

ETHAN TEMPLE MINISTRIES
TOOLS FOR LIFE
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THE EARLY CHURCH AND FELLOWSHIP

I personally believe the Lord is moving upon His people to look more closely at what the New Testament church was like. Seventh-day Adventists have viewed themselves as God's remnant for many years. We have sought to hold true to the teachings of God's Word, as did the New Testament church. I believe that now the Lord is calling us to not only continue "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine," but to continue steadfastly in "fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). God is calling His children to be His remnant people just like the New Testament early church, not only in doctrine but in fellowship, as well. Fellowship is an important aspect to being God's remnant people. With this in mind, let's take a closer look at what God's early church was like.

The book of Acts tells us that the early Christians met both in the temple and from house to house:

"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (verse 46).

As the Christians became unwelcome in the Jewish temples, their homes became the focal point of their worship and fellowship. The homes of the believers were the places where they met for praise, fellowship and teaching. Many verses mention the homes in the New Testament where the Christians met:

"And when they were come in, they went up to an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James" (Acts 1:13).

"And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she

was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us” (Acts 16:14, 15)

“But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go” (Acts 17:5-9).

“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20).

“Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ” (Rom. 16:5).

“And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other” (1 Cor. 1:16). “The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house” (1 Cor. 16:19).

“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house” (Col. 4:15).

The apostles certainly understood the importance of small home fellowship. For three and one half years they had worshipped and fellowshiped with Jesus in this manner. We can understand how natural it was for the apostles to continue this type of small group fellowship as hundreds and thousands of individuals accepted Christ. The home fellowship style of church would make it much easier to assimilate and organize the large numbers joining the church even on a daily basis:

“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added

to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

These small fellowship groups served the growth of the church well. It is estimated that by the third century, six million Christians lived in the Roman Empire. These small fellowship groups were conducive to growth. New members were assimilated quickly and thoroughly. It would also be evident that these groups were not just to nurture but were evangelistic in nature. The home groups enabled the church to grow even in times of severe persecution. Also, as the numbers of a home church grew, participants would be forced to divide and form a new group in another home.

The close, intimate fellowship that results from the smaller group creates a very close bond between members of the group. Mutual encouragement more readily takes place. It is in this kind of setting that fellow believers receive strength from one another. Humankind is created to stand stronger when united with others than when alone. Christians today need the strength that comes from the close, intimate fellowship the early church experienced. As God said in the beginning, “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18, NIV). It is not good for the Christian to try to withstand the forces of Satan and the world alone.

Personal Reflection and Discussion

Where did the early Christians meet for fellowship, and why?

What are the benefits of home fellowship groups?

Why do you think Christian fellowship is important in one's life today?

Do you think there will be a time when home fellowship will become necessary? Why, or why not?

Would you like to be a part of a Spirit-filled home fellowship group? If yes, how can you become part of one?

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