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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

SEPTEMBER 2020 | Part 1 of 2

Due to size restrictions with our email server, we need to split this month's MOTT into two portions. This is part 1 of 2.

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Finally, brethren
WHATEVER THINGS are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely
are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY —
meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christstheway.com.

Response from Nigeria on Who May Baptize

Question

Bro. Sharp again I wish to respond to the answer to the issue of "who can Baptize" as it appeared in August issue of MOTT. I affirm that who can Baptize has Spiritual Significance with the following Scriptural records:

1. The Commission/ Command to preach the Gospel and Baptize was authorised by our Lord Christ to His Apostles/Believers only (Mat.28:18-19)
2. Only the Apostles preached on Pentecost and Baptized those that believed (Acts 2:4,14-41).
3. Evangelist Philip Baptized the Samaritan Believers. (Acts 8:1-8) or is it in divine order and proper that after preaching believers will left in the mercy of unbeliever to Baptize? Meditate on that.
4. Evangelist Philip again preached and Baptized the Ethiopian noble man (Acts 8:36-38)
5. Apostle Paul and Evangelist Apolos Baptized Corinthian believers. (1 Cor 1:14-15;3:6).

With these Scriptural Facts and Figures, I agree with the Spanish brethren that Baptism should be by Believers not by Unbelievers. More so "Who Baptize is of high Spiritual Significance."

Answer

Thank you very much for your thoughtful response. I respect you and treasure the memories of our work together in Awka, but I respectfully disagree on this question.

The Great Commission commands are to all creation (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20).

Nowhere does it say who did the baptizing on the Day of Pentecost. The apostles did the preaching, but the Holy Spirit chose not to reveal who did the baptizing (Acts 2:41).

Philip did the preaching in Samaria, but the Scriptures do not reveal who did the baptizing (Acts 8:12-13).

Yes, Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-39), but so far as is revealed, they were the only two people present.

Paul baptized only a few Corinthian believers, and he doesn't reveal who baptized the others (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). Nothing is revealed about Apolos baptizing any of them (1 Corinthians 3:6; cf. Acts 18:24-19:1).

If the validity of your baptism depends on the faithfulness of the one doing the baptizing, what if he, unknown to you, is an hypocrite or an heretic? Is your baptism then invalid?

Re: Review

McIntosh Chimeziri (Evang.) and Joseph Taiwo Ogundare (Evang.) and Olumuyiwa Sunday Asaolu
mchimeziri@gmail.com, Josephogundare@yahoo.com & asaolu@yahoo.com
Lagos, Nigeria | June 24, 2020

Dear brother Keith Sharp ([KS]), our attention was drawn to your review to our article on Multiple Assemblies vs Single Assembly Church and we are sincerely glad that you did. We hope you will equally circulate our response in your Newsletter. Please note that this issue is not about winning an argument, it is an effort to establish the Bible truth about the matter.

Our original article was "a draft" prepared for a discussion on a WhatsApp Group in Nigeria. The authors promised to write a fuller version

afterwards and released that on May 18th. [We wonder why Bro. Julius Chiemela Nwankwo, a preacher, did not participate in the discussion but sent you the draft rather than the revised article] The nuances expressed in a work should not becloud one from separating the wheat from the chaff. Some (including Bro. Asaolu sifted that article) grasped the truth therein and now contributes to our subsequent materials on the subject. We apologize for the generic "judgmentalism" but observe that one may highlight common trends especially amidst his audience and environment. As to how elders should operate, what you aver is an ideal many should equally practice. We agree that elders rule but only in matters of opinion. Sure, it behooves Evangelists to raise teachers and set things in order in a church. Yet preachers should periodically preach in various towns. Many especially in Nigeria would not venture outside their cities for months without fear of losing their monthly paycheck unless his congregation initiates it. It is sad that such evangelist work as yours is rare here; for a preacher is often treated as an employee who cannot leave his desk save for when he goes on annual vacation of at most 4 weeks.

Interesting that you NEVER defined the word "church" [Ekklessia] in your review! If you did, it would obviously negate your assertions. Please see Acts 9:31 & 19:32-41 for "church, assembly & churches," and check the Greek words so translated. We understand the difference between two/three and 'the church' (though a church can be started by a plurality of Christians) hence did NOT cite Mt 18:17. Is the local church a group within the universal church? Could the church in Aquila's house have been a group within the church in Rome? What makes 'a local church' or 'the church in a locality'? Once these are clarified, you might understand why some describe a cluster of saints meeting in a zone of a city as 'zonal fellowship' e.g. a cluster of the Jerusalem church such as those praying in Mary's house. Many deem any religious group that meets regularly and takes the Lord's Supper an autonomous congregation, we do not.

Christians that regularly gather for worship in selected homes were cells [house churches], which altogether constituted THE church in a city which we term 'the City-church.' KS listed 1 Cor 1:2 as a local congregation. The Christians in Corinth constituted the church of God in that city because they were called to be saints [holy ones], and have been invited by the gospel from the world into of Christ's kingdom. They did not just become "the church" when gathered in a house but came together "as a church" (physical assembly) at such moment. What you call "the worship assembly of the local congregation" is simply saints gathered in a venue at a particular time for worship or religious service; it could be the whole or a part of the City-church. For instance, in a city; sisters meet at a home: 1 Main Street on Wed between 6-7pm for Bible Study, brothers meet at a home: 10 Moore Street on Wed between 7-8pm for Bible Study, and the Church runs a worship service for all on Sunday 9am-12pm at a rented hall pending the erection of its own building. This yields three congregations or assemblies per week of a City-church under one common leadership. Yet each gathering is 'a church in session' or "assembled church" since it is a program/event designed by the whole church and executed by a segment thereof. In Acts 21:5, an observer at the seashore who enquires, "Who are those who knelt to pray?" would be informed, "that is the church of Christ." 1 Cor 11:18 'as a church', 14:19 'in the church' connotes "with some saints in a capacity of the body of Christ, for a spiritual purpose" NOT necessarily "amidst the whole church." A person who prophesy edifies the church (1 Cor 14:4). Did sisters stop prophesying altogether or lost the gift of prophecy after Paul wrote vs 34-38 or did they thereafter exercise their gift to saints in gatherings where brothers were absent? If after Paul's epistle, a Corinthian sister prophesied in a sisters' class, she would have scripturally edified a [segment of the local] church NOT the [whole] church.

From the New Testament [NT], we understand and believe that Christians typically met in homes back then for fellowship and worship, not in purpose-built structures. A new church in any city would commence meeting in one venue [often a private house] and the brethren may grow in number to use multiple assembly venues [houses] for services in the same city but would still remain one church with a common leadership. Our view is that ONE church existed per city in the NT [whether or not the saints therein worshipped in multiple houses]. That is the divine pattern delivered via the inspired apostles!

A congregation is a group of worshippers and is NOT necessarily autonomous. How could YOU have missed passages cited such as:

- Acts 12:12-17 that shows various congregations of the City-church of Jerusalem praying at different houses? Acts 15:4; 21:17-18 that refers to "the whole church ...the brethren ...all the elders" in Jerusalem? Thus, cells made up the church in Jerusalem, how come that is no longer practiced now?
- Acts 18:24-27, 1 Cor 16:19 which shows that at Ephesus, a church was meeting at Aquila's house while Acts 19:1-10 shows that some disciples he was unaware of were converted, which then met DAILY with Paul for study and evangelism in the school of Tyrannus? Acts 20:17-28 wherein Paul sent for and addressed "the elders of THE church" of Ephesus showing the assemblies constituted one church under a common eldership?

1 Pet 5:1-2 was not written to a congregation but to brethren in several provinces. "Elders among you" means the elders in each of the City-churches of those provinces. The New Testament does NOT have a pattern of 'congregational autonomy' UNLESS congregation is construed as each City-church. In the NT one cannot switch congregations within a city if disfellowshipped, such is purged out -1 Cor 5:5-7

We agree that personal meals should be taken privately and not mixed up with the Lord's Table at the assembly of the saints. At home, one can eat alone or dine with Christian associates in a social setting or be gathered with disciples as a church to observe the Lord's Supper. It is a matter of the purpose of the gathering or meal and appropriately discerning what is being done at that moment. No one disputes that the disciples in Troas came together to break bread. It is authorized for disciples to meet as an assembly ["as a church" -1 Cor 11:18] to break bread. KS posits the local church must gather in one place for the Lord's Supper. Many aver this is to demonstrate that Christians are in one accord. Really? For all to come together for Communion is permitted and authorized but NOT necessarily mandatory. What inspiration says is "if therefore the whole church be come together into one place..." NOT "let the whole church come together in one place..." Are the brethren not in one accord when they organize or conduct different edification programs for various segments of the church in distinct classrooms or venues? Being in 'one accord' does not necessarily mean gathering together as some interpret. While 'one accord' may be used to describe physical coordination of a group, it does not mean that in every context. Notice the employment of the phrase in Acts 2:1; 2:46 and Phil 2:2. Did the instruction to the Philippians mean that they should perpetually remain physically together in one place, and not go home to eat, rest or work? If 'one accord' means being physically together in every context, then the following are the implications: The church in Jerusalem did not pray for Peter's release in one accord (Acts.12:17), the early church ceased to be in one accord after Act 8, whenever few brethren are absent in a program, the church is not in one accord, once the assembly disperses, they are no longer in one accord! The only valid interpretation of 'one

accord' is that the City-church coordinated themselves well as one body having the same mind, the same judgment, one faith, one hope, one Lord, being united under same local leadership irrespective of whether all met in one place or not.

Actually, Acts 2:44-47 seems more like an explanation or expansion of the thought captured in vs 42. It could very well be the Communion referenced in vs 42 that is alluded to in vs 46. In the early years of the church, the Communion was an actual meal of [unleavened] bread and wine not crumbs or tiny wafers with micro cups being licked as many practice now. Since they lacked a cathedral and were persecuted since Acts 4 it is obvious the Jerusalem church communed in their homes even from its inception.

- During severe persecution in Jerusalem, especially between when Peter was imprisoned and divinely rescued [Acts 12:18-19], would the whole church have met publicly in one place to break bread?
When some in Corinth abused the Communion, conflating it with personal meals, Paul made a distinction and corrected them. That church was reminded on what it entails to come together to break bread.
- Could they possibly come together "as a church" in multiple places?
[Many translations and Greek manuscripts do not contain the phrase "in one place" in 1 Cor 11:20, 33 but simply state "...when you come together..."]

For expediency, many Christians are meeting in small groups (with family/neighbours) during the lockdown occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since they are constrained from getting to a church building to meet with all others as they customarily do, spiritual leaders of the local church also guide such via visits/technological tools. [Akin to coordination of early Christians in private homes by local church leaders via visits/epistles since there were no church buildings for all to gather in many cities]. These recent small groups (cells) constitute congregations. It is immaterial whether such cell of the City-church is temporary; the important thing is their worship. They gather in Christ's name, praise the Lord, edify one another, proclaim the Lord's death via Communion, give and may assist the needy in their midst, preach to those around them, etc.

- Are you against the establishment of new congregations [house-churches] or would deny these the right to assemble and serve their God?
- Are all the Christians in a city recognized as a local church, and must ALL assemble in one place to partake of the Communion?

Consider a city with 450 Christians pre-Covid-19. In God's sight, the local church has 450 baptized members. Assuming these formed 3 congregations that worship at three different locations (halls) across town, averaging 150 per assembly, is it okay? When due to limitations on public gathering occasioned by Covid-19, the Christians rearranged themselves and worship in 75 homes based on proximity averaging 6 per assembly, is it still okay or has it suddenly become sinful? If using 75 assemblies is sinful then so was the original 3 and so was the Jerusalem church in Acts 12:12, 17.

- Worshipping in 3 or 75 venues are alike! Both are simply convenient means of gathering, for Christians in various sections of the city at different periods. Ab initio, the saints ought to operate as a City-church with common leadership. If instead, they initially operated 3 autonomous churches, guess you would balk at 75 assemblies purporting it signals 75 independent churches?
- What if pre-Covid-19, some Christians are imprisoned in that city (e.g. in persecution -Acts 16:19-25), could such sing, pray and even break bread in jail if they have the opportunity on a Sunday?

Acts 12:12 "many were gathered together praying" explains vs 5 "prayer was made without ceasing of the church." The passage is NOT talking of individuals functioning separately in prayer or about 'church spoken of distributively' as KS posits. Verse 5-17 teaches of the church functioning in clusters/cells; city-saints congregating in several distinct places for the same intercessory purpose. The cells used were not haphazard but familiar. Both Peter and the saints praying in Mary's house KNEW the exact locations where others assembled, and who was where! "Church" is a collective noun. "Came to the ears of the church" means the Jerusalem church [leadership] was informed; it was reported hence the brethren took collective action, not some individuals. During persecution, some families hosted worship services. On Acts 8:3. Despite his warrant, Saul could not invade any home unless he had some evidence that Christian(s) were there, see web link Part 1 referenced below for an in-depth exposition of this verse.

Actually, it was the saints in a city that made up a 'local church' not their meeting place (temple, upper room, riverside, private house, etc.) 1 Cor 1:2 refers to the City-church of Corinth; it was a local church because it was located in Corinth. It remained so for as long as Christians dwell in and regularly meet ANYWHERE within the city, for worship/service. [By service, we mean those activities that glorify God including the works of edification, benevolence or evangelism.] The church that met at the house of Aquila and Priscilla was a cell or segment of the saints in Rome, it did NOT "function as a whole" and there is no scriptural evidence it was autonomous with a distinct eldership as the church at Philippi or Jerusalem or Ephesus. In Paul's epistle to Rome, the saints were addressed collectively despite worshipping in multiple house-churches. There is no inspired proof that the assemblies therein were autonomous congregations. In Rm 1:6, inspiration alluded to the Roman saints as 'the called of Christ' signifying they were also a church as others, which saluted them (Rm16:16). Each saint was to function as a member of the body; they were all to be of the same mind and utter praise in one voice (accord) -Rm 12:4-8; 15:5-6. Thank you for ADMITTING that a congregation worshipped "in a school (Acts 19:9)." While that was happening in Ephesus, a congregation was also meeting in Aquila's house (1 Cor 16:19). There could have been more since many people believed (Acts 19:11-18). These cells constitute one body, THE church of Ephesus and later had a common presbytery -Acts 20:17-28. The cluster that met in Mary's house [Acts 12] was not an "autonomous or local church" which ordained its own elders or functioned independently of other saints in Jerusalem. Members of house-church(es) altogether constitute the City-church and ordain elders as "the church" in a locality.

Acts 11:25-26 states that Paul and Barnabas assembled with the church in Antioch for a year and taught much people. It does not give details of how that was done; whether in a single class or dual classes, whether in a single location or two, whether always teaching at the same time or sequentially, whether all the people were taught exactly the same topics in the same way or in different ways (youth and adult lessons), etc. The church may gather as a whole or in clusters, that can be inferred from Titus 2 where various segments are to be taught various lessons. Heb 10:24-25 does NOT specify the time, when, how often or where the assembly must hold! We know from other passages that we should meet regularly, at least on Sundays, and that the building or place of meeting is a matter of convenience not requirement for true worship. The time to

start or end a service is discretionary as agreed by the church so long we wait for one another during the agreed period. Heb 10:25 is about stirring up one another in love unto good deeds, getting together and caring for ourselves, not only for worship but for every good work! Various historians give different dates for the first church building. What seems unanimous is that the NT churches did not own purpose-built edifices. Even Schaff, whom YOU cited negates YOUR application of Acts 2:46, corroborates our scriptural claim that in the first century "Christians held their worship mostly in private houses," and thus supports the conclusion that churches existed as a network of cells in a typical city. The Old Testament was a shadow yet contained types. We have NOT claimed that the church should have various levels of elders but stated that in the NT, elders are to be appointed for the church at the city level only. "It might be wise to start another congregation in a city" is KS's fallible opinion.

KS wrongly accused us of making the meeting place a matter of faith. A careful read of our material should clarify that the crux of our argument is not on number of assemblies in any city. We affirm this Proposition: "In the first century, regardless of whether the Christians in a city met in a single assembly or multiple assemblies, they constituted one church with a common leadership (presbytery)."

We are ready to engage you or anyone willing to deny it in a formal written debate, via exchanges of 3 Pages not exceeding 1800 words apiece. Those interested in reading all the discussion and written exchange this matter has generated should kindly download and study the following materials:

- http://www.lainosint.com/download/faith/Multiple_Assemblies_vs_Single_Assembly_Church_What_is_the_jurisdiction_of_Elders.pdf
- http://www.lainosint.com/download/faith/Multiple_Assemblies_vs_Single_Assembly_Church_What_is_the_jurisdiction_of_Elders_Part2.pdf

Reply

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

I do not know brethren Chimeziri, Ogundare, or Asaolu, and I certainly have no animosity toward them. But I believe they are teaching false doctrine that leads to denominationalism when they affirm (1) "Each church of the 1st century was a network of cell (home group) churches," (2) "The Holy Spirit treated all house assemblies of each city collectively as one church," and (3) "Elders were ordained over cities and not over each congregation of the same city." This is the diocesan concept that was one of the early steps in the organization that led to Catholicism. Add this to "Church of Christ - Nigeria," a board that claims to make decisions for all churches of Christ in Nigeria, and you are well on the way to being just another human denomination.

I know nothing about a draft. I simply replied to the material I received. Why do you think Brother Nwankwo was not seeking to do as you and pursue truth when he asked for my review of the material he had from you? Let's leave judgment of motives out and deal with the Scriptures.

There are side issues these brethren raise, but I will center my attention on the three statements above that are the heart of their error.

Yes, I'm aware of the Greek word translated "church," I have looked up its lexical definition, and I know in three verses it is translated "assembly" (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). My concern is with its use in Scripture.

I devoted an entire paragraph to defining the Bible word "church."

"The word 'church' is used in the New Testament to denote the universal assembly of people called out of the world into fellowship with God (Matthew 16:18), the local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2), and the public, worship assembly of the local congregation (1 Corinthians 11:18). It is never used scripturally to denote a group within the local church."

That last sentence is crucial and still stands.

I also spent a lengthy paragraph defining the phrase "local church."

"According to the New Testament, a local church is composed of saints who agree to work together (Acts 9:26-28), is sufficiently local (1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 16:5), that its members assemble regularly (Acts 11:25-26; 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25), it functions collectively, i.e., as a whole (1 Timothy 5:16; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2), and, when mature, is organized, with bishops (i.e., overseers, also called elders or pastors/shepherds (Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17, 28), deacons (servants, 1 Timothy 3:8-13), and saints (members) working together as they have ability and opportunity (Romans 12:4-8). It may have fellowship with a preacher or preachers, who both preach to them and work in other places (Philippians 4:15-16). Each local church is autonomous (independent, self-ruled (1 Peter 5:1-2; Acts 13:1-3)."

The word "church" is used in the New Testament to denote the universal assembly of people called out of the world into fellowship with God (Matthew 16:18), the local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2), and the public, worship assembly of the local congregation (1 Corinthians 11:18). It is never used scripturally to denote a group within the local church.

One important characteristic of a local church is that it assembles regularly (1 Corinthians 11:18; Acts 20:7). After the church was in existence, every recorded instance of the observation of the Lord's Supper occurred in the public worship assembly of the local church, not some subdivision. The brethren at Troas came together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:6-8). The apostle Paul, writing to "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2), directed the whole church to come together to eat the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:18, 20, 23-24). The implied rebuke of verse 20 indicates they should have been coming together to eat the Lord's Supper.

20, 33-34). The implied rebuke of verse 20 indicates they should have been coming together to eat the Lord's Supper.

These two records of the Lord's Supper are the sum total of New Testament revelation on when and where to eat the Lord's Supper. They teach us to eat in the public worship assembly of the church on the first day of the week. There is more said about the where than the when, but brethren bind the when and loose the where. There was no congregation within a congregation. They were the disciples in Troas (Acts 20:6-7) and the "church of God ... in Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

There is no biblical authority for any group larger than, smaller than, or other than such a local congregation to come together to eat the Lord's Supper (Colossians 3:17; 2 John 9). There is no authority from the Lord for individuals to eat the Lord's Supper apart from the church assembled. The covid19 pandemic does not alter the New Testament pattern. Those brethren doing this now have opened the door to what you brethren advocate - a number of mini-congregations within one city wide congregation assembling separately to worship but ruled by one city-wide eldership. If not, why not?

No, the local church is not a subdivision of the universal church. The universal church is comprised of individual Christians. Every metaphor used in the New Testament that describes the composition of the universal church applies to individuals: (1) kingdom: citizens (Matthew 16:18-19; Ephesians 2:19), fold: sheep (John 10:16), vine: branches (John 15:5-6), body: members (1 Corinthians 12:27), temple: stones (Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5), and family: children (Ephesians 3:14-15; Galatians 3:26).

The universal church (Matthew 16:18) has no earthly organization. Individual members of this universal body function under a spiritual Head (Colossians 1:18; 3:17). Christians universally have fellowship by each following Christ through submission to the words of His apostles (1 John 1:3,7).

Why do you understand that two or three from a church engaged in spiritual work is not a church (Matthew 18:15-17) but cannot apply this to those meeting in Mary's house and "James and ... the brothers" (Acts 12:12-17)?

The apostle Paul does not address the Roman letter to "the church in Rome" but to "all who are in Rome" (Romans 1:7). Among them was the church that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (Romans 16:3-5), but there is not even a hint that this church was part of a city wide church under the rule of one eldership.

Yes, the local church, and even disciples in a region are called the "church" in a distributive rather than a collective sense. In the **New American Standard Bible**, we read in Acts 9:31, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace..." (So **English Standard Version**), Do brethren Chimezi, Ogunbare, and Asalu believe they were all under one eldership? If so, they will have graduated to an eldership over a region, well on the way to Catholicism. Likewise, "news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 11:22). Did the church collectively have ears, or is the local church denoted distributively, as individuals? Thus, prophetesses could edify the church (distributively, rather than collectively) without violating their feminine role (1 Corinthians 14:4, 34-35). None of this authorizes multiple churches meeting separately to observe the Lord's Supper while functioning under a common city-wide eldership.

They seem not to have read my reply to their material very carefully, for I specifically answered their misuse of every passage they cited, including Acts 12:12-17. If any readers do not have access to the May issue of MOTT, please email me, and I will send it to you.

Classes involving members of a local congregation meeting at various times in various locations with the approval of the elders, whether they meet for Bible study, prayer, or singing, do not constitute local churches in the biblical sense. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Thus, if a group of Christians is a local church, it may have its own elders. May the Wednesday morning ladies Bible class have its own elders?

Not every group of worshipers, even Christians, is a local church. Were Paul and Silas in prison a church? (Acts 16:25)

Meeting for worship in private homes is certainly permitted, but it is certainly not the New Testament pattern. The original congregation, the church in Jerusalem, met in the temple (Acts 2:46). The church in Troas met in an upper room of unrevealed ownership (Acts 20:7-8). The place the church meets for worship is a liberty, something allowed but not required (1 Corinthians 8:8-9).

Yes, each local church is necessarily autonomous. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this truth. It is the divine bulwark against denominationalism. The violation of this truth led to Catholicism in the first six centuries of the existence of the church and led to the formation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

"Congregational Autonomy" means the direction of the execution of the will of Christ belongs completely within the local church and is not to be surrendered, partially or completely, to any outside control. Elders are to be appointed within each local church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). These elders have the oversight of the congregation of which they are members (1 Peter 5:1-2). There they rule under the authority of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Each local church is to select its own leaders (Acts 6:1-6), govern itself within the limits of those things Christ has authorized (1 Peter 5:1-4; Colossians 3:17), determine its own program of work and select the arrangements to carry it out (Acts 11:22; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25), control the use of its own resources (Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8, and discipline its own sinful members (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). That is an inviolable divine pattern. That is the safeguard against general apostasy. That must not be violated or compromised. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen.

When Paul was in Corinth, it is not revealed where the church in Ephesus met, unless it was in the synagogue (Acts 18:24-27). We don't know whether Aquila and Priscilla knew the twelve men Paul baptized in Ephesus or not, but the brethren were meeting in the synagogue (Acts 19:8) as had Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:26), until Paul moved them to the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9), where they continued for two years (Acts

19:10). During this time Paul wrote to Corinth and sent greetings from the church that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (1 Corinthians 16:8, 19). About a year later (1 Corinthians 16:8; Acts 20:16), he summoned the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him in Troas (Acts 20:17). There is no divine revelation about where the church met at this time; only speculation, which is no basis upon which to build a biblical case.

You simply assume that First Peter 5:1-2 is addressed to elders of each "city church" with assumed sub-churches within them. This is nothing more than assumption devoid of evidence. Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). If it is a church, it should strive to have its own elders.

Many years ago, a brother came to us from another congregation in the same city. He said the elders of the other congregation withdrew from him "for asking too many questions." We met with the elders of that church, and they confirmed the truth of his story. We accepted him as a member of the church, although another church in the same city had withdrawn from him. Did we sin?

Personal meals, eaten because we are hungry, are no part of the work of the church, but of the home (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34).

I made no argument about "one accord." I affirm the Lord's Supper is to be eaten in the public worship assembly of the church because that is the New Testament pattern (Acts 20:7-8; 1 Corinthians 11:18, 20, 33). We must follow New Testament approved examples (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9).

Maybe you can explain to me how we can come together in different places. You're in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria; I'm in Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA. Are we together? Are you not now affirming the absurd?

Actually, Acts 2:43-46a does go into further detail about Acts 2:42. "All who believed were together" (verse 44) "with one accord in the temple" (verse 46a). They ate their own meals (not the Lord's Supper) "from house to house" (verse 46b; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:22, 34). The disciples as a whole were not persecuted but "had favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47). Only after the death of Stephen was the church as a whole persecuted (Acts 8:1-3), at which point "they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). Where are your house churches within the city church? A figment of your imagination.

You assume without proof that later persecution kept them from assembling as the church (Acts 12:18-19). Actually, after the conversion of Saul, "the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified" (Acts 9:31). In Acts twelve, Herod did not harass the whole church, but "some from the church" (Acts 12:1), specifically the apostles James and Peter (Acts 12:2-3). Brethren have often met in one place secretly through the centuries because of persecution, and some do so even today, as in China, Vietnam, and Muslim countries.

Doubtless brethren knew where others were meeting in Acts 12, but that doesn't make these groups of saints churches within a church. When I preached in Lakeland, Florida, evangelistic classes met in three designated homes simultaneously under the direction of the elders, but these classes were not churches within the church.

I find it difficult to fathom that you affirm the church collectively had ears (Acts 11:22). Individual people have ears. Your position that "church" means the leadership is good Catholic doctrine, since they refer to the clergy as "the Church." Does Acts 9:31 ("church," **NASB, ESV**) refer to

one organization throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee under one eldership? Have you graduated to a regional eldership? Are you another step closer to Catholicism?

Where did I ever affirm that the meeting place makes the church? But if it is a local church, it does assemble regularly (Acts 11:25-26; 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25) and should strive to have its own elders (Acts 14:23).

You assume and assert without any evidence that the church meeting in the home of Aquila and Priscilla were part of a city wide church. Passages I have already cited prove that any body of Christians who can properly be called a local church should be autonomous and strive to have its own elders. These truths don't have to be restated every time the word "church" occurs. There are instances of conversion where repentance is not mentioned (e.g., Acts 18:8). Is repentance unnecessary? Again, Paul didn't address the church in Rome; he wrote "To all who are in Rome" (Romans 1:7).

"Elders in every church" is not my fallible opinion but the infallible word of God (Acts 14:23). If it's a local church, it should strive to have its own elders. I don't care if a local church has twenty classes meeting at the same time in various parts of the city, they should come together as a church on the first day of the week to eat the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7-8; 1 Corinthians 11:18, 20, 33).

I cited Schaff in reply to your contention that the first buildings owned by churches were during the time of Constantine and were the first step to Catholicism. Since churches met in a variety of places in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 2:46; 19:8-9; 20:8; 1 Corinthians 16:19) and since where we worship is unimportant but how is (John 4:20-24), where the church meets for worship is a liberty (1 Corinthians 8:8-9).

You said that churches meeting in private homes is the New Testament pattern and that churches owning their own buildings was the first step to Catholicism. That makes it a matter of faith (2 Timothy 1:13; 2 John 9). I never said a church had to own its own building. I affirm that where a church meets is a liberty.

I have spent all the time on this issue I intend to spend. If you can work out a written debate with a faithful, competent Nigerian preacher, I will publish it. I am the editor of this paper, and I will determine the length of the articles and the rules of the debate. There will be no personal recriminations, as you did toward Brother Nwankwo, and the articles will be much, much shorter.



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