

## ANTIBIBLICAL TENDENCIES

In its neglect on Bible-centeredness the house church movement has made a fundamental error by going down the identical path as “The modern church”. “The latter in addition to being afflicted with charismania and neo-orthodoxy, has a raging ignorance of the Scriptures says George Barna”. His polls tell of huge sections of believing Christians who don't believe in either the Bible or in the fundamental doctrines in the Bible such as sin and its consequences.

Those polls also indicate that not only do large numbers of Christians not believe in the Bible, they don't even believe in the abstract concept of truth. Most modern day Christians on a workaday level ignore the Scriptures entirely when they are faced with a difficulty.

The present-day Christian is in effect a mystic or pragmatist, doing what he "feels" like, or trying what **he** “thinks” will work. His life is a dichotomy, between the secular and religious, and ‘never the twain do meet’. This includes those in the House Church movement as well as those inside the present religious system.

House church leaders seem to be consumed with the task of expansion and growth, Numbers in multiplied tens of thousands roll off the lips of their imports from America as they attempt to convince them that they can reproduce what is taking place in far away places. Having traveled worldwide for 45 years, and having lived in America for many years I have noted they have been singularly unsuccessful at practicing what they preach. “Can any good thing come out of ????????”

The abysmal ignorance of what the bible actually says, and the lack of desire to search the scriptures personally and collectively in their lives is plain when those with a reasonable grasp of truth digest what they propagate. You could argue that in the House Church movement they really do believe in the necessity of the Bible, but in my experience (because it is hardly ever referred too) this has certainly not been the case.

Every speaker or writer knows the difficulty involved in correcting an error. One side of the issue has been so heavily overemphasized that one has to talk a little longer and louder in order to make oneself heard.

Among writers and commentators within the radical wing of the House Churches it is difficult to find a healthy endorsement of the written word of God? Instead all we seem to hear is an almost monotonous denigration of those that use the written Scriptures. If that seems too strong, then they at least need to admit to a certain neglect of as well as ignorance of them. I'm certain it's because some have become wary of what they call Bible bashers, because in the past the Bible was used by the clergy to make them compliant.

This has given rise to the belief that doctrine has become an unnecessary pursuit; and bible study is to be avoided in the gatherings like the plague. Nevertheless we need to be mindful of Jesus' statement concerning the Pharisees on that point when He said: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life, yet you **refuse** to come to me to have eternal life" (John 5:39, 40).

That apparently sets up a dichotomy between knowing the Scriptures and knowing Jesus, which is what many in house churches have done and do. But notice how Jesus says: "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). And so we can see that in Jesus and later Paul's mind there is no dichotomy at all. Jesus was blaming the Pharisees **misuse** of the Scriptures, **not** the Scripture itself.

Jesus, upon whom some constantly urge us to focus, made many other ringing affirmations of the authority of Scripture. The apostle Paul, whom the radical wing routinely refer to as their authority on church planting practice, entirely agreed with Jesus about the importance of Scripture.

Consider these words by Jesus and Paul about the divine authority of the written word of God:-

First Jesus: "until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law" (Matt 5:18). "The Scripture shall not be broken" (John 10:35). "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures." (Matt 22:29. "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?" (Matt 26:54). We could add the at least sixteen times Jesus appealed to the authority of the written Scriptures by saying "it is written..." and then at least **six** times he said, "Have you not read?"

Then Paul: "and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed".

Then Gene Edwards comes and says; "Only a move away from being Bible-centered, to being Christ-centered can save us from the dubious honor of being like the past". Gene Edwards (HCM, p 59). Surely it is not just a case of 'either or', but both?

And again, "Beware the man bearing verses cry the Edwardsites". A person who has known genuine church life will **not** be bearing verses or theory; he will be bringing you Christ", says Gene. The House church gatherers echo the same sentiments as they do their thing when they come together which rarely if ever makes provision for exposition by those called to labor in the Word and Doctrine.

P.S. This writer some years ago sat under the ministry of Gene Edwards and was blessed. References have been made to Gene here because he was undoubtedly a 'file leader' and the foremost writer on the failures of organized Christianity. I would hasten to add multiplied thousands have him to thank for the liberating influence his writings had upon

them from the stifling orthodoxy that was killing them. He has helped many to commence their journey; I certainly have much to thank Gene for. But Gene is not infallible.

This quote comes from Tim Richey on the Edwards website at [www.atlantachristians.com/germany.html](http://www.atlantachristians.com/germany.html)

"The pattern for the church is **not** found in the New Testament. What is found in the New Testament is merely a manifestation of the pattern. The pattern itself is found in the Godhead **before** creation". This sounds very weird to me.

In these quotations one discerns the subtle false dichotomy that runs through the literature of this radical wing which in turn has influenced many.

The Gene Edwards' camp very often makes the point that the Bible wasn't important to the early church. *"With an illiteracy rate over 99% and books as rare as a three-horned cow, are we actually convinced that first-century believers sat around and studied the Bible?" (HCM, p. 90)*

House church groups certainly endorse this by their actions. *Gene maybe convinced of his own deductions but I certainly am not.*

A statement like that sounds brilliant but in reality it's foolish, because they just haven't thought it through. Note in Acts 6: 7 where a "**great company**" of the Priests believed and were added, these men undoubtedly could **read, write**, and expound the scriptures.

It is routinely suggested by the **radicals** that it's **either** Christ or Scripture, but **not** both. Did Paul ever suggest such a thing when he called the Scriptures "holy" and then said that those same Scriptures had led Timothy to Christ 2 Tim 3:15?

We should also note that even though the early church was mostly illiterate **it was not deaf**. The letters of the apostles were **read** to the brethren, and were considered authoritative as Scripture. (I Tim 4:13).

Further to that, when one is correcting an error, it is very important not to create another in the attempt. We need to concede enthusiastically that Gene Edwards isolated a very big problem in the church; i.e. a lack of focus on Jesus Christ.

We heartily affirm what they say in *HCM* on page 82: *"Imagine: a church never having a burden for anything except fellowship with Jesus Christ and Him alone! Would not that local gathering discover his heart, in deep and wondrous ways? And in that discovery she would naturally respond, as a bride to her groom, to the things that are on the Lord's heart. She would move forward with God's eternally purposed desire for expansion of fellowship."*

Here we are presented with the stated truth: that before we can do things for the Lord (evangelism, carrying forward God's desire for expansion of fellowship) we have to know him deeply first.

Gene Edwards and his associates are a part of an honorable tradition of Christian pietists; people who throughout church history have bemoaned Christians who emphasized ecclesiastical and political power, over the interior knowledge of Jesus Christ Himself. The Edwardsites follow in the old tradition of Brother Lawrence, Thomas a Kempis, Madame Guyon, and Philip Jacob Spener. We are not trying to trash that tradition, but we are calling for a more **balanced presentation** that will avoid misleading those who inquire into house church matters. The fundamentalists are called Bible-bashers because they appear to bash others over the head with the Bible. However House Church Gurus seem to be just as guilty as they appear to bash the Bible itself or as the least neglect it.

Even a revelation that we should "focus on Jesus" can become more important than Jesus Himself. The next time Gene Edwards and his fellow workers crusade against "paper papists" and "Bible-worshippers," the next time they repeat their slogan "focus on Jesus," we would suggest that they realize there is a similar trap into which they have fallen. The danger is that even a revelation that we should "focus on Jesus" can become more important than Jesus Himself. Anyone's beliefs are subject to abuse and extremist application. Those who respect the Bible might **forget** the Jesus of the Bible; but that is a human failure, **not** the failure of the Scriptures. And followers of Gene Edwards are just as apt to take their minds off the centrality of Jesus as anyone else. However, we would never suggest that they should not focus on Jesus, but we would suggest they shouldn't denigrate focus on the Bible. The **abuse** of something does not **bar** its use. Food and Sex are good examples.

If the radicals in the House Church wing don't start guarding its flanks, it will find itself in the same position of the charismatic movement, which, having failed to chasten its extremists is now paying a bitter price for its lack of moderation. There are some now who feel that the movement has already peaked and now over the hill and loosing ground?

The subtle magnetism of the type of rhetoric of "The house church leaders" leads to an effective abandonment of Scriptural authority for church life and practice.

The Apostle Paul's makes several statements in which he clearly appeals to a certain, albeit simple church structure when he writes, "Timothy will **remind** you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I **teach** everywhere in **every church**" I Cor 4:17.

"Be imitators of me just as I am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you" I Cor 11:1-2. "But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God" I Cor 11:16.

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains" Tit 1:5. "I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are" Col 2:5.

Earthly Christians cannot do church by just focusing on a location, i.e. Homes'. If you don't believe that look at the track record of Gene Edwards' home plants. They have been passionately planting and withering up before you can say "Jack Robertson" for the last 30 years. He has been trying and failing in this since before most of you were born. So why keep trying to reinvent the wheel? They have a "form without the force".

Ironically, home church planters are stating and doing exactly what the institutional church believes. Institutional churchmen don't want there to be any biblical accountability for their church practices, so they can go out and do what's right in their own eyes. The only effective difference between them and Home Church Planters is that the institutional church substitutes church traditions for the authority of the Scriptures, whereas the fired up "house churchers" accept the authoritative rhetoric of J Rutz; F Viola; T Fitz; W. Simpson; T & F Dales; House church coach John White and a host of others over and alongside the authority of the Scriptures.

These brethren don't practice what they preach, because they have tried; and tried, and keep trying, but it isn't working. But that doesn't seem to worry them. As long as they can get people to support them and do their bidding they'll keep at it. The only way they are going to "find the truth is to pick up their dusty Bibles and read them. They need the Scriptures just like all the rest of us do.

It's a reality of life but Christians need to face up to the fact just they cannot promote evangelism by focusing on location alone; if you don't believe it then I suggest you look at the track record so far. Jesus and Paul weren't ashamed of the Word of God. Why should we be? **We all need the ministrations of the mobile ministry gifts to the body** operating as Jesus intended. That is an imperative; it's not optional, nor is it up for debate.

We were not commanded to go out and bring people into a building, but into the Kingdom of God. The only way a man can get in is through the Door. Jesus Christ the Way; the Truth; The Light. This is our message is and nothing else. We need to come to the cross and get on it. The open grave comes after Gethsemane and Calvary.

Dear brethren I respectfully suggest that you go into the garden and "have it out" with Him once and for all. Then I suggest you "Go to the cross and get on it". The "open grave comes after the garden and the cross".

These thoughts are not the views of one isolated individual, I know others.