The First Century Church: Is That What We Have Today?

Christ the Head of His Body — What God Wanted, What It Became, and What He Gives Us in Grace

A study of the church as scripture gave it, what history made of it, where it stands today, and the pattern God gives His household in grace.

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Anchor Passage

> **Ephesians 2:19** *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;*
>
> **Ephesians 2:20** *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;*
>
> **Ephesians 2:21** *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*
>
> **Ephesians 2:22** *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*
>
> **Acts 5:42** *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*
>
> **Acts 20:20** *And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,*

Introduction

A. Written in Love

This study is written to believers, and most of the believers who will read it sit, faithfully, in the kind of churches it describes. It is not written against them. It is not written against their pastors, many of whom serve with little pay, no insurance, and long hours, for people they love. It is written the way a brother writes to brothers: **"speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15)**, and **"in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" (2 Timothy 2:25)**.

What it asks is simple. Put three pictures side by side. The first is the church as scripture shows it in the first century: a household of people, meeting in homes, led by servants, reaching outward one person at a time, giving to the needs of real people. The second is the record of history: how that household was gradually turned into something else. The third is the church as it stands today: its buildings, its budgets, its programs, and what it offers people as the reason to come. Then ask, gently and honestly, whether the third picture looks like the first — and if it does not, what God has given His people instead.

Where a fact is hard, this study states it plainly once and moves on. It has no interest in scorn. Christ loves His church, **"and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25)**. Anyone who speaks about the church must speak about it as His.

Weighing it: Narrative — sets the tone; carries no weight on any contested claim.

B. The Question

Christ is the head of the church. Scripture says so in plain words:

> **Ephesians 1:22** *And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,*
>
> **Ephesians 1:23** *Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*
>
> **Colossians 1:18** *And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*

If He is the head, then the question that matters is not what works, or what grows, or what people prefer. It is what the head intended for His body. This study asks that question in three parts. What did God give His church in the first century? What did men make of it over the centuries that followed? And what does scripture actually prescribe for God's people now, in this administration of grace?

Weighing it: Method, not argument — states the question.

C. Method

This study follows the same method as every other study in this library. The King James Version is the base text. Scripture interprets scripture. Context comes first: who is speaking, to whom, and under which administration. The other side's case is stated at its full strength before anything is tested (§E). Every section ends with a short note weighing its argument (§G).

Two kinds of evidence outside scripture are used, and both are held at a lower weight. The first is history: the writings of the early church, the councils, and the record of what churches did with power once they had it. The second is present-day fact: surveys of church finances and beliefs, a reading of church websites, and a measured sample of sermons. Neither kind is scripture, and neither is used to establish doctrine. They are used for one purpose: to show what grew up beside scripture, so that it can be told apart from scripture. History cannot tell us what God wants. It can show us what men did instead.

Two rules govern how present-day churches appear here. No church is named for what its website or its sermons contain; what is described is a pattern, with phrases quoted so that the reader can recognise it. Named ministries appear only as the public record names them, and only for what that record says.

Weighing it: Method, not argument — history and statistics are corroboration only throughout.

D. The Words: Ekklesia, Church, House and Temple

Four words carry this whole study, and a reader who has them clearly in mind will find everything that follows much plainer. Some of what is said here is said again in later chapters; it is set out here first so that the reader has it from the start. This library's study *In Vain Do They Worship Me* (Chapter 5 §B) traces the first of these words more fully.

Ekklesia — an assembly of people. The Greek word the New Testament translates "church" is *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία). It is built from *ek*, "out of," and a form of *kaleo*, "to call," and it is often explained as "the called-out ones." That picture is true to the gospel, but the word itself, in ordinary first-century speech, simply meant an assembly: people called together from their homes and their work to meet. The clearest proof is in Acts 19, where Luke uses *ekklesia* three times for a crowd of idol-worshippers in the theatre at Ephesus, and the King James translators rightly render it "assembly":

> **Acts 19:32** *Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.*
>
> **Acts 19:39** *But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.*
>
> **Acts 19:41** *And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.*

A confused crowd, a lawful civic meeting, a gathering dismissed by the town clerk — all of them *ekklesia*. The word names people gathered, never a place. Stephen uses the same word for Israel gathered at Mount Sinai, centuries before there was a temple or a synagogue:

> **Acts 7:38** *This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:*

"The church in the wilderness" was a nation camped in tents around God's presence. Hebrews uses the word in the same way when it quotes Psalm 22, where the Hebrew had "congregation":

> **Psalms 22:22** *I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*
>
> **Hebrews 2:12** *Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*

So when Paul writes **"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Corinthians 1:2)**, he defines the church in the same breath: it is "them that are sanctified," the people. When Jesus says **"tell it unto the church" (Matthew 18:17)**, He means tell it to the gathered believers, not to a building. And when Paul speaks of **"the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:5)**, the words themselves settle the matter: if the church can be *in* a house, the church is not the house.

"Church" — an English word with a different history. The English word "church" does not come from *ekklesia* at all. It comes, by way of the old Germanic languages, from the Greek *kyriakon*, "belonging to the Lord," a word that came to be used of the Lord's house, the building. That is why "church" in English so easily means a building: "going to church," "the church on the corner." The New Testament's own word never meant that. Remarkably, the Greek adjective *kyriakos*, "the Lord's," appears only twice in the whole New Testament, and neither time is it a building — once for **"the Lord's supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20)** and once for **"the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10)**. Whenever this study says "church," it means what scripture means: the people, the assembly, the *ekklesia*.

House — a dwelling, and the people in it. The New Testament word for house, *oikos* (οἶκος), means both the building a family lives in and the household that lives there — the family, the servants, all

under one roof. Scripture uses it both ways, often in the same breath. When Paul told the jailer at Philippi, **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31)**, he did not mean the walls would be saved; he meant the people. An elder must be one who rules his own household well, because the church is a household too:

> **1 Timothy 3:4** *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;*
>
> **1 Timothy 3:5** *(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*

That is why scripture can call the church **"the house of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15)**, and why Hebrews can say of Christ, **"whose house are we" (Hebrews 3:6)**. The early believers met "from house to house" (Acts 2:46) — in the homes of families — and they themselves were God's house, His household. Both meanings of the word are at work in this study, and both point the same way: to people living together under one Head.

Temple — the courts, the sanctuary, and the people. Two Greek words are translated "temple," and the difference between them matters here. *Hieron* (ιερόν) is the whole temple complex at Jerusalem — its courts, porches and open spaces where crowds could gather. When Acts says the believers were **"daily with one accord in the temple" (Acts 2:46)**, or that the apostles taught **"daily in the temple, and in every house" (Acts 5:42)**, the word is *hieron*: the public courts, where the people of Israel could be found and the gospel preached to them (Chapter 3). *Naos* (ναός) is the sanctuary itself, the holy dwelling-place of God. And it is *naos*, the holy dwelling, that the New Testament gives to believers:

> **1 Corinthians 3:16** *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*
>
> **2 Corinthians 6:16** *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
>
> **Ephesians 2:21** *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*
>
> **Ephesians 2:22** *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

Paul never calls believers the *hieron*, the courts where crowds gathered. He calls them the *naos*, the place where God Himself dwells. And when Stephen and Paul say that God **"dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48)**, the word they use is the same *naos* — the sanctuary made with hands gives way to the sanctuary made of people.

Putting the four words together. The *ekklesia* is the people of God gathered. They gathered in houses, and they are themselves God's household. They went to the temple courts to reach others, but they are themselves God's temple, His dwelling-place. Not one of these four words, as scripture uses it of believers, names a building. The whole of this study turns on that one shift: from a house made with hands, to a household made of people.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim H, scripture's own words for the church, God's house and God's temple, used of believers, name people and never a building. The other side can fairly answer

that "church" in common English now means the building as well, and that language changes. It does; this study simply keeps to the meaning scripture's own words carry, and asks the reader to read "church" in scripture that way.

E. The Other Side's Case, Stated at Full Strength

Before any of this study's argument is made, the case for the church as it is organised today deserves to be heard in its own best words. Many wise and godly people hold it.

1. **A building is a tool, not a doctrine.** The early church used whatever space it had. Paul hired a hall (Acts 19:9) and a house (Acts 28:30). Persecution and poverty, not principle, kept believers in homes; when they were free to build, they built. A roof and a heating bill are not sin.

2. **God Himself commanded a house.** The tabernacle and Solomon's temple were costly and beautiful, and God filled them with His glory (Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11). Beauty and size can honour God.

3. **Size is not sin.** Three thousand were added in a single day (Acts 2:41), and soon five thousand men (Acts 4:4). Large churches reach many who would never walk into a stranger's living room.

4. **Paying those who minister is scriptural.** "The labourer is worthy of his reward" (1 Timothy 5:18). A full-time staff is that verse applied.

5. **Organisation serves ministry.** The apostles appointed seven men to administer relief (Acts 6:1-6). Churches today run food pantries, counselling, schools and missions that a few families in a living room could never fund.

6. **Music and warmth are not manipulation.** The Psalms are full of music, and believers are told to **"receive ye one another, as Christ also received us" (Romans 15:7)**. A warm welcome is obedience, not a sales technique.

7. **The scandals are a minority.** A handful of broadcast ministries does not describe the ordinary congregation, whose pastor is usually underpaid and overworked.

8. **House churches carry their own dangers.** Isolation, error left unchecked, and a strong personality ruling the room — Diotrephes, who "loveth to have the preeminence," appears in an age of house churches (3 John 9).

Each of these is answered in its place, and where one of them is right, this study says so.

Weighing it: Opposing case, stated — weighs against this study throughout; answered in Chapters 2-6, 10-12 and 17.

F. What This Study Claims

The study argues seven claims. They are named here once, so that every weighing note can say which one it bears on.

	The claim	Argued in
H	The church's own gatherings in the New Testament were in homes; no building was owned or built for the assembly	Chs. 1-2
O	The temple courts, synagogues and public halls served outreach, not the assembly's own worship, and that outreach gave way to person-to-person witness	Chs. 3-4
L	Each assembly was served by its own local elders and visited by travelling workers who established and moved on; Christ alone was head	Ch. 5
S	The assemblies were self-sustaining: they carried no property, and their giving went to people	Ch. 6
D	The adversary works through men within the church to draw disciples after themselves and to rule over them; the move from home to institution was one of the chief ways this happened	Chs. 7-10
T	Much of today's church economy and presentation departs from the New Testament pattern, and leaves many believers untaught	Chs. 11-13
G	Scripture gives a pattern for the household of God in this administration that believers can live today	Chs. 14-16

Weighing it: Method, not argument — names what is being tested.

G. How to Read This Study's Weighing Notes

Every section ends with a short note in bold, headed **Weighing it**. It says two things: how strong the section's argument is, and which way it points, on which claim.

The strength is given on a five-step scale used across this library. **Direct statement** means scripture says it in so many words. **Strong inference** means it follows closely from what scripture says, and the alternative has to strain against the text. **Reasonable inference** means it is the more natural reading, but an honest reader can take it otherwise. **Corroboration only** means it fits this study's position but would fit the opposite nearly as well, or comes from outside scripture — it may be stated, not leaned on. **Neutral** means it is commonly cited but settles nothing. Sections that tell a story, state the other side, or

describe method say so instead. Every history and statistics section in Parts Two and Three is corroboration only, by its nature.

Each chapter closes with "In Short." Appendix B gathers every argument in one table.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

Chapter 1 — From a House Made with Hands to a Household of People

Before there was a church, there was a house of God made with hands. To understand what God gave His people at Pentecost, it helps to see first what He gave them before it, and what He said about it even then.

A. The Tabernacle and the Temple

Under the Law, God gave Israel a dwelling place — first the tabernacle, then Solomon's temple — and He filled it with His glory. The other side of this study is right to point to it (Introduction §E, point 2). It was costly, it was beautiful, and it was commanded:

> **Exodus 25:8** *And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.*
>
> **1 Kings 8:10** *And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD,*
>
> **1 Kings 8:11** *So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.*

But on the very day the temple was dedicated, the king who built it said plainly that no building could contain the God it was built for:

> **1 Kings 8:27** *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?*

The temple was real, and holy, and God's own command. It was also, from its first day, a provision for one people under one administration — the Mosaic Law — with its priests, its sacrifices and its tithes (this library's *The Tithe and the Church*, Chapter 3). Solomon himself knew it was a meeting place, not a container.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim H, the temple was God's command for the Law's administration, and Solomon said it could not contain Him. The other side can fairly answer that God's commanding a costly house shows He is not against buildings. Agreed; the question is not whether God ever commanded a building, but whether He commands one for the church.

B. Jesus Foretells the Change

During His ministry, while the temple still stood, Jesus told a Samaritan woman that the place of worship was about to stop mattering:

> **John 4:21** *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*
>
> **John 4:23** *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*

> **John 4:24** *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

And He told His disciples, looking at the temple buildings themselves, that they would be thrown down:

> **Matthew 24:1** *And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.*
>
> **Matthew 24:2** *And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

"Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem." Worship "in spirit and in truth." The hour was coming when the question "where do we worship?" would no longer be answered with a place.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim H, Jesus said worship would no longer be tied to a place. The other side can fairly answer that John 4 concerns the Samaritan-Jewish dispute over holy mountains, not church buildings. True of its setting; but the principle Jesus states — the Father seeks worshippers in spirit and in truth, not at a place — is general.

C. "Not in Temples Made with Hands"

After Pentecost, two speeches in Acts say the same thing outright. Stephen, before the council at Jerusalem:

> **Acts 7:47** *But Solomon built him an house.*
>
> **Acts 7:48** *Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,*
>
> **Acts 7:49** *Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?*
>
> **Acts 7:50** *Hath not my hand made all these things?*

And Paul, before the philosophers at Athens, surrounded by some of the most beautiful temples of the ancient world:

> **Acts 17:24** *God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;*
>
> **Acts 17:25** *Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;*

"Dwelleth not in temples made with hands." "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing." The God who made the world does not need a building, and is not served by one.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim H. The other side can fairly answer that these verses deny that God is confined to a building, not that believers may meet in one. Agreed — and this study does not claim a building is sin. It claims that scripture never makes one the church's dwelling or its need.

D. God's House Is Now His People

Then the New Testament does something remarkable. It takes the words "temple," "house" and "habitation" and gives them to people:

> **1 Corinthians 3:16** *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*
>
> **1 Corinthians 3:17** *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 6:19** *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*
>
> **1 Corinthians 6:20** *For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*
>
> **Ephesians 2:19** *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;*
>
> **Ephesians 2:20** *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;*
>
> **Ephesians 2:21** *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*
>
> **Ephesians 2:22** *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*
>
> **1 Timothy 3:15** *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*
>
> **Hebrews 3:6** *But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.*
>
> **1 Peter 2:5** *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

The house of God is "the church of the living God." The temple is "ye." The building is "living stones." The habitation is "you… builded together… through the Spirit." Every word that once named the building at Jerusalem now names a people — "whose house are we."

This became possible because of what Christ finished. He died for sin, was raised, and ascended to the right hand of God, and from there **"he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33)**. The gift of holy spirit, poured out at Pentecost, made each believer a dwelling place of God and all believers together one household. A building was no longer needed for God to dwell among His people, because He dwells in them.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim H, scripture calls the believers themselves the temple, the house and the habitation of God. The other side can fairly answer that these are metaphors, and that a metaphor about people does not forbid a building for those people. Agreed; the point is not that a building is forbidden but that nothing is left for a building to be. Scripture's own house of God is the people.

E. Christ the Head of His Body

The household has a head, and only one:

> **Ephesians 4:15** *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*
>
> **Ephesians 4:16** *From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*
>
> **Colossians 2:18** *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,*
>
> **Colossians 2:19** *And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.*

The body grows from the head, "by that which every joint supplieth," every member doing its part. In Colossians the danger named is "not holding the Head" — men putting something else between the members and Christ. That warning will matter throughout this study. Whatever stands between the members and the head, however well meant, takes a place scripture gives to no one but Christ.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claims H and L, Christ alone is head, and the body grows by every member's supply.

In Short

Under the Law God gave a house made with hands, and even then Solomon said it could not contain Him. Jesus foretold worship without a place, and after Pentecost God's house is His people, with Christ the only head.

Chapter 2 — The Church That Was in Their House

If God's house is His people, where did those people gather? Acts and the letters answer plainly, and they answer the same way every time.

A. Breaking Bread from House to House

From the very first days after Pentecost, the household of God had a home life of its own:

> **Acts 2:42** *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*
>
> **Acts 2:46** *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,*
>
> **Acts 2:47** *Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

This library's study *Save Yourselves From This Untoward Generation* (Chapter 7) works through these verses at length and does not need repeating here. One phrase carries this chapter: "breaking bread from house to house." The four things the believers "continued stedfastly" in — the apostles' doctrine,

fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers — happened at home, around tables, among people who knew each other.

When trouble came, they went to the same place. Released from the council, Peter and John **"went to their own company" (Acts 4:23)**. Released from prison by an angel, Peter went straight to a house:

> **Acts 12:12** *And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.*

He did not go to the temple to find the church. He went to Mary's house, because that is where the church was.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim H, the church's own life of teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer was lived "from house to house." The other side can fairly answer that they also continued "daily with one accord in the temple" (Acts 2:46). They did, and Chapter 3 takes that up in full.

B. "The Church That Is in Their House"

By the time of Paul's letters, the pattern has a settled name. Four letters, four households, four cities:

> **Romans 16:5** *Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 16:19** *The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.*
>
> **Colossians 4:15** *Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.*
>
> **Philemon 1:2** *And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:*

Lydia's house at Philippi was the same:

> **Acts 16:40** *And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.*

There is no church building anywhere in the New Testament. There is no record of believers buying land, raising a hall, or collecting money to build one. What there is, repeatedly, is "the church that is in their house."

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim H, the New Testament names "the church… in their house" four times and records no building owned or built for the assembly. The other side can fairly answer that this was the circumstance of a poor and persecuted movement, not a command. That is fair: no verse commands the house. But no verse commands anything else either, and the house is the only pattern scripture records.

C. What Happened When They Met

When Paul describes an assembly gathered, he describes every member taking part:

> **1 Corinthians 14:26** *How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*
>
> **Colossians 3:16** *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

"Every one of you hath." "Teaching and admonishing one another." Not one man speaking and many listening, but a household building itself up, every member supplying something. A living room suits that. A hall seating hundreds in rows facing a stage does not.

The Lord's supper itself was eaten at home, at a shared meal. When the Corinthians turned it into a feast where the rich ate first and the poor went hungry, Paul's answer assumed a household table:

> **1 Corinthians 11:20** *When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 11:21** *For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 11:22** *What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 11:33** *Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 11:34** *And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.*

"Tarry one for another." The supper was a table where everyone was waited for and no one went hungry — something only possible among people small enough in number to see each other.

Weighing it: Strong inference — on claim H, the gathering scripture describes is participatory and table-centred, which the house serves and the hall does not. The other side can fairly answer that a large church can still have small groups where every member takes part. It can, and many do; this study's point is only that scripture's pattern puts that small, participatory gathering at the centre, not at the edge.

D. Many Houses in One City

A single house could only hold so many. The New Testament shows the natural answer: more than one house in a city, each a gathering of its own, all of them one church. At Rome Paul greets a church in Priscilla and Aquila's house, then two more groups:

> **Romans 16:14** *Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.*
>
> **Romans 16:15** *Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.*

"The brethren which are with them." "All the saints which are with them." At Corinth there were gatherings in houses, and also times when **"the whole church be come together into one place" (1 Corinthians 14:23)** — Gaius, Paul writes, was host **"of the whole church" (Romans 16:23)**.

So the picture is many households in a city, each meeting in a home, sometimes gathering together. When a house was full, the natural thing was another house. Scripture does not command that in so many words, and it does not need to: if the church meets in homes and keeps growing, a second home is the only choice there is.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claim H, from several house assemblies in one city and the plain limits of a home, assemblies multiplied rather than moved into larger buildings. The other side can fairly answer that "the whole church… into one place" might have needed a larger space. It might have; Gaius's house held it, and nothing in the text speaks of a building raised for it.

E. Small Enough to See Every Need

The house had a gift built into it. Everyone was known. Every need was seen. Acts says so of the earliest church:

> **Acts 4:32** *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*
>
> **Acts 4:33** *And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.*
>
> **Acts 4:34** *Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,*
>
> **Acts 4:35** *And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*

"Neither was there any among them that lacked." That sentence is easy to write of a household and very hard to write of a crowd. Need was met because it was seen, and it was seen because people lived close enough to see it.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claims H and S, the house setting made it possible to see and meet every need. The other side can fairly answer that Acts 4 describes Jerusalem's whole church, numbering thousands. True — and it met in temple courts and in houses both, with the distribution handled through the apostles; the point stands that need was known person by person.

In Short

The first-century church gathered in homes — "from house to house," "the church that is in their house" — every member taking part, the supper at a shared table. When a house was full, there was another house, and in a household no need went unseen.

Chapter 3 — The Temple Courts and the Synagogues: Outreach, Not the Assembly

The early believers did go to public places, and the other side is right to say so. The question is why they went, and what they did there.

A. To the Jew First

The gospel went first to Israel, by design. Peter's sermon at Pentecost was preached to **"ye men of Israel" (Acts 2:22)**. Paul said plainly that it had to be so:

> **Acts 13:46** *Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*
>
> **Romans 1:16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

To reach Israel, they went where Israel gathered: the temple courts at Jerusalem, and the synagogues in every city. Peter preached in Solomon's porch after the lame man was healed (Acts 3:11-26). An angel sent the apostles back to the temple to preach:

> **Acts 5:20** *Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.*
>
> **Acts 5:21** *And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.*

And Paul's custom, wherever he went, was the synagogue:

> **Acts 17:1** *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:*
>
> **Acts 17:2** *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,*
>
> **Acts 17:3** *Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.*

In every case the purpose is the same: to speak the gospel to those who had not yet heard it. The temple courts and the synagogues were the places where the people of Israel could be found. They were mission fields.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim O, the apostles went to the temple and the synagogues to preach the gospel to Israel, "to the Jew first."

B. What Jewish Believers Still Kept

Honesty requires a second point. The believers at Jerusalem were Jews, and for a time they kept the customs of their people, the temple among them. Peter and John went up **"at the hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1)**. The whole early church met **"with one accord in Solomon's porch" (Acts 5:12)**. Years later James told Paul:

> **Acts 21:20** *And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:*

And Paul himself, to show that he did not despise his people's law, purified himself and went into the temple (Acts 21:26), and he says he once prayed there (Acts 22:17).

So the temple was more than a pulpit to them. It was also their nation's house of prayer, and Jewish believers did not abandon it overnight. But two things are equally clear. The temple was never called "the church," and the church's own life — the breaking of bread, the apostles' doctrine taught to the household, the prayer meetings of Acts 4 and 12 — happened at home. And the epistles, written to the churches after this transition, never once send believers to the temple or to any sacred building for their worship. The Gentile churches never had one.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claim O, the temple was outreach to the apostles and a lingering custom to Jewish believers, but never the church's own gathering. The other side can fairly answer that Acts 2:46 and 5:12 show the whole church meeting at the temple. It did, in the early weeks at Jerusalem; this study grants it, and notes that the house, not the temple, is what the church carried into every other city.

C. The Turn to the Gentiles

Over the years Acts records, the outreach to the synagogues met hardening resistance, and step by step the apostles turned elsewhere. At Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:46, above). At Corinth:

> **Acts 18:6** *And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*
>
> **Acts 18:7** *And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.*

At Ephesus:

> **Acts 19:8** *And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.*
>
> **Acts 19:9** *But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.*
>
> **Acts 19:10** *And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

And finally at Rome, to the leaders of the Jews:

> **Acts 28:28** *Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*

Even then Paul went "to the Jew first" in every city to the very end (Acts 28:17-23), so the turn was gradual, not a single day. But the direction is clear. And in A.D. 70 the temple itself was destroyed, as Jesus had said. Whatever place the temple courts had held as a place of outreach, that place was gone.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim O, Acts records the turn from the synagogue to the Gentiles three times, ending at Rome.

D. Borrowed and Hired Places, Never "the Church"

Two hired places appear in Acts, and the other side cites both (Introduction §E, point 1). Look at what they were used for. At Ephesus, after leaving the synagogue, Paul taught **"disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus" (Acts 19:9)** — and the next verse gives the result: **"all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10)**. This was a lecture hall for preaching to outsiders. At Rome Paul lived in his own hired house:

> **Acts 28:30** *And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,*
>
> **Acts 28:31** *Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*

It was his lodging, where he received **"all that came in unto him."** Neither was the assembly's building. Neither was owned. Neither was called the church. Both were used to reach those outside.

Weighing it: Strong inference — on claim O, the only hired places in Acts were used for preaching to outsiders, not for the assembly's own gathering. The other side can fairly answer that if renting for outreach was right, renting for the assembly is right too. It may be, as a practical matter; scripture simply records no case of it, and the house remained the church's own place.

In Short

The temple courts and synagogues were where Israel could be reached, and the apostles went there to preach "to the Jew first." Jewish believers kept the temple's customs for a time, but the church's own life was at home, and as the gospel turned to the Gentiles and the temple fell, only the house remained.

Chapter 4 — Person to Person: How the Gospel Travelled

The great public scenes of Acts are well known: Pentecost, Solomon's porch, the Areopagus. Less often noticed is how much of the gospel's spread in Acts happened one person, or one household, at a time.

A. On the Road, in the House, by the River, in the Jail

Philip was taken from a city revival to a desert road to speak to one man:

> **Acts 8:29** *Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.*
>
> **Acts 8:30** *And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?*
>
> **Acts 8:31** *And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.*
>
> **Acts 8:35** *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*

Peter was sent to the house of a Roman officer who had gathered his household and friends:

> **Acts 10:24** *And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.*
>
> **Acts 10:44** *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*

At Philippi there was no synagogue at all, so Paul went where a few women prayed by a river, and spoke to them sitting down:

> **Acts 16:13** *And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.*
>
> **Acts 16:14** *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.*
>
> **Acts 16:15** *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.*

That same night in the jail, the gospel reached the jailer and his house:

> **Acts 16:30** *And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*
>
> **Acts 16:31** *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*
>
> **Acts 16:32** *And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*
>
> **Acts 16:33** *And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.*
>
> **Acts 16:34** *And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

And when a gifted preacher named Apollos needed correcting, a working couple did it privately, in their own way:

> **Acts 18:26** *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*

A road, a living room, a riverbank, a jail, a tentmakers' home. In every case the word went from person to person, often from house to house, and in every case a household was the result.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim O, Acts records the gospel spreading person to person and household to household.

B. Ready Always to Give an Answer

The epistles assume this kind of witness from every believer, not only from apostles:

> **1 Peter 3:15** *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:*
>
> **Colossians 4:5** *Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.*
>
> **Colossians 4:6** *Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*

"Every man that asketh you." "Them that are without." This is not a sermon from a stage. It is the conversation at work, with a neighbour, at a table — an answer given when someone asks about the hope they can see in you.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim O.

C. Outreach Today

Today the public settings of Acts are mostly gone. There is no temple court where a whole nation gathers daily, and few synagogues would invite a visiting believer to speak. Public preaching on a street corner rarely leads anywhere now. What remains is exactly what Acts also shows: witness through work, neighbours and personal conversation, where talk turns naturally to God's word; a household open to guests; a believer ready with an answer.

This is not a lesser substitute for the first century. It is the first century's own pattern carried on. The public scenes in Acts were tied to a particular moment — a nation gathered at Jerusalem, synagogues still open to the apostles. The person-to-person witness was never tied to any moment at all.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claim O, person-to-person witness is the part of the first-century pattern that carries forward unchanged. The other side can fairly answer that public preaching is still lawful and sometimes fruitful. Agreed; this study does not forbid it. It says only that the outreach most believers can do, and that Acts most often records, is personal.

In Short

Much of the gospel's spread in Acts happened one person and one household at a time. Every believer is told to be ready with an answer. That is how the gospel travels today, and it is the first-century pattern, not a substitute for it.

Chapter 5 — Served Locally, Visited by Travellers

The household had leaders. Scripture shows two kinds, and the way they related to each other is the reverse of how most churches are arranged today.

A. Elders Raised Up in Every Assembly

On their first journey, Paul and Barnabas went back through the cities where they had preached and did this:

> **Acts 14:21** *And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,*
>
> **Acts 14:22** *Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*
>
> **Acts 14:23** *And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*

And Paul left Titus in Crete for the same work:

> **Titus 1:5** *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:*

"Elders in every church." "Elders in every city." Leaders came from within each assembly, men the believers already knew. They were not sent in from elsewhere, and they were plural — elders, not a single elder.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim L, each assembly had its own elders, raised up from within it.

B. Known by Their Character, Not Their Credentials

What qualified a man was his life, seen by those who lived near him:

> **1 Timothy 3:1** *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*
>
> **1 Timothy 3:2** *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;*
>
> **1 Timothy 3:3** *Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*
>
> **1 Timothy 3:4** *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;*
>
> **1 Timothy 3:5** *(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*
>
> **1 Timothy 3:6** *Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

> **1 Timothy 3:7** *Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

Notice how many of these qualities can only be judged by people who know a man at home: "one that ruleth well his own house," "given to hospitality," "not greedy of filthy lucre," "a good report of them which are without." These are not things a search committee can learn from a résumé. They are things a household learns by living alongside someone.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim L.

C. Servants, Not Lords

The elders were warned, in the plainest words, against the very thing institutions tend to produce:

> **1 Peter 5:1** *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:*
>
> **1 Peter 5:2** *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;*
>
> **1 Peter 5:3** *Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*

"Not for filthy lucre." "Neither as being lords over God's heritage." And Jesus had already set the rule for all His followers:

> **Matthew 20:25** *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.*
>
> **Matthew 20:26** *But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;*
>
> **Matthew 20:27** *And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:*
>
> **Matthew 20:28** *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

"It shall not be so among you." The rulers of the Gentiles exercise dominion; Christ's servants serve. This is not a counsel of style. It is a different kind of leadership altogether.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim L, leaders in the church were to serve, not rule, and not for gain.

D. Equipping Every Member

The gifts Christ gave to the church were given for one purpose — to equip every member to do the work:

> **Ephesians 4:11** *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*
>
> **Ephesians 4:12** *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

> **Ephesians 4:13** *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry." The leaders equip; the saints minister. Paul told Timothy to multiply teachers, not to gather an audience:

> **2 Timothy 2:2** *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

A household where every member is being equipped to teach others looks very different from an audience that comes each week to hear one man. One grows teachers. The other, too often, grows listeners.

Weighing it: Strong inference — on claim L, the leader's task is to equip the members for ministry, not to perform it for them. The other side can fairly answer that a pastor who preaches every week is equipping the saints by teaching them. He may be; the question is whether the saints are then doing the work of the ministry, or watching it.

E. Travelling Workers Who Established and Moved On

The second kind of leader travelled. Apostles, evangelists and their companions went from city to city, preaching, establishing assemblies, appointing elders — and then leaving. Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus shows the whole pattern:

> **Acts 20:28** *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*
>
> **Acts 20:32** *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

He did not stay to govern them. He gave them a charge, commended them "to God, and to the word of his grace," and left. He wrote to the churches afterward, visited when he could, and sent workers like Timothy and Titus for particular tasks — and called them back again (2 Timothy 4:9, 21; Titus 3:12).

So the order was this: local leaders who stayed and served, and greater leaders who travelled and moved on. Today the order is usually reversed. A pastor — often from elsewhere — stays and leads, and above him sit offices and headquarters that do not travel to serve but remain to govern.

One exception should be named honestly. At Jerusalem the apostles stayed for a time even when others were scattered (Acts 8:1), and James remained there with the elders (Acts 21:18). Jerusalem was the first church and the centre of the Jewish believers, and it was not the pattern Paul carried to the nations.

Weighing it: Strong inference — on claim L, travelling workers established assemblies and moved on, leaving them in the care of local elders. The other side can fairly answer that Jerusalem's settled apostles show a different model. Stated above; it is the exception, tied to that city, and it was never reproduced elsewhere in the New Testament.

F. No Ruler over a City, and None over the Churches

Nowhere does the New Testament set one man over a city's elders as a standing office, or one city's church over the others. Each assembly answered to Christ, its head. When Diotrephes tried to make himself ruler of an assembly, John named it for what it was:

> **3 John 1:9** *I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.*
>
> **3 John 1:10** *Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*

"Loveth to have the preeminence." This library's *In Vain Do They Worship Me* (Chapter 6 §D) treats Diotrephes in full. He is the first recorded case of one man taking a place in the church that belonged to Christ alone — and he appears in the apostles' own lifetime.

Weighing it: Strong inference — on claim L, scripture gives no standing office over a city's elders, and rebukes the first man who took one. The other side can fairly answer that Timothy and Titus had authority over several assemblies. They did, as apostolic delegates for a task, and both were recalled (Titus 3:12; 2 Timothy 4:9); neither was a permanent ruler passed to a successor.

In Short

Each assembly had its own elders, known by their lives, serving and not ruling. Travelling workers established assemblies, equipped the saints, and moved on. Christ alone was head — and the first man to grasp for preeminence was rebuked by name.

Chapter 6 — Self-Sustaining: Where the Giving Went

The first-century assemblies carried no mortgage, no utilities, no building fund, and no salaried staff for a building. That simple fact shaped everything about how they lived and gave.

A. Hands That Worked

Believers were taught to work, to carry their own weight, and to have something left over:

> **1 Thessalonians 4:11** *And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;*
>
> **1 Thessalonians 4:12** *That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.*
>
> **2 Thessalonians 3:10** *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*
>
> **2 Thessalonians 3:11** *For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.*

> **2 Thessalonians 3:12** *Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*
>
> **Ephesians 4:28** *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

"That ye may have lack of nothing." "That he may have to give to him that needeth." The household of God was not a body that consumed resources. It was a body that produced them, and gave them away.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim S.

B. Elders Who Worked So They Could Give

Paul set the elders of Ephesus an example, and told them to follow it:

> **Acts 20:33** *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.*
>
> **Acts 20:34** *Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.*
>
> **Acts 20:35** *I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

"So labouring ye ought to support the weak." The elders were not to be a cost the assembly carried, but workers who supported others. This does not forbid support for those who give their whole time to the word — the next section shows scripture approves it — but it does show what Paul held out as the pattern for local elders.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claims S and L, Paul told the Ephesian elders to labour as he did, to support the weak. The other side can fairly answer that elders "that rule well" are worthy of "double honour" (1 Timothy 5:17). They are, and §C takes this up.

C. Two Purposes, Both for People

This library's *The Tithe and the Church* (Chapter 8) traced where first-century giving went, and found two purposes. The first was relief — **"the collection for the saints" (1 Corinthians 16:1)**, the daily ministration to widows (Acts 6:1), the poor saints at Jerusalem (Romans 15:26). The second was the support of those who labour in the word:

> **Galatians 6:6** *Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.*
>
> **1 Timothy 5:17** *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.*
>
> **1 Timothy 5:18** *For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.*
>
> **3 John 1:5** *Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;*
>
> **3 John 1:6** *Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:*

> **3 John 1:7** *Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.*
>
> **3 John 1:8** *We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.*

Both purposes were people. Neither was property. There was nothing else to spend on: no building to heat, no grounds to keep, no sound system, no stage. The gifts of the saints went to the poor among them and to those who taught them the word, and to nothing besides.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim S, first-century giving went to relief and to the support of those who labour in the word; scripture records no third purpose. The other side can fairly answer that buildings did not exist to be paid for, so silence about them proves nothing. That is fair as far as it goes; but the result is a pattern in which every gift reached a person, and that is the pattern scripture leaves.

D. Help from Outside Only in Crisis

Self-sustaining did not mean never needing help. The church at Jerusalem, in famine and poverty, was helped by the churches of the Gentiles (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-27). Paul called it equality:

> **2 Corinthians 8:13** *For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:*
>
> **2 Corinthians 8:14** *But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality:*
>
> **2 Corinthians 8:15** *As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.*

But that help went to people in want, in a time of need, to be returned in kind when the need turned the other way. No assembly needed outside money simply to keep running, because there was nothing to run. The household fed itself, cared for its own, supported its teachers, and helped other households when they fell on hard times.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim S.

In Short

The first-century assemblies were self-sustaining. Believers worked with their hands to have enough and to give; elders laboured to support the weak; and every gift went to people — the poor and those who taught the word — because there was no property to carry.

Chapter 7 — The First Drift (A.D. 60-250)

Part Two turns from scripture to history. Nothing in it carries the weight of scripture, and every section is held as corroboration only. But history shows something scripture itself foretold: the household of God did not stay as it was given. It was changed — gradually, by men, often with good intentions — into something else. This part traces how.

A. Warned Before It Happened

The drift did not take scripture by surprise. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that it would come from two directions, from outside and from inside:

> **Acts 20:29** *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.*
>
> **Acts 20:30** *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

"Of your own selves shall men arise… to draw away disciples after them." He told the Thessalonians that the working had already begun:

> **2 Thessalonians 2:7** *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.*

He warned the Corinthians that the adversary's servants come disguised:

> **2 Corinthians 11:13** *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*
>
> **2 Corinthians 11:14** *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*
>
> **2 Corinthians 11:15** *Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*

And Jesus Himself had told the parable of the enemy who sows among the wheat while men sleep:

> **Matthew 13:24** *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:*
>
> **Matthew 13:25** *But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*
>
> **Matthew 13:38** *The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;*
>
> **Matthew 13:39** *The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.*

These verses establish the first half of this study's claim D as direct statement: the adversary works through men inside the church, and their aim is to draw disciples after themselves. Diotrephes (Chapter 5 §F) shows it already happening within the apostles' lifetime.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim D, scripture foretells men arising within the church to draw disciples after themselves, and names the adversary as the sower. The other side can fairly answer that these warnings concern false doctrine, not church structure. They concern both: Acts 20:30 names the aim — "to draw away disciples after them" — and drawing people after oneself is a matter of who leads and who follows, not only of what is taught.

B. Still Close to the Pattern

The earliest writings outside the New Testament still show much of the first-century pattern. The *Didache*, a short manual of church practice from about A.D. 100, guarded against exactly the danger Paul named — travelling men who came to take rather than to give:

> **Didache 11** — *"Let every apostle that comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet."*

Justin Martyr, writing about A.D. 155, describes a Sunday gathering in which the gifts still went to people:

> **Justin Martyr, First Apology 67** — *"And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need."*

And Tertullian, about A.D. 197, describing the Christians of North Africa to the Roman authorities:

> **Tertullian, Apology 39** — *"Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house..."*

He adds that the pagans, watching, said: **"See, they say, how they love one another."** A century and a half after Pentecost, the money still went to the poor, the orphaned, the old and the imprisoned. There was still no building fund, because there was still no building.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim S, the earliest witnesses outside scripture still describe voluntary gifts spent on people in need.

C. Power Gathering into One Man

At the same time, another change was under way. Ignatius of Antioch, writing about A.D. 110, urged every believer to gather around a single bishop:

> **Ignatius, To the Smyrnaeans 8** — *"Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God..."*

Compare that with Chapter 5. In scripture, each assembly had a plurality of elders, and Christ alone was head. Within fifty years of the apostles, one man is being set over the elders, and nothing — not even

the love-feast, the shared table of Chapter 2 — is to happen without him. A century later Cyprian of Carthage, about A.D. 251, tied salvation itself to the bishop's church:

> **Cyprian, On the Unity of the Church 6** — *"He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother."*

Ignatius and Cyprian were sincere men, and both died as martyrs. They were trying to protect believers from division and false teaching. But the remedy they chose — one man over each city, and salvation tied to his church — put a man in a place scripture gives to Christ alone (Colossians 2:19). Once that place was filled, it would be fought over.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D, within two generations of the apostles one bishop was being set over each city's elders, and salvation tied to his church. The other side can fairly answer that these men acted to guard the church against heresy, and that some order was needed. Agreed; good motives are not in question. The question is whether the remedy matched scripture's pattern, and it did not.

D. The First Church Building: Still a House

The earliest church building yet found was at Dura-Europos, a frontier town on the Euphrates in Syria. It was an ordinary private house, built about A.D. 232, and converted for Christian use around 240 — its walls opened to make an assembly room, and a small room fitted as a baptistery. The town was abandoned in 256 during a Persian siege, and the house was buried and preserved. It is a fitting picture of the age: two hundred years after Pentecost, the first known church building was still a house.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim H, the earliest known Christian meeting place is a converted home.

In Short

Scripture foretold men rising within the church to draw disciples after themselves. For two centuries the gifts still went to the poor, and the first known church building was still a house. But power was already gathering into one man over each city, in a place scripture gives to Christ.

Chapter 8 — From House to Basilica (313-600)

In the fourth century the church went, within a single lifetime, from persecuted to favoured. Nothing changed its shape faster.

A. Constantine: A Funded Clergy

In 313 the emperor Constantine ended the persecution of Christians, and very soon began to favour them. One of his first letters, preserved by the historian Eusebius, exempted the clergy from the public duties every other citizen bore:

> **Eusebius, Church History 10.7 (Constantine to Anulinus)** — *"Wherefore it is my will that those within the province entrusted to you, in the catholic Church, over which Caecilianus presides, who give their services to this holy religion, and who are commonly called clergymen, be entirely exempted from all public duties..."*

The clergy became a privileged and supported class, set apart from the people by law. The distinction between "clergy" and "laity" — unknown to the New Testament, where every believer is a saint and a priest (1 Peter 2:5) — now had the force of the state behind it.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D, imperial favour created a legally privileged clergy.

B. The Great Halls

Constantine also built. Great basilicas rose at Rome, Jerusalem and Constantinople, among them the Lateran and the first St Peter's. A basilica was a Roman public hall — a law court and meeting place — with a raised platform at one end where the magistrate sat. Christians adopted the form. The bishop's chair now stood where the magistrate's had been, the clergy gathered at the front, and the people stood in the long hall facing them.

In that one change of building, the gathering of Chapter 2 was turned around. At a household table, every member faced every other member, and "every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine" (1 Corinthians 14:26). In a basilica, the people faced the front, and a few spoke while many watched. The meeting had become a service, and the participants an audience. And the building itself had to be built, lit and kept.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claims D and H, the move into the basilica turned a participatory household into an audience facing a platform. The other side can fairly answer that large numbers of new converts needed somewhere to meet. They did; the houses could have multiplied, as they had for three centuries, and the choice to build halls instead was a choice, not a necessity.

C. A Church Made Law

In 380 the emperor Theodosius issued the Edict of Thessalonica, making one form of Christianity the religion of the empire and calling for the punishment of those who held another. For the first time, the church had the sword of the state. Within five years it was used. In 385 Priscillian, a Spanish bishop accused by other bishops of heresy and immoral practices, was tried before the emperor's officials and put to death with several companions. Martin of Tours, a bishop himself, pleaded against it. The historian Sulpicius Severus, who knew Martin, records that he

> **Sulpicius Severus, Sacred History 2.50** — *"did not cease to importune Ithacius, that he should give up his accusations, or to implore Maximus that he should not shed the blood of the unhappy persons in question... and that it was, besides, a foul and unheard-of indignity, that a secular ruler should be judge in an ecclesiastical cause."*

Whatever Priscillian taught, the precedent was set: men who claimed to speak for Christ had used the state to kill another man over religion. Jesus had foretold it: **"whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2)**.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D, within seventy years of Constantine, Christian bishops used the state to put a man to death. The other side can fairly answer that the formal charges against Priscillian included sorcery and immorality, not doctrine alone. That is so; the accusers were bishops, the cause was religious, and a fellow bishop called it an unheard-of indignity.

D. Blood over a Bishop's Chair

Once the office of bishop carried wealth and power, men fought for it. In 366 two rivals, Damasus and Ursinus, contended for the bishopric of Rome. The pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus, who had no stake in the matter, recorded what happened, and why he thought men wanted the office so badly:

> **Ammianus Marcellinus, History 27.3.12-14** — *"Damasus and Ursinus, burning with a superhuman desire of seizing the bishopric, engaged in bitter strife because of their opposing interests; and the supporters of both parties went even so far as conflicts ending in bloodshed and death... It is a well-known fact that in the basilica of Sicininus, where the assembly of the Christian sect is held, in a single day a hundred and thirty-seven corpses of the slain were found... when they attain it, they will be so free from care that they are enriched from the offerings of matrons, ride seated in carriages, wearing clothing chosen with care, and serve banquets so lavish that their entertainments outdo the tables of kings."*

He then contrasts them with **"some provincial bishops, whose moderation in food and drink, plain apparel also, and gaze fixed upon the earth"** commended them as reverent men. Even an outsider could see the difference between the servant and the lord.

A century later, the Council of Chalcedon (451) had to forbid bishops to ordain men for money (canon 2). A rule against selling church offices shows the offices were being sold.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D, within two generations of Constantine the bishop's office was wealthy enough to kill for, and church offices were being sold.

E. Where the Money Now Went

As the church gained property and income, it needed a rule for dividing it. By the late fifth century a rule was being quoted as traditional by the bishops of Rome — Simplicius in 475, Gelasius in 494, and Gregory the Great about 601:

> **The quadripartite rule, as quoted by Gregory the Great (Bede, Ecclesiastical History 1.27)** — *"that all emoluments that accrue are to be divided into four portions—one for the bishop and his household because of hospitality and entertainments, another for the clergy, a third for the poor, and a fourth for the repair of churches."*

Set that beside Justin and Tertullian (Chapter 7 §B), when every gift went to people in need. Now the poor received one portion in four. One quarter went to the bishop's household, one to the clergy, and one to the buildings. In three hundred years, the buildings had gone from nothing to a fixed share, equal to the poor's.

Meanwhile, the Christians' care for the poor was still strong enough to shame the empire's last pagan ruler. The emperor Julian, about 362, wrote to one of his pagan priests:

> **Julian, Letter 22 to Arsacius** — *"For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galilaeans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us."*

Both things were true at once. Ordinary believers still gave to the poor in a way the world noticed. And the institution taking shape above them was claiming three parts of every four for itself.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claims D and S, by the fifth century church income was divided four ways, with the poor receiving one share and the buildings another.

F. The Tithe Becomes Law

The last step of this period was the tithe. As this library's *The Tithe and the Church* (Appendix A §6) records, the Second Council of Mâcon (585) ordered tithes to be paid on pain of excommunication, and in 779 Charlemagne's capitulary of Herstal made the tithe a civil obligation across his empire. The voluntary gift of Tertullian's day — "only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able" — had become a legal tax, and its first purpose was now to sustain the institution: its clergy, its buildings and its lands.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D.

In Short

Under Constantine the clergy became a funded class and the household became an audience in a public hall. The church gained the sword, and soon used it; the bishop's chair became worth killing for. By the fifth century the poor received one share of four, and by the sixth the tithe was law.

Chapter 9 — Power, Money and the Sword (600-1700)

The next thousand years are too long to tell in full. This chapter takes only the threads that bear on this study: power claimed, money raised, and the sword used in Christ's name — by every side that held it.

A. Forged Claims to Worldly Power

In the eighth century a document appeared claiming that Constantine had granted the bishop of Rome rule over Rome and the western empire. This "Donation of Constantine" was used for centuries to support the papacy's worldly power. In 1440 the scholar Lorenzo Valla proved from its language that it was a forgery, written centuries after Constantine's death. The church that claimed to speak for the One

who said **"My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36)** had rested a claim to an earthly kingdom on a forged deed.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D.

B. Cathedrals, Benefices and the Price of Forgiveness

Over the medieval centuries, tithes, endowments and offerings built great cathedrals and supported a vast structure of clergy, monasteries and church lands. Church offices came with incomes attached — "benefices" — and men sought them for the income. At the end of the period, the money needed to rebuild St Peter's at Rome was raised in part by selling indulgences: the promise of release from punishment for sin in exchange for payment. In 1517 the preaching of the indulgence-seller Johann Tetzel helped provoke Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses. Peter had answered a man who tried to buy a gift of God with money:

> **Acts 8:20** *But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.*

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D, the rebuilding of the church's greatest building was funded in part by selling the promise of forgiveness.

C. Persecution in Christ's Name

The sword, once taken up, was used again and again: in crusades against fellow believers judged heretical, in the Albigensian crusade of the thirteenth century, and in the Inquisition. Two deaths stand out because both men were killed for wanting scripture to rule the church. Jan Hus of Prague, who preached against the sale of church offices and of indulgences, was burned at the Council of Constance on 6 July 1415. William Tyndale, who translated the scriptures into English so that a ploughboy could read them, was strangled and burned near Brussels in 1536.

And the Reformation did not end the pattern; it multiplied it. Once the reformed churches held power, they used it the same way. In Zurich, Felix Manz was drowned in January 1527 for believer's baptism. In Geneva, Michael Servetus was burned in October 1553. In Puritan Massachusetts, Quakers were banished, and Mary Dyer and three others were hanged at Boston between 1659 and 1661.

This study does not tell these things to blame one church over another. It tells them because the pattern is the same in every case. Once the ekklesia had become an institution holding power, whichever institution it was tended to use that power the same way. Jesus had forbidden it:

> **Matthew 26:52** *Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.*
>
> **2 Corinthians 10:3** *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:*
>
> **2 Corinthians 10:4** *(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)*

He had also given the test: **"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20)**.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D, every church that held state power, Catholic and Protestant alike, used it against other believers. The other side can fairly answer that these were the failures of their age, and that the churches have long since renounced them. Many have, and gladly; the point is not to accuse the churches of today, but to show what the institutional form did once it held power.

In Short

For a thousand years the institution claimed worldly power, sometimes on forged deeds; built its greatest building partly by selling forgiveness; and used the sword against those who wanted scripture to rule. When the reformers gained power, they did the same.

Chapter 10 — Gentler Forms, the Same Structure (1700-Today)

The sword is gone now, and that is a real mercy. But much of the structure it once defended remains, and the drift continues in gentler forms.

A. Reform Inside an Inherited Building

The Reformation recovered a great deal: scripture in the people's own language, salvation by grace through faith, the priesthood of every believer. But it did not recover the household. The reformers inherited the church buildings, the parishes, the clergy and the tithes, and largely kept them. The movements that followed — Puritans, Baptists, Methodists, and many more — each began as a return to scripture, and each in time built its own buildings, trained its own clergy, wrote its own confession, and became a denomination. This library's *In Vain Do They Worship Me* (Chapter 6 §G) makes this point at length. Even the efforts to get back to scripture were born already holding a building, and already arranged around fixed attendance at fixed times in fixed rows.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D, reform movements recovered doctrine but kept the institutional form.

B. Pew Rents: Seats for Sale

To pay for their buildings, many churches in England and America sold or rented their pews. From the seventeenth century into the early twentieth, seats were assigned by what a family could pay, often in order of social rank. In America, where there was no state tithe, pew rents were a principal source of church income. Critics in the nineteenth century complained that the poor were shut out of the very churches meant to welcome them, and a movement for free and open churches grew up in England from the 1860s. James had written of exactly this:

> **James 2:2** *For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;*

> **James 2:3** *And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:*
>
> **James 2:4** *Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*

The building had to be paid for, and the way it was paid for put the rich man in the good seat and the poor man at the back.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim D, buildings were long funded by renting seats, which ranked believers by wealth, as James 2 forbids.

C. Traditions That Change, a Structure That Stays

The traditions of the churches have changed a great deal in three hundred years. Robes gave way to suits and then to jeans; organs to bands; pews to theatre seats; hymnals to screens. Each generation adapts its way of doing church to its own day. What has not changed is the structure underneath: a building to be paid for, a professional staff to run it, an audience gathered at a fixed time facing a front, and a budget that must be met. Jesus described traditions of men that are handed down and multiplied:

> **Mark 7:8** *For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.*
>
> **Mark 7:9** *And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.*
>
> **Mark 7:13** *Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.*

"Many such like things do ye." This library's *In Vain Do They Worship Me* traces the principle in full.

There is a right kind of adapting. Paul said, **"I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22)** — he adapted how he reached people. That is different from adapting the institution itself to the age, and then holding the adapted form as if it were the church.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claim D, outward traditions change with each generation while the institutional structure they serve remains.

D. The Megachurch and "Bigger Is Better"

In the later twentieth century the church-growth movement taught churches to measure health by attendance, and the megachurch appeared — churches of thousands, often with several campuses, large staffs and budgets in the millions (Chapter 11 gives the figures). Size became a sign of success. Scripture measures differently. God sent home thirty-one thousand of Gideon's thirty-two thousand men, **"lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me" (Judges 7:2)**. David's numbering of the people was counted sin (2 Samuel 24:10). The Lord asked, **"who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10)**, and promised His presence where **"two or three are gathered together in my name" (Matthew 18:20)**. And Christ's rebuke to the church at Laodicea was to a church that measured itself by its own measures:

> **Revelation 3:17** *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:*

Weighing it: Strong inference — on claims D and T, scripture never makes size a measure of God's approval, and rebukes a church that judged itself rich. The other side can fairly answer that large numbers came to Christ at Pentecost, and growth is good. Agreed — growth is good; the question is whether size is the measure, and scripture says it is not.

E. The Adversary's Way

Here this study states the second half of claim D, and states its weight plainly. Scripture says directly that the adversary works through men within the church to draw disciples after themselves and to rule over them (Chapter 7 §A). What scripture does not say in so many words is that moving the church from the home into the institution was the adversary's design. That conclusion rests on the record: the household was the pattern scripture gave; men steadily replaced it with a structure that put themselves between the members and the head; and that structure, once it held power, used it for wealth, for control, and for the sword. A tree is known by its fruit. This study judges the move from home to institution to be one of the chief ways the adversary did his work, and holds that judgment as a reasonable inference, not a direct statement.

Jesus's parable of the mustard seed is sometimes read in support — a seed that grows into an unnaturally large tree, in whose branches **"the birds of the air come and lodge" (Matthew 13:32)**, read beside the same chapter's birds that are **"the wicked one" (Matthew 13:19)**. Others read it simply as the kingdom's growth from small beginnings. This study notes the reading and leans no weight on it.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claim D, the move from home to institution was one of the chief means by which men drew disciples after themselves and ruled over them. The other side can fairly answer that the change had human causes stated at each step — persecution ending, numbers growing, the need for order — and that good men made it. All true. Good men with good reasons can still build what scripture did not give, and the fruit shows what was built. The mustard-seed reading is corroboration only.

In Short

The Reformation recovered doctrine but kept the building. Pews were rented by rank, traditions changed with each generation, and bigger came to mean better. The structure stayed. Scripture says the adversary works through men to draw disciples after themselves; history shows the institution was one of his chief ways.

Chapter 11 — How the Money Has Been Handled: Then and Now

Part Three turns to the present. Its facts come from published surveys and from a reading of real churches' websites and sermons, and they are held, like history, as corroboration only. They are stated without blame. The pastor who serves a small congregation for little pay is carried by this system as much as the giver is.

A. Then: Four Stages of Church Giving

The record of the earlier chapters can be set out in four stages:

1. **The first century.** Gifts given willingly, "as God hath prospered" (1 Corinthians 16:2), to the relief of the saints and the support of those who laboured in the word (Chapter 6). No property. Every gift reached a person.

2. **The second and third centuries.** A monthly or weekly collection, voluntary, held by the one who presided and spent on orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners and strangers (Justin; Tertullian). Still no buildings to speak of.

3. **The fourth to sixth centuries.** Church income divided four ways — the bishop's household, the clergy, the poor, and the repair of churches (Chapter 8 §E). The poor now received one share in four; the buildings received another.

4. **The medieval centuries.** The tithe made law (585, 779), supporting parish clergy, church buildings, monasteries and lands; later, pew rents, indulgences and endowments.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claims S and D, the share of giving that reached people in need fell as the institution grew.

B. Now: Where a Typical Church's Money Goes

Today most congregations are small. The 2020 Faith Communities Today survey found a median weekly attendance of 65 and a median yearly income of $120,000. Two-thirds of congregations take in less than $100,000 a year. At the same time, about half of all churchgoers attend the four percent of congregations whose budgets exceed a million dollars. Most pastors lead small churches; most people sit in large ones.

Where does the money go? The same survey found that 44 percent of congregational budgets go to staff salaries. A 2026 Southern Baptist compensation study put personnel at 45 percent on average, from 42 percent in churches under fifty people to 50 percent in churches over 250. Church-budgeting guides commonly put buildings and facilities — mortgage or rent, utilities, insurance, upkeep — at around 20 to 30 percent, with missions and outreach at 10 to 15 percent; these are rules of thumb, not surveys, but they agree with what congregations report.

The long trend is the clearest figure of all. The research group empty tomb, inc., which has tracked church giving for decades, reports that in 1968 churches spent 21 percent of their income on "benevolences" — everything given beyond the congregation itself, including missions and the poor — and 79 percent on their own operations. By 2015 the split was 16 percent and 84 percent. Over the same years, church members' giving fell from about 3 percent of their income to about 2.2 percent.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim T, most church income now goes to staff and buildings, and the share that leaves the congregation has fallen to about one dollar in six.

C. A Worked Picture

Take the median congregation: 65 people and $120,000 a year. Using the figures above, roughly:

- **Staff:** about $53,000 — often one pastor, sometimes part-time, with a secretary or musician.
- **Building:** about $30,000 — mortgage or rent, power, water, insurance, repairs, lawn.
- **Programs and administration:** about $18,000 — supplies, curriculum, software, events.
- **Beyond the congregation:** about $19,000 — missions, denominational giving, benevolence, the poor.

Now set beside it the same 65 people living as the household of Chapter 2: meeting in four or five homes, eating together, teaching one another. The $30,000 for the building would go to people. Programs would largely be meals and shared lives. The support of those who labour in the word would be given directly and openly. And the relief of the saints — the first purpose of New Testament giving — would no longer be the smallest line.

This is a picture, not an accusation. It is offered so that a believer can see plainly what the building and the organisation cost, and who carries that cost.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claims T and S, the building and the institution take roughly a quarter to a third of a typical church's income before any of it reaches a person in need. The other side can fairly answer that a building also serves the community — food pantries, recovery groups, children's programs. Many do, and that good is real; this study asks only whether it requires the building, and whether the believers who pay for it have been told the choice exists.

D. The Pastor Who Lives on Little

The figures above are not a picture of greedy pastors. Most are not. Lifeway Research's 2025 National Survey of Religious Leaders found that 47 percent of evangelical pastors are bivocational — working another job — up from 28 percent in 2001. The 2026 Southern Baptist study found that 63 percent of congregations provide no health insurance for their senior pastor, and that senior pastors' pay had fallen behind inflation over the previous two years. Many men serve with real sacrifice, and some take vows to live on as little as they can. The structure does not reward them; it uses them up. A small congregation carrying a building and a salary is often carrying more than it can bear, and the pastor carries the rest.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim T, many pastors are underpaid and uninsured; the burden of the structure falls on them as well as on the givers.

E. The Other End

At the other end are the largest churches and ministries. Hartford Institute's 2020 survey counted about 580 megachurches — churches with 1,800 or more in weekly attendance — with an average budget of $5.3 million. Most are well run, and many give generously beyond themselves.

But there is also a public record of excess. From 2007 to 2011 Senator Charles Grassley of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee examined six large broadcast ministries over reports of high salaries, private jets and luxury cars. Two made significant reforms. Four gave incomplete answers or none. The inquiry ended in January 2011 without penalties, and the questions it raised were referred to a commission of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. This study says no more than that record says. What it shows is that the structure which leaves a small-town pastor without insurance can also, at its top, fund a life of luxury — and that the same giving principle, "give to God's house," is used to raise money for both.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim T. The other side can fairly answer that a few ministries do not represent the many. Agreed, and this study has said so; the point is that the same structure produces both ends.

In Short

In the early church every gift reached a person. By the fifth century the poor received one share in four. Today most church income goes to staff and buildings, about one dollar in six leaves the congregation, many pastors live on little, and at the top a few live in luxury — all inside the same structure.

Chapter 12 — What Draws People In

If the church today is largely a building, a staff and a weekly service, then it must give people a reason to come. What reason does it give?

A. What Churches Say About Themselves

For this study, eighteen church websites were read — the pages each church writes for newcomers: "I'm New," "Plan a Visit," "What to Expect," and their statements of belief. The churches were drawn from Florida and Alabama, from many traditions: Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Calvary Chapel, Bible church and non-denominational. No church is named here; the phrases are quoted so that the reader will recognise the pattern.

About half lead with experience and belonging. Typical lines: church "should feel like coming home - your home away from home"; "Deep Worship"; worship "soulful and contemporary, led by a passionate team… standing, singing, and lifting their hands"; "Most people dress in elevated casual"; "Come as you

are… you belong here"; "More Than a Church—A Place to Belong"; "Doing Life Together"; "a powerful time of worship and a practical, inspiring Bible teaching." Greeters, coffee, "host teams," and "a small gift when you visit" are common. Where scripture appears on these pages, it is often as a banner — "I can do all things through Christ."

About a third lead with scripture: "We Preach Christ!" with sermons verse by verse through a book of the Bible; preaching that is "convictionally expositional… verse by verse, through books of the Bible"; a large church working steadily through the Gospel of John. These churches exist in the same towns as the others, and they deserve to be named as a pattern too.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim T, about half the churches read lead with experience and belonging rather than with the word.

B. Why People Choose a Church

Pew Research's 2016 study of Americans who had looked for a new congregation asked what mattered. The quality of the sermons mattered to 83 percent. Feeling welcomed by the clergy and leaders mattered to 79 percent. The style of the services mattered to 74 percent. Location mattered to 70 percent. Welcome and style weigh almost as much as the preaching.

That is not wrong in itself. Paul says, **"Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7)**, and tells believers to be **"kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love" (Romans 12:10)**. Warmth is commanded. The question this study asks is what the warmth is serving. In a household, it serves the people themselves. In an institution that must fill its seats to meet its budget, it can easily come to serve the seats.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim T, welcome and style weigh nearly as much as preaching when people choose a church. The other side can fairly answer that welcome is a scriptural command and not a marketing tool. Agreed; this study asks only that it be kept in its place, serving the people and the word rather than attendance.

C. What a Sample of Sermons Shows

Fourteen recorded sermons from eleven of these congregations were transcribed and read (Appendix D gives the method). All but two were preached in 2026. Several facts stood out.

Every sermon named scripture; none was without it. Nine of the fourteen were built around a passage or a book of scripture — reading it, explaining it and applying it — and several did so carefully and well. And one of the churches whose recorded sermon was topical lists on its website a recent series on how to study a topic in the Bible for oneself, using lexicons and letting "the Bible interpret itself" — exactly what this library tries to do.

The other five were built mainly around a topic, with one or two passages and most of the time given to stories, illustrations and life advice: setting boundaries, managing a household, a moving day, a hard week, a recent retreat in the mountains.

Almost every sermon, of either kind, opened with a personal story from the preacher's own life or week, and several returned to such stories throughout. In the topical sermons, the preacher's own experience was often the main material, with scripture brought in to support it.

Seven of the fourteen recordings, from six of the eleven congregations, included an appeal tied to money or buildings: a "vision campaign" building new spaces at several campuses; a "Commitment Sunday" for next year's financial pledges; a fundraiser at a local restaurant; a plan for a new preschool and daycare; a series featuring a well-known financial teacher on "divine prosperity"; and one prayer that "every tither" would "stand under an open window" — Malachi 3:10, spoken to a church as though it had been written to it. This library's *The Tithe and the Church* (Chapter 4) shows to whom Malachi was actually written.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim T, most sermons in the sample named and used scripture, but many leaned on personal story, and half included appeals for money or buildings. The other side can fairly answer that fourteen sermons are a small sample, and that illustrations help people understand. Both are true; the sample is described in Appendix D, and an illustration that serves the text is good teaching. The concern is the sermon where the story is the substance and the text the decoration.

D. Teaching People What They Want to Hear

Paul foresaw a time when people would choose teachers by what they wanted to hear:

> **2 Timothy 4:2** *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*
>
> **2 Timothy 4:3** *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;*
>
> **2 Timothy 4:4** *And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

"Preach the word… For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." When a church must compete for attendance to meet its budget, there is steady pressure to give people what draws them: music that moves them, preaching that encourages them, an hour that is pleasant and not too long. None of those is wrong in itself. Together, they can make a church where people come gladly for years and are never taught the word.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claim T, a structure that depends on attendance is under constant pressure toward what pleases, which Paul warns against. The other side can fairly answer that many such churches preach the word faithfully and grow. Many do, as the sermon sample showed; the pressure is real even where it is resisted.

In Short

About half the churches read lead with belonging and experience, and people choose churches nearly as much for welcome and style as for preaching. Most sermons in the sample used scripture, but many

leaned on the preacher's own stories, and half carried an appeal for money or buildings. Paul warned of teachers chosen for itching ears.

Chapter 13 — Born Again, but Barely Taught

The believers who fill these churches are, in great numbers, truly born again. That is not in question. What is in question is whether they are being fed.

A. What the Surveys Show

Barna's 2025 tracking found that half of Americans who call themselves Christians read the Bible in a given week — up from recent years, which is encouraging — and that only 44 percent of Christians strongly affirm that the Bible is totally accurate in all it teaches. The 2025 State of Theology survey (Lifeway Research and Ligonier Ministries) asked Americans about statements that scripture answers plainly. Sixty-five percent agreed that God accepts the worship of all religions. Sixty-six percent agreed that everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature. Scripture says otherwise in so many words:

> **John 14:6** *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*
>
> **Acts 4:12** *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*
>
> **Romans 3:10** *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*
>
> **Romans 3:11** *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*
>
> **Romans 3:12** *They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*
>
> **Romans 3:23** *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

These figures are for all Americans, not churchgoers alone, and they are corroboration only. But they describe a nation in which a great many people have heard the name of Christ for years and do not know what scripture plainly says.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on claim T, large majorities hold beliefs that plain scripture contradicts, and fewer than half of Christians strongly affirm the Bible's accuracy.

B. Scripture's Own Picture

Scripture has words for believers who are born again but not grown up, and it speaks of them with patience, not contempt:

> **1 Corinthians 3:1** *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

> **1 Corinthians 3:2** *I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*
>
> **Hebrews 5:12** *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*
>
> **Hebrews 5:13** *For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.*
>
> **Hebrews 5:14** *But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*
>
> **Ephesians 4:14** *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

"Babes in Christ." "Such as have need of milk." "Tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." This is not a description of unbelievers. It is a description of believers who have not been taught — who should, by this time, be teachers, but need someone to teach them again "the first principles."

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim T, scripture describes believers who remain babes when they are not fed the word.

C. Not Their Fault

The heart of this study is not to blame these believers. Many have sat faithfully for decades in churches that gave them warmth, music and encouragement, and never once opened the scriptures with them, verse by verse, at a table, letting them ask questions. They were never equipped to do the work of the ministry (Chapter 5 §D), because the structure did not need them to. It needed them to attend and to give. They did both, gladly.

The remedy is what it always was:

> **Acts 17:11** *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*
>
> **2 Timothy 2:15** *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

The Bereans "searched the scriptures daily." Timothy was told to study and to rightly divide the word. Neither needs a building, a stage, or a budget. Both need a Bible, a believer, and someone willing to sit beside him.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claims T and G, the remedy for untaught believers is the searching of scripture together, which the household provides.

In Short

Many believers are truly born again but have been left on milk. Large numbers hold beliefs plain scripture contradicts. It is not their fault; the structure needed their attendance more than their growth. The remedy is the Berean one: searching the scriptures together, daily.

Chapter 14 — The Pattern for This Administration

Part Four turns from what went wrong to what God has given. This is the heart of the study. Everything before it was meant to clear the ground for it.

A. A Household, Not an Audience

In this administration of grace, God's house is His people (Chapter 1). They gather where people live — in homes — small enough to know one another and be known, small enough that every need is seen (Chapter 2). When a home is full, there is another home. The whole of a city's believers may gather together on occasion, as at Corinth, but the life of the church is lived at the table.

Nothing in this requires permission, property or a budget. It requires a believer willing to open his home, and others willing to come.

Weighing it: Strong inference — on claims G and H, scripture's pattern for the church's gathering is the household meeting in homes.

B. Every Member Fed, Every Member Contributing

The gathering scripture describes is one in which every member takes part:

> **Ephesians 4:15** *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*
>
> **Ephesians 4:16** *From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

"By that which every joint supplieth." The word of God is central, read and taught and discussed, with questions welcome:

> **Colossians 3:16** *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

And the teaching is to be accurate and diligent — the word **"rightly dividing"** (2 Timothy 2:15), searched **"daily, whether those things were so"** (Acts 17:11), and preached **"in season, out of season"** (2 Timothy 4:2). The aim is not a pleasant hour but grown believers, able in turn to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim G, every member is to supply something, with the word dwelling in them richly.

C. Servants Who Lead, Travellers Who Equip

Each household is cared for by mature believers raised up from within it, known by their lives, serving and not ruling, not for gain (Chapter 5). Those with gifts for wider service travel, teach, equip and move on, leaving each household in the care of its own and commending it **"to God, and to the word of his grace" (Acts 20:32)**. No one stands between the members and Christ, the head.

Weighing it: Strong inference — on claims G and L.

D. Giving That Reaches People

With no property to carry, the household's giving goes where scripture sends it: to the relief of saints in need, to doing good to all, and to the support of those who labour in the word (Chapter 6; *The Tithe and the Church*, Chapter 8). Each gives **"as God hath prospered him" (1 Corinthians 16:2)** and **"as he purposeth in his heart" (2 Corinthians 9:7)**. The household is self-sustaining, and it helps other households in time of need.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claims G and S.

In Short

In this administration God's house is His people, gathered in homes, every member fed and contributing, cared for by servants and equipped by travellers, giving so that every gift reaches a person. None of it needs property or permission.

Chapter 15 — Outward and Inward, in Balance

The household of God has two callings, and it needs both: to reach those outside, and to build up those inside.

A. Publicly and from House to House

Paul summed up his own years at Ephesus this way:

> **Acts 20:20** *And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,*
>
> **Acts 20:21** *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

"Publickly, and from house to house." "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks." Outward and inward together. Acts 5:42 says the same of the apostles at Jerusalem: "in the temple, and in every house."

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim G, the apostles reached outward and taught inward together.

B. Especially the Household of Faith

Paul's rule for doing good holds both together in one sentence:

> **Galatians 6:10** *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

"Unto all men" — the outward calling. "Especially unto them who are of the household of faith" — the inward one. Neither cancels the other.

Weighing it: Direct statement — on claim G.

C. Neither Swallowing the Other

The apostles guarded this balance from the beginning. When the daily care of widows threatened to take all their time, they would not **"leave the word of God, and serve tables" (Acts 6:2)**. They found others to serve, and **"the word of God increased" (Acts 6:7)**.

The same danger runs both ways today. A church can be so busy with its programs, its building and its weekly event that it never equips its members to speak to a neighbour. And a believer can be so eager to reach outward that he neglects his own household's growth in the word. The household meeting in a home, teaching one another, and each member speaking person to person at work and among neighbours (Chapter 4), keeps both in their place.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claim G.

In Short

The household of God reaches outward, person to person, and builds up inward, house to house. Do good to all, especially the household of faith, and let neither crowd out the other.

Chapter 16 — For the Believer Today

This chapter is counsel, not law. Scripture gives a pattern; it does not give a rulebook for every household, and this study will not write one. What follows is offered to help a believer who has read this far and asks, "What now?"

A. Wherever You Sit, Be Fed

Whatever church a believer attends, nothing stops him from searching the scriptures daily, like the Bereans. Read the word for yourself. Test what you hear by it (Acts 17:11). Find even one or two others who will read and discuss it with you. That small table is already the household of Chapter 2.

Weighing it: Narrative — counsel; carries no weight on the question itself.

B. Open a Home

If you can, open your home. A meal, a Bible, and an evening is enough. Let every one take part. Pray together for each other's needs. When there are too many for the room, help another believer open his. Nothing more is needed to begin.

Weighing it: Narrative — counsel.

C. How a House Assembly Might Handle Its Giving

A worked example may help. It is an illustration of scripture's principles, not a rule.

Picture a household of twelve believers meeting weekly in two homes. They own no building and pay no rent. They agree on three things:

1. **Relief first, and direct.** When one of them, or a neighbour, is in need — a lost job, a hospital bill, a widow's roof — those who are able give directly to meet it. A small common purse may be kept for this, held openly by one or two trusted members and accounted for to all, **"providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:21)**.

2. **Support for those who labour in the word, openly.** If one among them gives much of his time to teaching, or if a travelling teacher serves them, they share with him **"in all good things" (Galatians 6:6)** — openly, willingly, by agreement, not by fixed percentage.

3. **Help for other households in need.** When believers elsewhere are in hardship, they send help, as the churches of Macedonia and Achaia did for Jerusalem (Romans 15:26).

There is no budget to meet, no building fund, and no pressure. Each gives as he purposes in his heart. Every gift reaches a person.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — on claims G and S, an illustration of scripture's principles applied to a house assembly.

D. Love Those Still in the Systems

Most believers in organised churches love the Lord and are loved by Him. Many pastors in them are faithful, and underpaid, and tired. A believer who sees what this study describes is not given licence to despise them. **"Let all your things be done with charity" (1 Corinthians 16:14)**. Share what you have learned gently, if they ask. Pray for them. Help them as you can.

Weighing it: Narrative — counsel.

E. Free from Guilt, Either Way

Finally, a word of freedom. A believer who stays in an organised church, out of love for its people or because he finds the word there, is not sinning by staying. A believer who leaves to gather with others in a home is not sinning by leaving. Scripture gives a pattern, and it is a good one, but it does not bind

consciences with a new law. **"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Galatians 5:1)**. What matters is that the believer is fed, that he grows, that he serves, and that Christ is his head.

Weighing it: Narrative — counsel.

In Short

Wherever you sit, be fed from the word. Open a home if you can. Let giving reach people, openly. Love those still in the systems. And whether you stay or leave, stand in the liberty of Christ.

Chapter 17 — Closing

A. What This Study Does Not Mean

It does not mean that buildings are sin, that pastors may not be supported, that large churches cannot be faithful, or that believers in organised churches are not true believers. It does not ask anyone to leave anywhere. It does not lay down a new law.

It does mean that the household of God, as scripture gives it, is a people gathered in homes, every member taking part, served by its own, self-sustaining, reaching outward one person at a time, with Christ alone as head; that men, through the centuries, replaced that household with an institution that cost much, ruled much and taught too little; and that the pattern God gave is still available to any believer who wants it.

Weighing it: Narrative — closes the argument.

B. What Would Change This Study's Mind

A study that cannot say what would overturn it has not tested itself. These findings would, and a reader is invited to look for them:

1. **A New Testament text directing believers to own, build or fund a building as the church**, or to gather in one as a matter of obedience. That would overturn claim H.

2. **A text placing the support of an organisation or its property above the relief of the saints**, or naming a third purpose for the church's giving besides relief and the support of those who labour in the word. That would overturn claim S.

3. **A text making the size of an assembly a mark of God's approval.** That would weaken claim T.

4. **A text appointing a permanent ruler over a city's elders or over the churches**, passed to a successor. That would overturn claim L.

None of these is in the text, as far as this study has found.

Weighing it: Method, not argument — names what would count against the study.

C. Where This Study Began

It began with Christ the head and His household, and it ends there:

> **Ephesians 2:19** *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;*
>
> **Ephesians 2:20** *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;*
>
> **Ephesians 2:21** *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*
>
> **Ephesians 2:22** *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

"Ye are… of the household of God." Not a building, not an organisation, not an audience. A household, built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. That is what God wanted. It is still what He gives.

Weighing it: Narrative — closes the study.

In Short

This study does not condemn buildings, pastors or believers. It shows what God gave — a household with Christ as head — what men made of it, and that the pattern is still available. Four specific texts would overturn it, and none has been found.

Appendix A — History and Figures in Detail

The chapters state these findings in a sentence so the reader can keep reading. The detail and sources are here. All of it is corroboration only.

1. The Early Witnesses (Chapter 7)

The *Didache* (c. A.D. 100) chapters 11-13 govern travelling apostles and prophets: one day's stay, two if needed; three days, or asking for money, marks a false prophet. A true prophet who settles is "worthy of his support," and receives the first-fruits; "if you have not a prophet, give it to the poor" (13). Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67 (c. 155); Tertullian, *Apology* 39 (c. 197); Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans* 8 (c. 110); Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church* 6 (c. 251). Quotations in Appendix C.

2. Dura-Europos (Chapter 7 §D)

A private house in block M8 of Dura-Europos, Syria, built about A.D. 232/233 and converted to Christian use probably around 240/241; abandoned in the Persian siege of 256 and buried under a Roman

defensive ramp. Excavated 1931-32; the earliest identified house church. Its assembly room measured about 12.9 by 5.15 metres.

3. Constantine to Theodosius (Chapter 8)

Constantine's letter to Anulinus exempting clergy from public duties: Eusebius, *Church History* 10.7. Edict of Thessalonica, 27 February 380. Priscillian executed at Trier about 385, at the prosecution of bishops Ydacius and Ithacius, with Martin of Tours protesting: Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History* 2.46-51. Damasus and Ursinus, 366: Ammianus Marcellinus 27.3.12-15. Council of Chalcedon (451), canon 2, against ordination for money.

4. The Division of Church Income (Chapter 8 §E)

The fourfold division — bishop, clergy, poor, repair of churches — is quoted as traditional by Popes Simplicius (475) and Gelasius (494), and by Gregory the Great in his answer to Augustine of Canterbury (Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.27), later entering Gratian's *Decretum*. Reported in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* article "Church Property."

5. Tithe Law (Chapter 8 §F)

Second Council of Mâcon (585); Charlemagne's capitulary of Herstal (779). See *The Tithe and the Church*, Appendix A §6.

6. Medieval and Reformation Persecution (Chapter 9)

Donation of Constantine: an eighth-century forgery, exposed by Lorenzo Valla in 1440. Jan Hus burned at Constance, 6 July 1415. Indulgences for the rebuilding of St Peter's; Johann Tetzel; Luther's Ninety-five Theses, 1517. William Tyndale strangled and burned at Vilvoorde, near Brussels, 1536. Felix Manz drowned at Zurich, 5 January 1527. Michael Servetus burned at Geneva, 27 October 1553. Mary Dyer hanged at Boston, 1 June 1660, one of four Quakers executed there 1659-1661.

7. Pew Rents (Chapter 10 §B)

Pew renting was a principal source of church income in Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian churches from the seventeenth century into the early twentieth, especially in the United States, where there was no state tithe. Opposition grew in the 1840s-1850s; the Free and Open Church Association was founded in England in 1866.

8. Modern Figures (Chapter 11)

- Faith Communities Today 2020, "Facts on Finance" (2022): median attendance 65; median income $120,000 (from $150,000 in 2010); 44% of budgets to staff; 66% of congregations under $100,000; 4% over $1 million, attended by 51% of weekly attenders.

- 2026 Southern Baptist Church Compensation Study (Lifeway/GuideStone/state conventions): personnel average 45% of budget (42% under 50 attenders; 50% over 250); 63% of congregations provide no health insurance for the senior pastor.
- Lifeway Research, National Survey of Religious Leaders (2025): 47% of evangelical pastors bivocational (28% in 2001); 35% of clergy overall.
- empty tomb, inc., *The State of Church Giving*: benevolences 21% of congregational spending in 1968, 16% in 2015; member giving 3.02% of income in 1968, 2.17% in 2015.
- Hartford Institute megachurch report (2020): about 580 churches of 1,800+ weekly attendance; average budget $5.3 million.
- Senate Finance Committee (Grassley) review of six broadcast ministries, 2007-2011; final review released 6 January 2011.
- Facilities and missions percentages in §B are budgeting rules of thumb from church-administration publishers, not survey results.

9. Surveys on Choice and Belief (Chapters 12-13)

- Pew Research Center, "Choosing a New Church or House of Worship" (2016): among those who looked, quality of sermons 83%, feeling welcomed 79%, style of services 74%, location 70%.
- Pew Research Center, "The Digital Pulpit" (2019): 49,719 online sermons from 6,431 churches; median 37 minutes; 95% named a book of the Bible.
- Lifeway Research and Ligonier Ministries, State of Theology (2025), 3,001 U.S. adults: 65% agree God accepts the worship of all religions; 66% agree most people are good by nature.
- Barna Group, Bible reading trends (November 2025): 50% of self-identified Christians read the Bible weekly; 44% strongly affirm its total accuracy.

Appendix B — Weight of Each Argument

Every load-bearing argument in the study, grouped by claim (Introduction §F).

Claim H — The church gathered in homes

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
1	The temple was the Law's provision, and could not contain God	Ch. 1 §A	Direct statement	God commanded a costly house — agreed, for that administration
2	Jesus foretold worship without a place	Ch. 1 §B	Direct statement	John 4 concerns Samaria — true of its setting; the principle is general
3	God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands"	Ch. 1 §C	Direct statement	Denies confinement, not meeting — agreed

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
4	God's house, temple and habitation are now His people	Ch. 1 §D	Direct statement	Metaphors do not forbid buildings — agreed; they leave nothing for a building to be
5	The church's own life was "from house to house"	Ch. 2 §A	Direct statement	They also met in the temple — see row 10
6	"The church that is in their house," four times; no building	Ch. 2 §B	Direct statement	Circumstance, not command — fair; it is the only pattern recorded
7	The gathering was participatory and table-centred	Ch. 2 §C	Strong inference	Large churches have small groups — they can
8	Many houses in one city; multiplying when full	Ch. 2 §D	Reasonable inference	The whole church sometimes met in one place — in Gaius's house
9	A house makes every need visible	Ch. 2 §E	Reasonable inference	Jerusalem's church numbered thousands — need was still known person by person

Claim O — Public places served outreach

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
10	Temple and synagogue were for preaching "to the Jew first"	Ch. 3 §A-B	Direct statement / Reasonable inference	Jewish believers also kept temple custom — granted
11	Acts records the turn to the Gentiles three times	Ch. 3 §C	Direct statement	Not disputed
12	The only hired places served outreach	Ch. 3 §D	Strong inference	Renting for the assembly may be practical — scripture records none
13	The gospel spread person to person and house to house	Ch. 4 §A-B	Direct statement	Not disputed
14	Personal witness is the part of the pattern that carries forward	Ch. 4 §C	Reasonable inference	Public preaching is still lawful — agreed

Claim L — Local servants, travelling equippers

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
15	Elders raised up in every assembly, plural	Ch. 5 §A	Direct statement	Not disputed
16	Qualified by character known at home	Ch. 5 §B	Direct statement	Not disputed
17	Servants, not lords; not for gain	Ch. 5 §C	Direct statement	Not disputed
18	Leaders equip; members minister	Ch. 5 §D	Strong inference	Weekly preaching equips — if the saints then minister
19	Travellers established and moved on	Ch. 5 §E	Strong inference	Jerusalem's settled apostles — the stated exception
20	No standing ruler over a city; Diotrephes rebuked	Ch. 5 §F	Strong inference	Timothy and Titus — delegates for a task, recalled

Claim S — Self-sustaining assemblies

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
21	Believers worked to have enough and to give	Ch. 6 §A	Direct statement	Not disputed
22	Elders laboured to support the weak	Ch. 6 §B	Direct statement	"Double honour" — agreed; both stand
23	Giving went to relief and teachers; no third purpose	Ch. 6 §C	Direct statement	No buildings existed to fund — fair; every gift still reached a person
24	Outside help came only in crisis, as equality	Ch. 6 §D	Direct statement	Not disputed

Claim D — The drift from household to institution

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
25	Men would arise within to draw disciples after them	Ch. 7 §A	Direct statement	Concerns doctrine — and leadership: "after them"
26	Early witnesses still sent gifts to people	Ch. 7 §B	Corroboration only	—
27	One bishop set over each city; salvation tied to his church	Ch. 7 §C	Corroboration only	Done to guard against heresy — agreed; the remedy did not match scripture
28	Constantine created a privileged clergy	Ch. 8 §A	Corroboration only	—
29	The basilica turned a household into an audience	Ch. 8 §B	Corroboration only	Converts needed space — houses could have multiplied

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
30	Bishops used the state to kill (Priscillian)	Ch. 8 §C	Corroboration only	Charges included sorcery — the cause was religious
31	A bishop's chair worth killing for; offices sold	Ch. 8 §D	Corroboration only	—
32	Fourfold division: poor one share, buildings one	Ch. 8 §E	Corroboration only	—
33	Tithe made law	Ch. 8 §F	Corroboration only	—
34	Power, forged claims, indulgences, the sword — by every side	Ch. 9	Corroboration only	Failures of their age, since renounced — agreed
35	Reform kept the institutional form	Ch. 10 §A	Corroboration only	—
36	Pew rents ranked believers by wealth	Ch. 10 §B	Corroboration only	—
37	Traditions change; the structure stays	Ch. 10 §C	Reasonable inference	—
38	Size is never scripture's measure	Ch. 10 §D	Strong inference	Growth is good — agreed; size is not the measure
39	The move to institution was a chief way the adversary worked	Ch. 10 §E	Reasonable inference	The change had stated human causes — good men can build what scripture did not give
40	Mustard seed and birds	Ch. 10 §E	Corroboration only	Read simply as growth — both readings stated

Claim T — Today's church economy and presentation

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
41	The share reaching people fell as the institution grew	Ch. 11 §A	Corroboration only	—
42	Most income goes to staff and buildings; one dollar in six leaves	Ch. 11 §B	Corroboration only	—
43	Building and institution take a quarter to a third first	Ch. 11 §C	Reasonable inference	Buildings serve the community — real good; does it need the building?
44	Many pastors underpaid and uninsured	Ch. 11 §D	Corroboration only	—
45	The same structure produces luxury at its top	Ch. 11 §E	Corroboration only	A few do not represent the many — agreed
46	Half the sites read lead with experience and belonging	Ch. 12 §A	Corroboration only	—
47	Welcome and style weigh nearly as much as preaching	Ch. 12 §B	Corroboration only	Welcome is commanded — agreed; keep it serving people

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
48	Sermons used scripture but leaned on story; half had money appeals	Ch. 12 §C	Corroboration only	Small sample; illustrations help — both true
49	Attendance-dependence pressures toward what pleases	Ch. 12 §D	Reasonable inference	Many preach faithfully and grow — the pressure is real even where resisted
50	Beliefs plain scripture contradicts are widespread	Ch. 13 §A	Corroboration only	All adults, not only churchgoers — stated
51	Scripture describes untaught believers as babes	Ch. 13 §B	Direct statement	—

Claim G — The pattern for today

#	Argument	Where	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
52	The household meeting in homes is scripture's pattern	Ch. 14 §A	Strong inference	—
53	Every member fed and contributing	Ch. 14 §B	Direct statement	—
54	Giving that reaches people	Ch. 14 §D	Direct statement	—
55	Outward and inward together	Ch. 15	Direct statement	—
56	A house assembly's giving, worked through	Ch. 16 §C	Reasonable inference	An illustration, not a rule — stated

Appendix C — Early Witnesses Quoted

All translations are from the public-domain *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series (as given at newadvent.org), the Loeb translations of Ammianus (J. C. Rolfe, 1940) and Julian (W. C. Wright, 1923), and are quoted for history, not for doctrine.

> **Didache 11** — *"Let every apostle that comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet… But whoever says in the Spirit, Give me money, or something else, you shall not listen to him; but if he says to you to give for others' sake who are in need, let no one judge him."*
>
> **Didache 13** — *"But every true prophet that wills to abide among you is worthy of his support… Every first-fruit, therefore, of the products of wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, you shall take and give to the prophets, for they are your high priests. But if you have not a prophet, give it to the poor."*

> **Ignatius, To the Smyrnaeans 8** — *"Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast..."*
>
> **Justin Martyr, First Apology 67** — *"And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need."*
>
> **Tertullian, Apology 39** — *"The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary."*
>
> **Cyprian, On the Unity of the Church 6** — *"He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother."*
>
> **Eusebius, Church History 10.7** — *"...who give their services to this holy religion, and who are commonly called clergymen, be entirely exempted from all public duties, that they may not by any error or sacrilegious negligence be drawn away from the service due to the Deity..."*
>
> **Julian, Letter 22** — *"For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galilaeans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us."*
>
> **Ammianus Marcellinus 27.3.15** — *"These men might be truly happy, if they would disregard the greatness of the city behind which they hide their faults, and live after the manner of some provincial bishops, whose moderation in food and drink, plain apparel also, and gaze fixed upon the earth, commend them to the eternal Deity and to his true servants as pure and reverent men."*

Appendix D — How the Sermon Sample Was Taken

Which churches. The congregations were drawn from the Florida and Alabama church lists used for this library's outreach. For each, a search was made for its recent recorded sermons, and one or two were chosen: the most recent available sermon or service with a usable transcript. Fourteen recordings from eleven congregations were used — Baptist, Methodist, Calvary Chapel, Church of God, Pentecostal and non-denominational. Twelve were preached in 2026; one in 2023; one in 2018. Some were full services, including music and announcements; for those, the longest continuous speaking portion was taken as the sermon.

How they were read. The automatic transcripts were cleaned and counted for length and for scripture references (a book of the Bible followed by a chapter number). Each was then read at four points spread through the sermon, and as a whole where needed, to judge whether it was built around a passage of scripture or around a topic, how it opened, and whether it included appeals tied to money or buildings.

What it can and cannot show. Fourteen sermons are a small sample, and not a random one. Automatic transcripts contain errors, especially in names and references. Counting references measures citation, not depth. The sample can show patterns — how sermons open, what they lean on, what they ask for — but it cannot measure all preaching, and it is used here only as corroboration. The transcripts are kept in this study's research folder.

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Sources Consulted

This study is built from scripture. The King James Version is the base text throughout, and every quotation has been checked against it. The works below were consulted for history and present-day fact. None carries scriptural weight.

The Holy Bible, King James Version. The base text.

This library's companion studies. *The Tithe and the Church* (pod-V6); *In Vain Do They Worship Me* (pod-V14); *Save Yourselves From This Untoward Generation* (pod-V24); *The Seven Administrations of Scripture*.

Early church writings, in public-domain translation: the *Didache*; Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*; Justin Martyr, *First Apology*; Tertullian, *Apology*; Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*; Eusebius, *Church History*; Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History*; Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*; Julian, *Letters*; Council of Chalcedon, canons. Corroboration only.

Reference works. *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1908-1914), "Church Property"; published accounts of the Dura-Europos excavation, the Edict of Thessalonica, the Donation of Constantine, and the lives of Hus, Tyndale, Manz, Servetus and Mary Dyer; studies of pew renting.

Present-day research. Faith Communities Today 2020 ("Facts on Finance," 2022); Hartford Institute for Religion Research, megachurch report (2020); empty tomb, inc., *The State of Church Giving*; Lifeway Research, 2026 Southern Baptist Church Compensation Study and National Survey of Religious Leaders (2025); Pew Research Center, "Choosing a New Church or House of Worship" (2016) and "The Digital Pulpit" (2019); Lifeway Research and Ligonier Ministries, State of Theology (2025); Barna Group, Bible reading trends (2025); news reports of the Senate Finance Committee ministry review (2011). Corroboration only.

Church websites and recorded sermons. Eighteen church websites and fourteen recorded sermons from congregations in Florida and Alabama, read November 2026. Not named, by design (Introduction §C).

Scripture Index

Exodus 25:8 Chapter 1 §A

1 Kings 8:10-11 Chapter 1 §A

1 Kings 8:27 Chapter 1 §A

Psalms 22:22 Introduction §D

Matthew 13:24-25 Chapter 7 §A

Matthew 13:38-39 Chapter 7 §A

Matthew 20:25-28 Chapter 5 §C

Matthew 24:1-2 Chapter 1 §B

Matthew 26:52 Chapter 9 §C

Mark 7:8-9 Chapter 10 §C

Mark 7:13 Chapter 10 §C

John 4:21 Chapter 1 §B

John 4:23-24 Chapter 1 §B

John 14:6 Chapter 13 §A

Acts 2:42 Chapter 2 §A

Acts 2:46-47 Chapter 2 §A

Acts 4:12 Chapter 13 §A

Acts 4:32-35 Chapter 2 §E

Acts 5:20-21 Chapter 3 §A

Acts 5:42 Anchor Passage

Acts 7:38 Introduction §D

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Acts 10:24 Chapter 4 §A

Acts 10:44 Chapter 4 §A

Acts 12:12 Chapter 2 §A

Acts 13:46 Chapter 3 §A

Acts 14:21-23 Chapter 5 §A

Romans 16:5 Chapter 2 §B

Romans 16:14-15 Chapter 2 §D

1 Corinthians 3:1-2 Chapter 13 §B

1 Corinthians 3:16 Introduction §D

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Chapter 1 §D

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Chapter 1 §D

1 Corinthians 11:20-22 Chapter 2 §C

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