

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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"The House Church Movement"

By Wilson Adams

"That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new?" Already it has existed for ages that were before it."
[Ecclesiastes 1:9-10](#)

The wise man was right. Each generation possesses an adventurous spirit for the discovery of things unique; believing they have found what no one else was smart enough to think of. Alas, in the passing of time and the gaining of wisdom, most discover the truth of Solomon—there is nothing new under the sun.

I am especially troubled these days by an attitude I see espoused by those who seek to mimic the house-church

movement of "non-denominational" evangelicals. Some among us have discovered a "new and exciting" brand of Christianity that rises above the bland and boring worship they believe most of us experience. There are several underlying causes for the popularity of these groups that seem to thrive in areas where there is a large contingency of vulnerable college students—

There is the seed-thought planted by LaGard Smith (*Radical Restoration*) and other writers who raise more questions than answers and who seem to enjoy sarcastic jabs at anything that smacks of local-church tradition,

There is a desire to duplicate the casual and intimate assemblies often found in foreign countries where Christians gather for worship followed by a common meal,

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There is an appeal to a more youthful camp-like devotional/emotional service in which little teaching of substance beyond the elementary occurs [Heb. 5:12-14](#)).

- There is an unspoken rebellion against biblical leadership (the rule of elders) although it is obvious in every house-church group that someone is in charge,

There is extended focus on the Lord's Supper with a tendency to turn it into a meal,

There is opportunity for women to be more vocal by leading talks before the assembly to describe what the Lord's Supper means to them,

There is an imitation of Pentecostal hand clapping and arm waving (rock-concert style)—hardly the holy hands of Jewish generations who sought to communicate God's blessings by lifting up empty hands to show that without Jehovah they had nothing,

There is disdain for symbols of establishment such as church buildings or a "full-time" preacher,

There is a diminished importance of Bible study by

substituting externals instead of genuine renewal of spirit (bigger pieces of bread, unique seating arrangements, etc.),

There is an attitude of arrogance against those who raise questions or voice suspicions. Suddenly the love-and-grace-group isn't very loving and grace giving.

Perhaps I should add an eleventh—there is more focus placed on what the issue isn't rather than what it is—an attempt to divert attention away from the real problem(s). The concerns are not about needing emotion in worship, numbers, the arrangement of chairs, more focus on the Supper, singing new songs, church buildings, times or number of services on the Lord's day, etc. The issue is about an attitude of arrogance ("knowledge makes arrogant but love edifies"—[1 Cor. 8:1](#)) and a desire to supplant biblical teaching and New Testament example.

Questions

Question: When the whole church assembles together ([1 Cor. 14:23a](#)) and a woman addresses the assembly about the Lord's Supper, is that not

a violation of Paul's v. 34 admonition that "women are to keep silent in the churches?" It is clear that the apostle speaks of those leading the assembly—and he says that women are not to do that. Or have I missed something? By the way, 1) women taking on leader roles, and 2) instrumental music in corporate worship usually join hands—one tends to follow the other.

Question: Are the current attitudes against shepherds leading the flock (and they lead by more than mere example—[1 Tim. 5:17](#); [Heb. 13:17](#)) a desire to walk closer to Scriptures or...is it really a march closer to the one-man pastor rule of Protestantism? I have read the meanderings of some on the subject who have a knack for making the simple sound rather complicated (a.k.a., intellectual). And unless I miss my guess, some have spent so much time reading Lynn Anderson's, *They Smell Like Sheep* (elders lead only by moral suasion), that they have begun to smell like Lynn Anderson's teaching!

Question: Does the emphasis on feeling over facts negate

the "fact" that sometimes the feelings aren't there ([Ps. 10:1](#); [22:1-2](#); [43:2](#); [89:46](#); [Job 23:8-9](#)) and that there are times in life when God's child must walk based upon facts? When Job said, "I know (not "feel") that my Redeemer lives..." he wasn't exactly experiencing a mountain-top Hallelujah moment—he was in the valley of despair. Are we equipping young people with the spiritual truths they will need to survive the hardships of life, or are we surrounding them with an emotional fog that will eventually be blown away by the gale force winds of tough times? I am not a prophet but I have my suspicions—I suspect that many of our youth will walk away from a faith of fluff when they walk away from the environs of the college campus and out into the real world. That is when they will find out just how "real" (hard) it is. My hope is that they don't walk too far away. Sometimes disillusionment with the illusion leads one away from the real thing.

Question: And how do these attitudes have a bearing on evangelism? If ever there was

a rock-and-a-hard-place, this is it. It is hard to maintain the "small church/house-church" concept when converts occur and you have to "tear down houses and build larger ones." The easy answer is to plant another "house-church." The reality is, some people don't like to give up control. (Do you think I am far off the mark?) Here is a quick history lesson: most local assemblies of God's people began in houses, or store-fronts, or school cafeterias. Novel idea? Hardly.

And when does a tradition become traditional? When it is done two weeks in a row? Three? A month? Two months? One year? Two? Ten? Those who decry "tradition" (which could be defined as an orderly way to accomplish what God asks us to do) soon establish their own order (tradition) that they repeat—repeatedly. Hence, the very ones ridiculing traditions (i.e., two songs, a prayer, and another song...) themselves become traditionalists. That's ironic.

Okay, here it is: Are some assemblies too rigid and man-traditional? Are

some elders overbearing? Are some Christians rushing through the Lord's Supper—with an attitude of "let's get it over with so we can get on to more important things" (i.e., the sermon)? Are some songs and prayers more rote than from the heart? Are some more concerned about maintaining property (and saving money) than they are about saving souls? The answers are obvious.

And the solution is...? The solution is and always has been a re-examining of biblical texts. What does the Bible say? What did New Testament churches/assemblies do? How can we become more like they were—and wouldn't that also include Paul's stern warning to the free-and-easy Corinthians to do "things properly and in an orderly manner" (14:40—a verse that has become the focal point of sarcasm). Some, in their disdain for anything traditional, find more comfort in following evangelical traditions—a fact that is both odd and...old.

A Plea to Parents

This is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all definition of

everyone who espouses some form of "house-church" idea(s). Such is impossible. Undoubtedly, I will be criticized for painting with broad strokes—but *at least I am trying to articulate what is disturbing and heartbreaking to some parents*. Some will disdain the very term "house-church"—although another facet of this kind of thinking is avoidance of any "label" entirely. Call it what you wish or paint it in a better way but please understand that there is a problem—and not an imaginary one.

My chief concern, beyond that of those involved, are for parents who send their children to colleges and universities and who assume automatically that their impressionable children will be "impressed" by those who hold to the same truths as do they. Don't bet on it.

My advice to parents is simple: *investigate the places of worship for your children*. Yes, you have that right—do you quit *parenting* when your pre- or post-teen attends school away from home? Sure, they must forge their own faith, but help them

with the tools to do exactly that. Encourage them to worship with churches on solid footing (size has nothing to do with it), with stable shepherds, with preaching that is persuasive ([2 Corinthians 5:11](#)), filled with enthusiastic exhortations ([Acts 2:40](#)) and that will feed them the solid truths they need to build the muscles of their faith. Like the exemplary church of the Thessalonians, those assemblies of Christians are there.

Like it or not, Solomon nailed it. There *is* nothing new under the sun. Parents—*wise up!*

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