

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

When people first hear of house churches, they often mistakenly imagine that the only difference between house churches and institutional churches is their size and their relative abilities to provide "ministry." People sometimes conclude that the house church cannot offer the quality of ministry provided by churches with buildings. But if one defines "ministry" as that which contributes to the making of disciples, helping them become like Christ and equipping them for service, then institutional churches have no advantage, and as I pointed out in the previous chapter, they may well be disadvantaged. Certainly house churches cannot provide the quantity of multi-faceted activities of institutional churches, but they can excel at providing true ministry.

Some people reject house churches as being true churches, simply because they lack an actual church building. Had those folks lived at any time during the first three hundred years of the church, they would have rejected every single church in the world as being a real church. The fact is that Jesus declared, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. 18:20). Jesus said nothing about where believers must gather. And even if there are only two believers, He promised to be present if they gather in His name. What Christ's disciples often do in restaurants, sharing a meal and exchanging truth, teaching and admonishing one another, is actually closer to the New Testament model of church gatherings than what often happens in many church buildings on Sunday mornings.

In the previous chapter, I enumerated some of the advantages that house churches have over institutional churches. I'd like to begin this chapter enumerating a few more reasons why the house church model is a very valid biblical alternative that can be quite effective in accomplishing the goal of making disciples. First, however, let me state at the outset that my purpose is not to attack institutional churches or their pastors. There are multitudes of godly and sincere pastors of institutional churches who are doing everything they can within their structures to please the Lord. I minister to thousands of institutional pastors every year, and I love and appreciate them very much. They are among the finest people in the world. And it is because I know how incredibly difficult their jobs are that I want to present an alternative that will help them suffer fewer casualties and be more effective and happy at the same time. The house church model is one that is biblical and that potentially lends itself to the effective making of disciples and expansion of God's kingdom. I have little doubt that the large majority of institutional pastors would be much happier, more effective and more fulfilled if they ministered in a house church setting.

I was an institutional pastor for more than twenty years and did my best then with what I knew. But it was after spending several months visiting many churches on Sunday mornings that I had my first glimpse of what it is like to attend church as a mere "layperson." It was an eye-opener, and I began to understand why so many people are so unenthusiastic about attending church. Like almost everyone except the pastor, I would sit there politely waiting for the service to be over. When it was, at least then I could interact with others as a participant rather than as a bored spectator. That experience was one of several catalysts that started me thinking about a better alternative, and I began my research on the house church model. I was amazed to discover that millions of house churches exist all over the world, and concluded that house churches have some definite advantages over institutional churches.

Most of the pastors who read this book are not overseeing house churches, but institutional churches. I know that much of what I've written might be initially difficult for them to swallow as it may seem so radical at first. But I ask that they give themselves some time to contemplate what I have to say, and I don't expect them to embrace everything overnight. It is for pastors I have written, motivated by love for them and their churches.