

STRUCTURE OF SIMPLE CHURCH

- CHURCH IN THE HOUSE

Rom 16:3-5

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house.NKJV

1 Cor 16:19

19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. NKJV

Col 4:15

15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house. NKJV

Philem 1-2

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, 2 to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: NKJV

The early Christians had no public place of worship. They gathered in their private homes. The assembly of believers in their private homes was called church. The church had no name. It was referred to by the owner of the private dwelling. The church was not a place but the people gathered in the place.

- HOUSEHOLD

The term household refers to family and it seems as if it refers to biological family in the following scriptures, rather than the family of God as a church:

1 Cor 16:15

15 I urge you, brethren — you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints —NKJV

2 Tim 1:16-18

16 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; 17 but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. NKJV

Stephanas and Onesiphorus don't appear to be leaders of house churches. Paul was most likely referring to their biological families.

In Galatians below, household refers to the church as the family of God.

Gal 6:10

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. NKJV

- ELECT LADY

2 John 1-2

1 The Elder,

To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, 2 because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:NKJV

The elect lady appears to be the leader of a house church. She had authority to reject those who came with a contrary doctrine.

2 John 10-11

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; NKJV

What leadership structures did these churches have?

Looking at the above scriptures many have assumed that there is no senior pastor or senior elder and that they met speaking psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – edifying and encouraging one another. There was singing and praying. Everyone shared testimonies, or passage of scripture with short exhortation. I was caught in a similar system of church for about 5 years – it went nowhere. Then we moved to a system of elders with a senior elder. The elders became the board. Eventually this church split. I know of such churches that have split over 10 times – this is without exaggeration.

The early church had elders in every church.

Acts 14:23

23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. NKJV

Acts 20:17

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. NKJV

I believe it was one elder to every house church. Thus in Ephesus there were many house churches that constituted the ONE CHURCH IN THE CITY. Paul conferred with all the elders of the house churches. These elders were the elders of the one city church. Paul was the set man or father to these elders. Paul was the angelos to these elders – thus the angelos (messenger) to the church in Ephesus at that point.

The elder's sphere extended to his house church.

Paul's sphere extended to the whole city. At the same time Paul was also an elder but with a greater measure of grace. In the Book of Revelation Jesus is addressing the angelos of each of the city churches.

The house churches had a very simple structure – one elder and believers. Simple churches have the same structure. They are very economical – no sign boards, no loudspeakers and mikes, no data projector, no pulpit, no expensive musical instruments. The elder shepherds his/her house flock. The elder is male or female – (refer to my elect lady above.) The elder is accountable to the apostle of the city who had sent him or her. THE ELDERS TASK WAS TO SET THINGS IN ORDER - A WORD, THAT MANY SIMPLE CHURCHES THAT I KNOW OF, DESPISE.

Titus 1:5

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you NKJV

1 Cor 14:40

40 Let all things be done decently and in order. NKJV

1 Thess 3:2-3

2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, NKJV

This is not human order but God's order.

The order is the establishment of God's people in the faith.

HOW IS THAT GOING TO BE DONE?

Here is the principal demand - simple churches must not just sing songs, share testimonies, share dreams, exhort, prophesy and share a good word. **THEY MUST DO WHAT THE EARLY CHURCH DID TO GROW – I.E. CONTINUE IN APOSTLES' DOCTRINE. THIS IS THE FIRST PILLAR OF APOSTOLIC CULTURE. THE OTHER THREE FOLLOW THIS PILLAR.**

Acts 2:42-43

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. NKJV

Not anyone can install this practice in a simple church. Excited believers can only sing songs and share testimonies – they cannot deliver apostles' doctrine – for this you need an elder – a shepherd – a father who himself is connected to a father.

Even in the multiplication of simple church, you cannot send an excited believer to plant another simple church. You need an elder who is a mature son who knows apostles' doctrine (proceeding word). All of the excited believers that I have sent over the years have failed – I have had greater success by sending out mature sons. Excited believers may be able to start a simple church, but cannot sustain it.

If the Word is not prioritized as is the case where there are believers sharing testimonies and prayer without proceeding word engagement there are consequences:

- Absence of spiritual growth.
- Marriage problems
- Money problems
- Mental problems – strife and contentions
- False doctrines
- Low socio-cultural impact

All this is evidence of grace deficiency.

GRACE COMES THROUGH THE WORD. THE WORD COMES FROM A PREACHER.

Rom 10:14-15

14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent?

NKJV

THE PREACHER MUST BE SENT.

Sent – apostello – depicts commissioning and authorization.

The preacher is an elder. The elder is a mature son of an apostle who is a father. This mature son fathers the church in the house.

This is a grace enabled task.

NOT ANYONE CAN LEAD A CHURCH – EVEN A SIMPLE CHURCH. YOU MUST BE SENT.