to be holier than God. Look at this...

- Eph 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.
- Acts 11:26 and when he (Barnabas) had found him (Paul), he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers;

and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

- Acts 15:32 And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.
- Acts 15:35 But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching, with many others also, the word of the Lord.
- Acts 18:27 And when he (Apollos) wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace
- 1 Tim 1:3 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines.

Even the synagogues welcomed this.

- Acts 13:15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."

3. Jesus' Followers Strangely Silent About Leadership And Authority?

House-churchers say:

- 1) *If we are to live like Jesus' followers, we need to take seriously his insight that leaders are as children and slaves, those without authority.*
- 2) *The most obvious aspect of what the NT has to say about leadership and authority is its lack of interest in the subject. In all of Paul's major letters, for instance, leaders only appear in Ph. 1:1, and there only in passing. For the most part, he ignores them, as do the other writers. Jesus' immediate followers were strangely silent about leadership and authority.*
- 3) *The New Testament does not say anything about one believer having authority over another.*
- 4) *Any leadership, such as existed, is very, very low-key indeed, and far more of a back seat affair than anything up front.*
- 5) *Numbers in each church were . . . small. . . interactive gatherings with no one leading.*

Incredible statements! The house-churchers denigrate leadership and try to eliminate the concept of authority. It is a false teaching. One house church website says, "Although all house churches are different, and they decide individually how they want to do things, in general there are no pastors."

Let these 'givens' be acknowledged.

- A. Pastors, shepherds, elders, and overseers are interchangeable terms.
- B. Pulpits, many of them, are filled with proud, pushy, professional religious workers, like Diotrephes, 3 Jn 9.
- C. No person has absolute authority over another; each one – child, wife, congregant, employee, citizen – answers ultimately to God only.
- D. Spiritual authority is different from the world's.
- E. Pastors are publicly recognized and appointed, Acts 14.23, Tit 1.5. It is an acknowledging of what God has already done after they have been "tested" – tested by their walk over time in a neutral setting, 1 Tim 3.10. So, there is a positional aspect as well as the gifting and work aspect.
- F. There exists a positional aspect of authority and also a personal aspect.
 - 1) Example: Of two pastors, one may have more personal authority than the other, for he is more holy, knowledgeable, wise, more intimate with God, etc., but nevertheless there is an equal positional authority.
 - 2) Example: There might be a godly old woman in the church who has more personal authority than the

pastors, but nevertheless she submits to the pastors in view of their positional authority.

G. I believe the Bible teaches as little leadership as possible, or, to say it the other way, as much congregationalism and participation as possible.

Hupotasso

Are leaders “without authority,” as house-churchers say? Look at it first from the Greek word hupotasso, as found in 1 Pet 5:1 ...

- Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder ... You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders

No authority?

“Be subject” is from hupotasso. It does indeed teach authority. Hupo = under, and tasso = to arrange. It is a military term meaning to arrange under, to rank under. Peter uses it with reference to...

- The civil realm, 2.13
- The occupational realm, 2.18
- The domestic realm, 3.1,5
- The angelic realm, 3.22, and
- The ecclesiastical realm, 5.5.

No authority?

It is not a weak term. Get more of a feel for it in these verses...

- Eph 5:24 But as the church is subject to Christ
- Phil 3:21 who by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

No authority?

Seeking to be under one another – humility – should be big on our mind.

- Eph 5:21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.
- 1 Cor 16:16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.

No authority? So is this “very, very low-key, a lack of interest,” as the house-churchers say? The Bible is loaded with it.

Look again at 1 Pet 5...

- Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.

Look at this. Peter ...

- “exhorted” the elders/shepherds/overseers (low-key?)

- exhorts them to “exercise oversight” (low-key?)
- speaks of the reward of a “crown,” for them (low-key?)
- gives an awful warning, “God is opposed” (low-key?)
- and gives a great promise, “grace, exaltation” (low-key?).

Proistemi

Let’s look at this matter of authority from the standpoint of proistemi, which means, “to stand before.” It is found in

- 1 Th 5:12, 13 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over (proistemi – stand before) you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.
- 1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders who rule (proistemi – stand before) well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

So what does it mean that the elders are to “rule” or to stand before?

We can get a feel for proistemi from the way it is used in other places. In 1 Tim 3.5, 12 it is translated rule, like a father over his household.

- 1 Tim 3:5 For if a man know not how to rule (manage, NAS) his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?
- 1 Tim 3:12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

Admittedly, even fathers are not to ‘lord-it-over’ their families, but nevertheless there is some headship there, some authority there. And this is the same word for elders (5.17). But the house-churchers say there is “nothing about authority” and anything about leadership is “very, very low-key.” What a lie!

Hegeomai

This word is found in these verses:

- Heb 13:7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.
- Heb 13:17 Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.
- Heb 13:24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.
- Acts 15:22 Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

Interestingly, it is the same word translated “chief” and “governor” ...

- Acts 14:12 And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.
- Acts 7:10 and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.

This same word is also translated “esteem” in 1 Th 5.12. Thus, the leaders are ‘the esteemed.’ Dare I say it? It ought to be that way. Paul requests, entreats, or exhorts them to do this. If you cannot esteem them, find those you can.

- 1 Th 5:12,13 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that

you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

My point? The Bible is not “strangely silent” about leadership. Scripture itself talks of ...

- leaders
- shepherds, Ac 20.28, 1 Pet 5
- overseers, 1 Tim 3, Php 1.1
- elders, 1 Pet 5, Tit 1.5
- overseers / elders as stewards, Tit 1.7.

Surely a term like shepherd means something! God Himself chose these terms. Don't try to be more holy than God.

And speaking of elders as stewards, even there we find authority.

- Mark 13:34 For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority (exousia) to his servants

The administrator of a nursing home has a charge nurse. She is the one in authority. The farmer has some hired hands and puts one in charge, in charge to “watch,” to oversee. So it is in God's household. Yet, the house-churchers say there's nothing in the New Testament about authority!

Peitho

House-churchers make a big point regarding the Greek word, peitho, "obey," in Heb 13:17 ...

- Obey your leaders, and submit to them

They point out that it means merely ‘allow yourself to be persuaded or convinced by.’ But is this really a weak term as the book suggests? No, for the opposite of this term (apeitheo) is found in Heb 3:18. They went to hell because they did not do this ...

- And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

The Israelites, by not being persuaded, were reprobated. If there is any question as to what the writer to the Hebrews meant, he followed it with “submit.” And the word submit means just that – to yield under.

Paraggello

Paraggello means “near message” – to bring a message alongside someone. It is noteworthy that it is often translated “charge” (KJV) and “command” (NAS). Look at these verses. Think of the spiritual authority Paul had, and not only Paul, but the men with him, for, he says “we.”

- 1 Th 4:11 and work with your hands, just as we commanded you;
- 2 Th 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof
- 2 Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.
- 2 Th 3:12 such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.
- 1 Tim 4:11 Prescribe and teach these things.
- 1 Tim 6:13 I charge you in the presence of God

Strangely Silent, Low-Key, Lack of Interest?

Is leadership 'very, very low-key' as the house-churchers say?

- They are to desire the overseership, 1 Tim 3.1
- They are to have a good reputation, 1 Tim 3.7
- Elders were to be appointed in every church, Ac 14.23, Tit 1.5
- The elder is to reprove and silence, Tit 1.9,11
- Titus was to reprove with all authority, Tit 2.15
- They were to diligently labor and have charge, 1 Ths 5.12
- They are to lead zealously, Rom 12.8
- They are to lay hands on people, 1 Tim 4.14
- They might have double honor, 1 Tim 5.17
- They are to be remembered, imitated, obeyed, Heb 13.7,17
- They are greeted, Heb 13.24
- When sick, they are summoned, Jam 5.14
- They are exhorted to shepherd the sheep, 1 Pet 5
- They are to be examples, 1 Pet 5
- They are to be on guard and alert for others, Ac 20.28,31, Heb 13.17
- They have the awful responsibility of giving account for souls, Heb 13.17
- A contribution was sent via elders, Ac 11.30
- Paul reported to the elders in Acts 21:18
- Peter addresses elders, overseers, or shepherds in 1 Pet 5
- Paul gives instructions to elders, shepherds, overseers in three different places, 1 Tim 3, Tit 1, Acts 20.

Adding up in Acts through Revelation, we have the following totals. Are Scriptures 'silent'?

- Elders = 25x (where applies to New Testament elders, not counting John's epistles or Rev.)
- Overseers, oversight = 6x
- Shepherds = 2x
- Pastors = 1x

We find leadership all through the New Testament ...

- Acts 1, Peter leading
- Acts 2, Peter leading
- Acts 4, Apostles leading
- Acts 6, Apostles leading
- Acts 10, Peter leading
- Acts 11, Paul and Barnabas leading
- Acts 13, Prophets and teachers
- Acts 14, appointing leadership
- Acts 15, 16, leaders making decisions
- Acts 20, Paul prominent in meeting
- Acts 20, Leaders' conference
- Rom 12, leaders
- 1 Cor 16, submit to them
- Eph 4, pastors

- Php, overseers
- 1 Th 5, in charge
- 1 Tim 3, overseers
- 1 Tim 5, rulers
- Titus, overseers
- Heb, leaders
- James, teachers, leaders
- 1 Pet, leaders, pastors
- 2 Pet, false prophets, teachers
- 3 Jn, false leaders
- Jude, false leaders
- Rev, angels of church, perhaps messengers

God has woven authority into all of life. A shepherd leads the sheep. A father leads his family. A ruler leads the country. A coach leads the team. And are we to believe when Sunday meeting comes that no one leads the meeting? Even Samuel presided at a prophets meeting, 1 Sam 19:20 they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing and presiding over them. After all, shepherds / overseers are those who 'stand before' (proistemi).

The house-churchers say leaders are just guides, but note, Scripture does not use that word for them. Here is the word for guide, hodegos, as in...

- Mat 15:14 Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.
- Mat 23:16 Woe to you, blind guides
- Acts 1:16 concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus
Guide is not a weak term anyway.
- John 16:13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.

Decision-making

Again, much is made by house-churchers about the church making the decisions, that is, consensus rule. But what does the Bible teach? It teaches that the apostles and elders were the decision-makers...

- Acts 4:35 and lay them at the apostles' feet
- Acts 15:2 the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue
- Acts 15:6 And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter
- Acts 15:23 The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia
- Acts 16:4 the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe

Now, admittedly, decision-making was not without the congregation, but it was not by the congregation. Rather, it was with the congregation...

- Acts 15:22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them.

Again, leaders, overseers, and shepherds must mean something! These are the terms God uses.

It is with that mind set we must view verses like ...

- Mat 18:17 And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.

It is understandable that the office of overseer or elder is not mentioned in Mat 18. It was not used till Acts 11. But in view of the apostles' active leading before Acts 11, it is only consistent to view Matthew 18 as including of course the leaders leading, especially in view of Titus 1:9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. Without leadership, there is confusion. My next point...

Why leaders?

1. Order!

- Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city

Again, God has woven this into all spheres of life (1 Pet 2.13, 18, 3.1, 5.5) – civil, vocational, domestic, and ecclesiastic – even down to the 4-H club.

2. Peace!

- 1 Th 5:13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

You buck and kick? There will be no peace. No peace for you, nor the church, nor the leaders, but rather “grief”, Heb 13.17.

3. Equipping and building up, especially by teaching.

- Eph 4:11,12 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

A Bad Mark

Rejection of authority and insubordination is pretty serious – a mark of apostasy. Is that a “low-key” matter? The two main chapters on apostates point this out ...

- Jude 1:8 these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.
- 2 Pet 2:10 and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

This was the essence of Korah's rebellion. Korah charged that 1) Moses' exalted himself as a leader, and 2) all the congregation was holy, that is, equally set apart to lead,

- Numbers 16:2 and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. 16:3 And they assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you **exalt yourselves** above the assembly of the Lord?"

One author says, “But Moses was appointed by God. You can't apply that to church elders.” Really? Elders, pastors, shepherds, or overseers are also appointed in some real sense by God, Acts 20:28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to

shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Not So Among You

What do we do with this verse?

•Mat 20:25f But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The Lord Jesus contrasts the world and the church in the matter of authority. By esteeming servant-hood, did He mean that the idea of authority in the church is eliminated? If that is so, then the Lord Jesus, being the chief example of servant-hood, has no authority. To say that servant-hood eliminates authority is a misapplication. The verse itself contains the point we are to get – humility (opposite of lording it over) and servanthood are attitudes of true leaders and greatness in the kingdom of God.

Admittedly, it is not authority like the Gentiles. Matthew Henry sums it up pretty well, on 1 Ths 5.12 (emphasis mine).

“Ministers are to rule their people also, so the word is rendered in 1 Tim. 5:17. They must rule, not with rigor, but with love. They must not exercise dominion as temporal lords; but rule as spiritual guides, by setting a good example to the flock. They are over the people in the Lord, to distinguish them from civil magistrates, and to denote also that they are but ministers under Christ, appointed by him, and must rule the people by Christ’s laws, and not by laws of their own. This may also intimate the end of their office and all their labour; namely, the service and honour of the Lord. They must also admonish the people, and that not only publicly, but privately, as there may be occasion. They must instruct them to do well, and should reprove when they do ill. It is their duty not only to give good counsel, but also to give admonition, to give warning to the flock of the dangers they are liable to, and reprove for negligence or what else may be amiss.”

I will summarize and paraphrase:

Not with rigor	But with love, goodwill and lowliness
Not as temporal lords	But as spiritual guides, especially by example
Not as civil magistrates under the king	But as servants, helpers, under Christ appointed by Him
Not by their own laws	But by Christ’s laws
Not for their own honor, glory or benefit	But the honor and glory of Christ and His kingdom

A person has no more authority than God puts on him and no more than others see in him. It can't be self-claimed – Php 2.9, “Wherefore God hath highly exalted...” It dare not be self-promoted. The godly soul shuns that and looks for ways to be smaller.

4. House Church Only?

House-churchers say: The format for church gatherings in the New Testament kept each individual church small in numbers and was therefore simply perfectly suited to everything occurring in people’s home. Numbers in each church were, by definition, supposed to be small.

Every time individual churches are given a location in the New Testament it is always, and without fail, in someone's home.

They teach falsely that New Testament churches were small, supposed to be small, and always in a house.

Small Meetings?

Were the meetings small? No, rather...

A. 120 people, See: Ac 1:14,15. In the upper room there were 120 people meeting on Sunday (Pentecost).

B. 3000 people, Ac 2:43-46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple.

C. 5000 people, Ac 4:4, 32; Ac 5:12 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul and were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

D. A "large number" were gathered at the Antioch church, and note, they gathered as a church.

- Acts 11:21, 26 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord... And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

- Ac 14:27 And when they had arrived and gathered the church together.

- Ac 15:30 They went down to Antioch and having gathered the congregation together

E. There were so many believers at Ephesus that

1) they had many pastors, enough for a pastors' conference, Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church (note: not churches).

2) they met daily in a school for two years, Ac 19:9-10 Paul withdrew. . .the disciples reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus for two years.

F. Many at Corinth

1) There were many converted in Corinth, Acts 18:10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.

2) Whole church assembled, 1 Co 11:18; 14:23 When you come together as a church. If therefore the whole church (many of them) should assemble together...

3) Note: There were enough disciples at Corinth that there could be three prophets present, 14.27,29

4) Note: There were enough that many were sick, 11.30

5) Note: There were various households represented, 11.22 do you not have houses...?

6) Note: There were enough there that there were divisions among them, 1.10, 11.18

G. There were many at Cornelius' gathering, Acts 10:27 he entered, and found many people assembled.

Size is not necessarily a hindrance. I have been in meetings where 400 were gathered with a very deep sense of unity, openness, and liberty. About 2000 believers meet in Samuel Lamb's household in China. House church in the Bible did not necessarily mean small gatherings. The "church at Nympha's house" did not necessarily mean small. Early 'households' were complexes, often with big rooms, so it is presumptuous to say the meetings were small. They weren't always small.

Always, Without Fail, In A House?

Were the meetings of the believers “always without fail” in someone’s home, as the book says?

A. Synagogue

- Jam 2:1,2 My brethren, if a man comes into your synagogue (the Greek word).
- Acts 22:19 And I said, Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee.

B. School

- Acts 19:9 ... he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

C. A place

- Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken

D. The temple

- Acts 5:42 in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

There is good reason to doubt that the Antioch church was meeting in a house, because a multitude, a large number, were converted and yet they did meet together...

- Ac 11:21 large number
- Ac 14:27 gathered the church together
- Acts 15:30 So, when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together

The Laodicean church is mentioned and Scripture does not say they were all in a house...

- Col 4:15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. 16 And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans

Observe: 1) There was the “church of the Laodiceans,” 2) not all “the brethren” met in Nympha’s house, and 3) it does NOT say where the church met, so it is NOT “always, without fail” specified as in a house.

Here is an example of disgusting bias from a house church web site: “House churches are set forth by God in His Word in the book of Acts.” Where in the book of Acts are they “set forth”? I could just as easily say “schools” or “synagogues” were set forth, Ac 19.9, 9.2.

It is ironic inconsistency that the house-churchers are those that have seen that structure does not matter, but have come full circle around and maintain that structure does matter – it must be a house. They have become a non-denominational denomination. Their koinonia (point in common) is house-church, not Christ. Example: Only house-churchers teaching at conferences, thus sectioning off a great part of the body of Christ.

5. Tradition Is Practice?

House-churchers say: Webster says (tradition) is an inherited pattern of thought or action. A street definition would be, “things people do on a regular basis.” The point of tradition is that it is something that is passed on, from generation to generation. The patterns in the NT are to be binding

on the church in all ages and places.

However, Bible “tradition” is not a pattern of practice. That is the way we use the word. That is the connotation. But, the Bible explains what tradition is – it is apostolic teaching, whether orally or letter.

•2 Th 2:15 hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by letter from us.

That which was "by word", the oral, is unknown now. We do not know what it was. We only have that which was "by letter", the Bible. So, tradition in the Bible is not patterns of behavior. It was doctrine. Sure, we ought to lean toward any NT pattern wherever we can.

Summary

It may seem like we are dealing with little differences. But that is the way error is. A thing can look real good and scriptural, but the Lord Jesus detected the devil's device and responded with, "On the other hand...", Mat 4:7.

What is the thrust of house-churchers? What is the house-church gospel? What is their koinonia (thing in common)? What are their conference topics? It is house church, house church, house church. Let's stay big on "Christ and Him crucified" – "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

I The quotes in boxes after each heading come from the book, Ekklesia, with various contributors, edited by Steve Atkerson, February, 2003, by New Testament Restoration Foundation, Atlanta, Georgia. Some modifications have been made in his subsequent, House Church. My treatise was written about four years ago and submitted to the Editor before his House Church was written.