

“Radical Restoration”
Four Part Series by John Gibson
(Preached at the Pepper Road Church in Athens, AL)

Part One

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Introduction:

- 1) In looking for an appropriate passage to introduce and set the tone for my lesson, I came up with two and am not certain which one best fits.
 - a) Consider Luke’s description of the Athenians. **Acts 17:18-21**
 - b) Hear also Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders. **Acts 20:28-31**
- 2) This morning I want to begin a series of lessons reviewing a movement largely inspired by F. LaGard Smith’s *Radical Restoration*.
 - a) As I consider the movement I sometimes see the Athenians and the desire for “something new,” though in reality it is not really new.
 - b) But I also believe it goes much deeper and is far more serious.
- 3) What is *Radical Restoration* all about?
 - a) Though it takes different forms in different locales and no two groups are exactly the same, it is an attempt to radically reshape the nature of local churches and their worship.
 - b) It is radical, but I believe it fails on the Restoration end.
 - c) In this lesson I am going to take a few minutes to try and help everyone understand what we are talking about. I don’t want to bore you with lengthy quotations but I want to provide enough to make it clear that I am not misrepresenting anyone.
 - d) Unless noted, all quotations are from Smith’s book, but I will also reference a sermon preached in Alabama by a preacher who helped form a “house church” that has since disbanded. (Because I believe he has backed away from many of the things he once argued for, I will not identify him by name, but will refer to him as “Bill,” which is not his real name. Yet, though he may have changed some of his views I have retained the references to his sermon because they help illustrate the thinking of many “reformers”).

I. DIFFERENT FORMS, CERTAIN COMMON BELIEFS

1. F. LaGard Smith is a huge factor in the movement, but he is not a dictator whose every whim is followed by those he influences.

2. When I read *Radical Restoration* and then listened to the sermon preached in my county, there was no doubt Bill had been influenced by the book (either directly or indirectly), but he did not simply mimic Smith.

3. You will also find a continual evolving of doctrine and practice going on in these nontraditional groups.
 - a. To be fair, some of the evolving probably should be attributed to ongoing study.
 - b. But when you understand the next point you expect an evolving of doctrine and practice.

II. A HIGHLY SUBJECTIVE MOVEMENT.

1. On p. 22, “Not Rules, but righteousness” and “Not Ritual, but spiritual” are put in quotation marks as the words of Jesus.
 - a. When you speak out against rules and ritual, it is hard to maintain continuity.
2. “Ironically, it is we who continue to worry more about whether we are doctrinally restored than about whether we are spiritually restored?” p. 73
 - a. Who is he talking about? I deny being guilty, but even if I am, it is not a fair indictment of all.
 - b. Minimizing the need for doctrinal restoration will produce groups that never know just where they are headed.
3. On pp. 121, 122 we read of “almost exact parallels between the miraculous gifts and those which are non-miraculous.” Joy, peace, hope, and singing are described as ecstasy, similar to that of miraculous tongues.
 - a. The dictionary defines *ecstasy* as “a state of being beyond reason” or “a state of overwhelming emotion.”
 - b. When you believe worship is Spirit-led and beyond reason or involves overwhelming emotion, you can be sure that things will change often.
 - c. We will have more to say about this later.
4. One realizes that the movement will constantly be in a state of flux when he sees how Smith proposes radical changes, but is unsure of so much.
 - a. As one example, consider the number of speculative, uncertain expressions found on one page.
 - b. “From what we can tell....Apparently....apparent...presumably....I wonder....this might have taken place....But it is also possible....If that were the case....might have been...equally possible....” P. 146
 - c. Such words constitute weak proof of the need for a radical remaking of the church.
5. There are more quotations we could cite, but I hope you get the picture.
 - a. Smith does not ignore Scripture, but his approach to the Bible is often quite subjective.
 - b. Without a concrete, fixed standard you can rest assured that changes will occur often.

III. SOME KEY FEATURES OF THE RADICAL RESTORATION.

A. **Emphasis on Emotions and Feelings of the Participants.**

1. As noted earlier, singing is said to result from a non-miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit that generates a spirit of ecstasy in the worshiper.
2. When Smith urges churches to move from their buildings to small “house-churches,” he contrasts the “warmth of hearth and home” with the “relative coldness of auditoriums in church buildings.”
P. 151

B. **Edification.**

1. Closely related to this is the emphasis placed upon our being built up.
2. The local preacher stressed that edification is the primary purpose for our assembling.
3. No one can argue that our assemblies are intended to edify, but when I listen carefully I hear the needs of the audience being given higher priority than the worship of God.
4. Bill spoke of coming together and being so engulfed in prayer that we never sing a song.

C. **Names.**

1. As noted, there are many differences among the new “restorationists,” but dislike for the name Church of Christ seems to unite them.
2. Smith argues that it has become a denominational name; others say that it is prejudicial in nature and prevents evangelism.
3. I found it interesting that near the end of the book Smith acknowledged that some kind of “name” would be necessary and said...
 - a. “My personal preference would be almost any...other than ‘Church of Christ,’ simply to move us all beyond the current denominational usage of that term.”
 - b. Names he suggested include: “Christ’s church,” “The Lord’s church,” “The Church,” “The church of God,” “The family of God,” “perhaps even ‘The Way.’”
4. Bill in his sermon focused on the name Christian.
 - a. After going through various individual and collective names he speaks of someone asking, “What are you collectively? Christians.”
 - b. The sign at their meeting place read “Christians Meet Here.”

D. **Size.**

1. Smith presses hard for groups small enough to meet in a house (private dwelling).
2. He mentions the number 40-50 often, though he cites a book that advocates the Rule of 150.

3. Different advocates will probably have a different number in mind, but all are promoting the small, intimate “family-like” gatherings.

E. The Lord’s Supper.

1. Great emphasis is given to the Lord’s Supper.
2. LaGard advocates eating the Lord’s Supper (which is to him a full meal) in conjunction with a fellowship meal.
 - a. Uncertain if best to have the memorial portion before, during or after the fellowship meal.
3. Others have adopted the “full meal” concept without the accompanying fellowship meal.
 - a. Bill spoke of the Lord’s Supper as a supper requiring sufficient quantities as would constitute a meal.
 - b. Bill spoke with commendation of a gathering near Nashville, TN where about 40 people sat around a table with baskets of bread and pitchers of grape juice and the Lord’s Supper lasted about 45 minutes.

F. Spontaneity in Worship.

1. Lastly, there is an emphasis upon a more informal, spontaneous, unscripted worship.
2. Smith calls it the “truly, informal spontaneous worship of first-century Christians.” P. 154
3. Bill talks about not knowing how they dressed or how reverent they were.
4. One of the key concepts is the creation of an atmosphere where anyone (at least the men) can jump in and participate (they mean lead) at anytime.

G. Summary.

1. There is more we could say, but these are some of the most crucial ideas.
2. This lesson will only examine a couple of the concepts, but we hope to look at the others later.

IV. THE STANDARD.

1. Please don’t misunderstand and think that LaGard Smith, Bill or anyone else involved in these kinds of activities have cast the Bible aside.
2. But Smith has downplayed “rules,” “ritual” and doctrinal restoration. Smith wants the worship to involve a Spirit-guided ecstasy.
3. We must never forget that there is a concrete standard that makes men complete. **2 Tim. 3:16f**
4. Without God’s rules, how can I know what righteousness is? **Jer. 10:23; Rom. 10:1-4, Mt. 7:21-23**
5. If “ritual” is unimportant to Jesus, why did He say, “Do this?” **1 Cor. 11:24f**
 - a. He could have simply exhorted them to remember Him as they saw fit.

6. NT worship is not based on ecstasy (overwhelming emotion or a state of being beyond reason).
 - a. Take singing as an example. Singing results from being filled with the Spirit, which is parallel to having the word of God in us. **Eph. 5:18f; Col. 3:16**
7. There is no defense for dead worship, but worship must also be guided by truth. **Jn. 4:23f**

V. EDIFICATION.

1. While in full agreement that God wants our assemblies to be edifying, I do have some disagreements with what I have heard.
2. **1 Cor. 14** certainly teaches that our assemblies should be edifying. **14:12, 26**
 - a. Yet when I consider the entire context of **1 Cor. 12-14** I am not certain that Paul is saying it is the primary purpose.
 - b. In **ch. 12** we learn that the Corinthians had a tendency to downplay the importance of some (gifts and persons) and play up the importance of others. **12:12-26, 29—13:3**
 - c. One of the main points of **ch.14** is make certain you use your gift (if you had one) for the good of others and not self-glorification.
 - d. I am not saying edification is unimportant, but is it more important than worship of God? Can we decide that our “needs” can replace God’s direction for worship?
 - 1) If we don’t need to sing today because we need to pray, can we decide the same thing next week? The week following?
 - e. Consider the following.
3. How do we stir up and exhort one another? **Heb. 10:24f**
 - a. It may involve some direct words of exhortation, but does it not include drawing near to God? **Heb. 10:19-25**
 - b. In **Col. 3:16** worship of God is said to benefit others. Cf. **Eph. 5:19**.
4. We need to edify and be edified, and the best way to do that is to offer God the worship He desires. **Psa. 95:1-7a; 100:1-5**

Conclusion:

- 1) While we have only begun to scratch the surface today, we have looked at two foundational points.
- 2) God has revealed Himself by means of a concrete standard.
- 3) That which we feel to be our need for edification can never replace the worship God has commanded. That worship will edify us.
- 4) As we close, let’s turn to God’s word regarding our salvation.

“Radical Restoration”

Part Two

Introduction:

- 1) **1 John 4:1** In keeping with those instructions we want to continue our look at a movement affecting churches in various areas.
- 2) While the movement takes different forms in different locales and no two groups are exactly the same, LaGard Smith’s *Radical Restoration* is a key influence.
 - a) In our lessons we are focusing on the materials found in his book.
 - b) We are also incorporating some statements made here in Alabama by a preacher who, with a few other families, has formed a new church.
- 3) As I noted there are differences among the groups and they all are evolving, but there are some common characteristics and I want to quickly review these.
 - a) There is a great emphasis on *emotions* and the *feelings* of the participants.
 - b) *Edification*, not worship, is stressed as the primary reason for our being together.
 1. Acts of worship may be cut if the people’s needs are better met by doing something else.
 - c) The name or term *church of Christ* is usually *disdained*.
 - d) Most want to *limit the size* of local churches to a group small enough to meet in a home (even if that is not where they meet).
 - e) The *Lord’s Supper* is a focus of the edification gathering and is usually meal-sized.
 - f) *Worship* is relatively *informal, spontaneous, and participatory* (many taking leading or speaking roles).
- 4) Last week we sought to emphasize two points.
 - a) God has an absolute standard by which all must be measured. **2 Tim. 3:16f; Jn. 4:23f**
 - b) Edification is important, but not to the neglect of worship, which is itself edifying. **Col. 3:16**
- 5) In this lesson I want us to look at some fundamental weaknesses in Smith’s approach and offer some warnings.

I. RESTORATIONISTS.

A. The “Restorationist” Charge.

1. Smith writes of “the historical priority we have given to doing doctrinal battle, as compared with the lesser attention typically given to personal spiritual discipline and development.” P. 35

2. He says older members of the Lord's church "have viewed ourselves as Restorationists almost as much as Christians." P. 35
 - a. Having made that assertion, Smith characterizes *Restorationists* as reformers, crusaders, and warriors, while *Christians* seek sanctification, purity, and spiritual growth.
3. Bill said, "I no more want to be affiliated with the Restoration Movement than I want to be affiliated with denominationalism."

B. My Response.

1. It can't be denied that some brethren, especially preachers, have been guilty of an unbalanced approach and emphasis, but is that true of all or even most?
 - a. Looking back at lessons preached here I see doctrinal lessons, family lessons, devotional material, sermons on putting away evil and putting on righteousness, sermons on Jesus, etc.
 - b. Though imperfect in our points of emphasis, most preachers seek to promote both doctrinal purity and spiritual growth.
2. What was/is the Restoration Movement?
 - a. Historically speaking it was a 19th century movement that sought to call men back to the Bible and end denominational distinctions.
 - b. I am grateful for the work of those associated with the Restoration Movement, but do not, and don't know anyone who does, view that movement or its leaders as my standard.
 - c. When have you heard me quote Campbell, Stone, Lipscomb, etc. as my authority?
3. Consider the contrast Smith made between Christians and Restorationists.
 - a. How would you characterize Paul? In **Acts 15:1f** he is a warrior, but in **Gal. 5:14f, 19-26** we see him concerned about spiritual growth.
 - b. The fact is that while we may not like it (and shouldn't), there is a battle that must be fought by Christians. **1 Tim. 6:11f; 2 Tim. 4:7; Jude 3f; Eph. 6**
 - c. The true follower of Jesus is concerned both with cleansing the temple (restoration if you will) and developing poverty of spirit, meekness, etc.

C. Ad Hominem Arguments.

1. Smith criticizes Martin Luther and Alexander Campbell for breeding an atmosphere where preachers resort to "ad hominem arguments...employ deceptive sophistry...misquote and misconstrue the words of his opponents...." Pp. 56, 57

2. While there is inconsistency in condemning ad hominen arguments and then accusing your opponents of “slander, innuendo, and dishonest debate (p. 58),” I am not as concerned about Smith’s inconsistency as I am in warning about being deceived by his kind of reasoning and labeling.
3. Oppose Smith and other “nontraditionalists” and you may be labeled as being among the “most strident defenders of our denominational status quo” (p. 58) or perhaps more concerned about being affiliated with the Restoration Movement than being a Christian.
4. Don’t allow this type of prejudicial statement to put you on the defensive. If you are not a defender of denominationalism or a Restoration advocate, but simply a disciple of Jesus seeking to know the truth (**Jn. 8:32**), don’t be intimidated.
 - a. One might do things the “traditional way,” not because he is defending a “denominational status quo,” but because the traditional way is the right way.
5. And let me add that Smith is right in criticizing the tactics some (and he himself at times) employ.
2 Tim. 2:23-26
 - a. I am concerned that error is being taught, but it is imperative that we not lose our souls by resorting to evil tactics.

II. A FOCUS ON EXTERNALS.

1. Smith writes that we must not be “quick-fix artists who deal only with the symptoms of our malaise, not the root causes.” P. 39
 - a. Truly it is the heart that must be reformed. **Mt. 15:18f**
2. On pp. 106-108 we are reminded of the place the Second Coming had in the minds of 1st century Christians and challenged to “plunge ourselves with abandon into truly being his people!”
 - a. **2 Pet. 3:10-12** is one Scripture featured prominently.
3. These two ideas reflect a lot of what is wrong with *Radical Restoration*.
 - a. Many of his aims are noble and I am in full agreement with these two points, but Smith turns around and provides a lot of externals for problems that are internal (if and when they do exist).
 - b. If we follow his suggestions we will remember the Lord with bigger portions of bread and juice; sit in a circle (or around the living room); won’t put a song leader up in front; not bore everyone with a lecture, but have everyone participate; et al.
 - c. Are those really the answers? Can we not sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord with or without a leader? Does remembering the Lord’s death require a circle, square, rectangle, etc. Is our remembrance of Him dependent upon the size of the piece of bread?

- d. On Pentecost 3,000 were baptized, not because of a “homey” atmosphere or everyone sharing his or her ideas, but because the man with the knowledge preached the gospel. **Rom. 1:16**
- 4. On pp. 160, 161 Smith writes as if “house churches” would solve gender issues regarding women wanting to “wait on the Lord’s table” and/or lead singing.
 - a. We are living in the midst of a cultural war over gender roles and we think setting the bread on the table for all to grab will end the disputes?
 - b. Those who think the “warmth of hearth and home” for worship will solve our questions about women’s roles should look at the homes from which the worshipers come. Would we not admit that biblical gender roles are often confused or ignored in the homes?
- 5. I would suggest that even when Smith has correctly identified a problem (and who among us has not found ourselves in a spiritual rut sometime?), his *solutions* do not really provide any answers.
 - a. We do not need more external manipulation; instead, we need more internal reflection.
 - b. Consider what God has done for us and then obey from the heart. **1 Th. 5:16-18**
 - c. When I with my rational mind appreciate what it means to be in the Lord I will rejoice regardless of how the seats are arranged or the songs started, etc. **Phil. 3:1; 4:4-7**

Conclusion:

- 1) Don’t allow talk about Restorationists and defenders of the status quo to put you on the defensive. Just keep taking the Scriptures as your guide and follow them to the best of your ability.
- 2) Remember that when our lives (including worship) are not what they ought to be, the answer does not lie in some artificial manipulation of the externals around us, but in a transforming of the mind.

Rom. 12:1f

“Radical Restoration” Part Three

Introduction:

- 1) For the past couple of weeks we have been looking at some of the ideas promoted by F. LaGard Smith in *Radical Restoration*.
- 2) Previously, I have focused more on underlying principles, but want to talk today about some of the more obvious, noticeable changes Smith proposes. (Some of which have been adopted in various places).
- 3) This morning we are going to talk about worship and the radical remake and redirection some would give it, including a look at the Lord’s Supper.

I. THE NEW WORSHIP.

A. A Shift in Focus.

1. As discussed previously, church assemblies have been shifted from God-centered to man-centered.
2. It is repeatedly said that edification is to be our primary purpose for assembling.
3. We won’t say much about this today, but I would encourage you to review the first sermon in this series and/or talk with me afterwards.

B. Informal, Spontaneous, and Participatory.

1. On p. 154 we read about the “truly, informal spontaneous worship of first-century Christians.” (On pp. 151-154 forms of informal and spontaneous are used 12 times).
2. P. 152 describes assemblies today as “spectator-oriented” and describes the “gathered assemblies of the primitive church” as “far more participatory.”
 - a. Smith emphasizes the word *everyone* in **1 Cor. 14:26**. (He uses the NIV; the NKJV has *each of you*).
 - b. Bill described the assembly at Corinth as “a multitude of people engaged in delivering God’s word.”
 - 1) Multitude is a big word for a movement that stresses the need to keep your assemblies small and intimate.
3. As we noted in our first lesson, Smith calls singing a result of a non-miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit and also the result of ecstasy.
 - a. Since ecstasy is defined as “a state of being beyond reason” or “a state of overwhelming emotion,” you can be assured that worship would be spontaneous.

C. Biblical Worship.

1. In previous lessons we have talked about the stress on edification. Remember this—edification and worship are actually inseparable. **Heb. 10:19-25**
2. Was NT worship informal and spontaneous?
 - a. May be an accurate assessment of what went on at Corinth, but Paul intended to change that.
 - b. Spontaneity suggests acting on impulse and without external constraint, but Paul commanded that all be done “decently and in order.” **1 Cor. 14:33, 40**
 - 1) Decently denotes “gracefully, becomingly, in a seemly manner.” Vine
 - 2) Order is “an arranging, arrangement, order.” Vine
 - 3) Do we not see the danger in *acting on impulse*? So much of Scripture condemns the actions of impulsive, without external constraint worship. E.g. Nadab and Abihu. **Lev. 9:22—10:3**
 - 4) Worship is not the result of overwhelming emotion, for though it should be an emotional time, it is to be directed by God’s word. **Col. 3:16**
3. Does **1 Cor. 14** teach that everyone was a “participant?”
 - a. Not if one defines *participant* as, “speak to the entire assembly.” **1 Cor. 14:34f**
 - b. The point of **1 Cor. 14:26** is that their practice was not edifying and the number of speakers needed to be limited. **14:27-29**
 - c. Smith has created his own definition of participant, spectator, etc., but nowhere in Scripture do we find a hint that singing with others (even if someone else started the song); quietly reflecting on the Lord’s death; studying God’s word by listening to a teacher; listening so as to be able to say amen to a prayer; et al is being a passive spectator.
 - d. One may choose to be a spectator in our assemblies, but that is not because of the nature or structure of them. That would be a choice the person has made.

II. THE LORD’S SUPPER.

A. Ideas Being Promoted.

1. Two ideas must be considered.
2. LaGard Smith argues the Lord’s Supper was instituted in the context of a shared meal (p. 129) and should be eaten in conjunction with a fellowship meal (pp. 129ff).
 - a. Contends that **1 Cor. 11** only condemns the abuse of the fellowship meal and the ones told to “eat at home” were the ones making pigs of themselves.
 - b. Wants the Lord’s Supper to be the centerpiece of the restored love feasts of **Jude 12**.

3. Others have not adopted (at least not yet) the fellowship meal concept, but have bought into the idea that the Lord's Supper must be "an actual food-and-drink meal" and not a "token ritual" with our "typical 21st-century crackers and grape juice." P. 132
 - a. Bill said it should be a supper with sufficient quantity and praised a gathering in TN where baskets of bread and pitchers of juice were on the tables in front of everyone and the Lord's Supper lasted 45 minutes.

B. The Fellowship Meal.

1. Look carefully at **1 Cor. 11**. In this chapter Paul does three things.
 - a. He condemns the divisive spirit found there. **11:17-22**
 - b. He reminds them of the proper way to remember Christ. **11:23-31**
 - c. He tells them to eat their hunger-satisfying meals at home. **11:33f**
2. Though Smith insists that the Lord's Supper is to be eaten in conjunction with another full-fledged meal we only read of the bread and the cup. **1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-26**
 - a. Where are the instructions regarding the meat, nuts, fish, eggs, cheeses, etc.?
3. What were the love feasts of **Jude 12**?
 - a. Smith interprets them in light of later extra-biblical readings and believes them to have been common meals eaten in connection with the Lord's Supper.
 - 1) A. T. Robertson's *Word Pictures of the New Testament* is cited, but Robertson, while a great linguist, was not an inspired historian.
 - 2) I also found it interesting that Smith cites Robertson, a Baptist, as a definitive authority on love feasts, but when arguing that the Lord's Supper was not instituted at the actual Passover supper never mentions Robertson's excellent refutation of that idea.
 - b. If that were the case Paul's rebuke in **1 Cor. 11** seems to have gone in the wrong direction. Instead of merely correcting the "abuses," Paul exhorted them to eat at home. **1 Cor. 11:22, 34**
 - c. The love feasts of **Jude 12** (the Greek is simply the plural of *agape*) may have been the kind of meals we find in **Acts 2:46** and **1 Cor. 5:11** (eaten from house to house) or possibly even the Lord's Supper itself. A third scriptural possibility is it that it referred to the spiritual feast of the worship assemblies. Cf. **Jn. 6**.

C. The Memorial as a Meal.

1. To stress the word supper as requiring a meal misses the point of what the Lord's Supper is all about.
2. Physical hunger was to be satisfied at home. **1 Cor. 11:22, 34**

3. The Lord's Supper was about the remembrance of Christ. **1 Cor. 11:24-29**
4. How much bread and juice does it take to remember the Lord? How big was the loaf from which Jesus had to break off eleven pieces? (If in fact He used just one loaf).
 - a. I have no objection to larger pieces of bread and larger cups, but those are external incidentals.
 - b. Don't divide brethren over something that should be a non-issue.
 - c. Instead of fighting over the size of the loaf (when God has not spoken on the subject), give yourself to a self-examination. **1 Cor. 11:28**

Conclusion:

- 1) Whether consciously or unconsciously, worship has shifted from God-centered to man-centered.
- 2) As we close I want to remind of us three basic principles.
 - a) God seeks those who will worship in spirit and truth. **John 4:23f**
 - b) Our worship must be orderly. **1 Cor. 14:33, 40**
 - c) The Lord must be approached with the utmost reverence. **Heb. 12:28f**
- 3) May these principles always guide us and keep us from centering things on ourselves.

“Radical Restoration”

Part Four

Introduction:

- 1) This lesson will conclude our look at the concepts promoted by F. LaGard Smith in *Radical Restoration* and adopted and adapted by different groups in different places.
- 2) In this lesson we will focus on his concept of “house churches” and also have a little to say about elders and the name by which a group is called.

I. HOUSE CHURCHES.

A. The Radical Restoration Concept.

1. Smith sees NT Christians meeting in small groups he frequently calls “house churches.” Pp. 145-151
2. One of the proofs he cites is **Rom. 16:3-5** and says, “It is worth noting from this special greeting that not all the Christians in Rome worshiped together.” P. 147
 - a. In a city with a population estimated to have exceeded 1,000,000 people, we would expect them to have to meet in various places around the metro area.
3. Though he cites various references to Christians in houses, he admits that it is not “whether we meet in an actual house as opposed to a church building. Rather, it’s the contrast between *small* versus *large*; *participant* versus *spectator*; *active* versus *passive*; *personal* versus *impersonal*. It’s simply axiomatic: The larger the gathering, the less personal, interactive, and truly participatory it’s likely to be.” P. 153
4. Though he does not come right out and give it his fullest endorsement, on pp. 171-173 Smith suggests that the elders of a city would share the oversight of all the house churches in that area.
 - a. The house churches are thus a subset of the metro church.
 - b. This is a concept that has been utilized by various denominational groups and is a key feature of the International Church of Christ (Boston/Discipling Movement).

B. Where Did NT Churches Meet and How Large Were They?

1. Some evidently met in private homes. **Rom. 16:3-5**

2. But the temple was also used in the earliest days of the church. **Acts 2:46; 5:12**
 - a. This was a group that started out with 3,000 and grew rapidly. **Acts 2:41; 4:4**
 - 1) Smith finds “newly-established house churches” (p. 148) in **Acts 12:5, 12**, but this is 10 to 15 years after the establishment of the church and long after the numbers given preceding the scattering of **Acts 8**.
 - 2) We should also note that the group meeting for prayer at Mary’s house is never described as a house church—it was simply “many” from the church.
 - b. We don’t know how long they met in the temple, but in **Acts 15** the whole church is described by the term multitude and was able to meet in one place for this discussion. **15:4, 12, 22**
3. Paul made use of the school of Tyrannus. **Acts 19:8-10**
 - a. Later, Paul urges the elders from Ephesus to care for the flock and church and continually uses the singular. **Acts 20:17, 28f**
 - b. In a city the size of Ephesus there may have been some other small groups, but the bulk of the disciples constituted one flock that the elders were among.
 - c. And remember that Paul’s work at Ephesus had been successful enough to make the silversmith’s feel threatened. **Acts 19**
4. The third story at Troas may have been in a private dwelling, but was large enough to hold a crowd.
 - a. There were at least 8 others traveling with Paul. **Acts 20:4-6**
 - b. The room needed many lamps to light it. **Acts 20:8**
5. Consider the church at Corinth.
 - a. While I don’t know where they met, it was a place large enough to hold a group that was in danger of dividing into four factions. **1 Cor. 1:11-13**
 - b. In **ch. 12** and **14** we read that several were able to prophesy, speak in tongues, interpret, etc. The assemblies described in 1 Corinthians seem to be fairly large groups.
 - c. In **ch. 11** Paul condemned their corruption of the Lord’s Supper and reminded them that they had houses to eat and drink in and contrasted that with coming together as a church. “Eat at home” in **11:34** is contrasted with the place of assembly.
6. Summary: NT churches weren’t always small, intimate groups and didn’t always meet in private homes.

II. ELDERS.

A. Concepts Promoted.

1. Smith criticizes churches for choosing men more for their worldly success than their spiritual maturity. He characterizes most elders as a “corporate board of directors” and not shepherds. Pp. 181, 182
2. Then in what I consider an odd twist for one who promotes smallness, on pp. 171-173, Smith suggests that the elders of a city would share the oversight of all the house churches in that area.

B. A Practical Observation.

1. When we limit groups to no more than 40-50 people, how often are we going to have elders that meet the qualifications of **1 Tim. 3** and **Titus 1**?
2. That is probably one reason Smith suggests that citywide are scriptural, but not everyone is going to go along with that notion.
3. If most Christians adopt the small, “house church” model few churches will be overseen by elders.

C. Scriptural Observations.

1. If brethren select elders because of worldly success they are wrong and I don’t doubt that it is done sometimes, but is it the rule or the exception?
 - a. We must take the Scriptures as our guide. **Titus 1:5-7**
2. Elders are indeed to function as shepherds and not as a corporate board of directors (**Acts 20:28**), but...
 - a. Shepherd is just one of the pictures given us of these men.
 - b. They are also overseers. Their rule is limited, but they do oversee. **1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17**
3. The notion of citywide elders overseeing various house-churches is both a contradiction of what Smith has previously said and without Scriptural basis.
 - a. He rightfully stresses elders being shepherds and then one wants to have them oversee and be an example to people they do not worship with.
 - b. Scriptural elders oversee the flock among them. **Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2f**
 - c. No NT church is ever said to be made up of several smaller churches or one flock composed of several smaller flocks.

III. THE NAME.

A. Not a “Church of Christ.”

1. There are many differences among the new “restorationists,” but dislike for the name Church of Christ seems to unite them.
2. Smith argues that it has become a denominational name; others say that it is prejudicial in nature and prevents evangelism.
3. I found it interesting that near the end of the book Smith acknowledged that some kind of “name” would be necessary and said...
 - a. “My personal preference would be almost any...other than ‘Church of Christ,’ simply to move us all beyond the current denominational usage of that term.”
 - b. Names he suggested include: “Christ’s church,” “The Lord’s church,” “The Church,” “The church of God,” “The family of God,” “perhaps even ‘The Way.’”
4. Bill in his sermon focused on the name Christian.
 - a. After going through various individual and collective names he speaks of someone asking, “What are you collectively? Christians.”
 - b. The sign at their meeting place reads “Christians Meet Here.”

B. What Shall We Be?

1. When Smith protests making Church of Christ the exclusive name, he does no more than many have been doing for years.
 - a. A few weeks I ago I spoke of church of God as a term we should be comfortable with. **1 Cor. 1:2**
 - b. Before coming here, when I was doing the *Beulah Bulletin* I used the following descriptions in the heading with verses following...
 - 1) Beulah church of Christ.
 - 2) Beulah: a church of Christ
 - 3) Beulah: a church of God
 - 4) Published by the Christians meeting at...
2. Church of Christ is not an exclusive NT title, but it is scriptural. **Rom. 16:16**
3. It certainly does not convey more of a denominational usage than Church of God or The Way.
4. To simply say that Christians meet here would not eliminate confusion; to many that would suggest an interdenominational group.

5. I am in full agreement with those who say that we should not make church of Christ the one exclusive name by which we are known, but I know no other scriptural designation that is less confusing to both Christians and nonchristians alike.

Conclusion:

- 1) We have looked at three things this evening and I am convinced that Smith is absolutely wrong on point #1. NT churches, in a time of persecution, were often small, but not always. They were sometimes quite large and met in a variety of places.
- 2) When he talks of citywide elders over a multiplicity of house-churches he is in contradiction to the biblical pattern.
- 3) When it comes to the name by which a group of God's people is to be called, I must say that I would not fall out with someone who chooses to be known as a church of God or simply a group of Christians (though I see many practical problems with those as a public label). However, I do have objections when people condemn as denominational those of us who use a biblical name in a biblical way.
- 4) How can I wrap up this series of lessons? **Acts 20:28-32**
- 5) God and the word of His grace have the answers.