

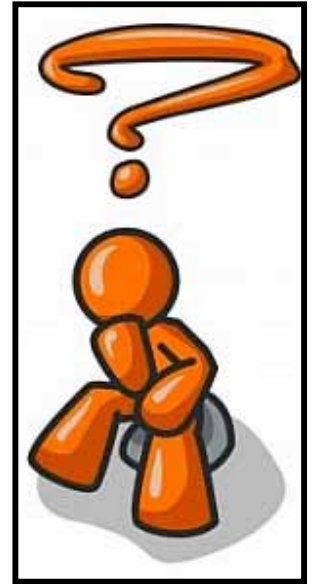
What About ... Small Groups?

BY DR. DAVID A. DEWITT

Actually, the New Testament church never met in a large group. The assembly of the church was always a small group. The only recorded church assemblies were in homes, and homes were small.

- **Acts 2:46** ...*breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness*
- **Acts 5:42** ...*from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ*
- **Acts 20:20** ...*teaching you publicly and from house to house*
- **Romans 16:5** ...*greet the church that is in their house*
- **1 Corinthians 16:19** *Aquila and Prisca greet you...with the church that is in their house*
- **Colossians 4:15** *Greet...the church that is in her house*
- **Philemon 2** ...*to the church in your house*

So it's clear, (1) the church never gathered in a large auditorium type of meeting, (2) they had their assemblies in homes, and (3) homes were always small. Everybody who reads the New Testament understands that, so people who support big churches have offered the following arguments.



1. "Yeahbutwhatabout when Jesus fed the 5000 and the 4000 and Peter spoke to over 3000?"

Answer: Those were unscheduled gatherings of crowds that spontaneously came together. People gathered around Jesus for healing and teaching. Peter spoke to the crowd that experienced the miracles at the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and again to those who gathered around the healing of the lame man at the temple (Acts 3). Occasional large gatherings might be advantageous. But no regular assembly of the church was scheduled, planned, or organized as a large meeting.

2. "Yeahbutwhatabout persecution? Maybe they couldn't build large churches due to persecution."

Answer: The apostles never held back from doing what was the right thing to do, or the best thing to do, because of persecution. The apostles never suggested bigger was better for a church gathering.

3. "Yeahbut an example is not a command. The apostles did not command small groups. Since the apostles did not specify a form for the church, we are free to adapt whatever style works best."

Answer: Pragmatism (what works) is not a good test for truth, and examples are given for a reason. The form forms the impact. If I go to hear a symphony orchestra, I do not expect to learn to play the violin. I go as a spectator to be entertained, with no thought of involvement. That is not what the apostles had in mind. Small groups encourage participation, thinking, and reasoning.

4. "Yeahbut small groups are easily taken over by false teaching."

Answer: Really? And large groups aren't? Nearly every significant false teaching in the church is linked to

some mega church pastor. The teaching in small groups is usually the most biblical, and it encourages participation, which is the best check on false teaching (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

5. "Yeahbut large churches often encourage breaking up into mid-week small groups."

Answer: Small groups themselves are not what the apostles formed. Let's think about that a bit. Hebrews 10:25 includes the command *not forsaking our own assembling together*. The words I'd like you to notice are *our own* [KJV, *of ourselves*]. Believers who only gather in mixed groups are not gathering themselves together. As believers, we are to gather ourselves together. We are not to build or rent an auditorium (school, restaurant, mall, or other mega facility) and invite in everyone who will come. That's ok if we are having an evangelistic rally for a few days, but it is not an assembly of the church. The church is when believers, who know each other from their networks of fellowship, find a way to gather themselves together in groups small enough to fit in a home. When we call for gatherings in auditorium-size places and encourage "seekers" to come, then we have a mixed group, not a gathering of the church. Of course, we can't teach them much because they won't understand much. When that large group is divided up into small groups, we do not have the believers gathering themselves together. We just have a mixed small group, which is usually shallow and superficial, characterized by shared ignorance. So the assembly of the church is not just to be small, it is to be the gathering of believers, not subdividing large groups for the sake of having small groups.