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Pastor John, in episode 912 of this podcast — titled: “Paying Pastors, Church Buildings, and Weekly Sermons?” — you skipped right over the question about house churches and meeting in buildings. And many savvy listeners wrote in to point that out to us — nothing gets past our listeners! So do you have any particular views when it comes to whether or not the church should meet in house churches?

Okay, not a problem. Yes, I have views. I think the Bible has something to say. I will summarize my view in six observations. I don’t think they are very controversial. I think they are easily supportable. So, here we go — and people can judge for themselves.

1) First, the church in the New Testament as the New Testament teaches about the church is people, not places. The word *church* in the New Testament is a translation of the word *ekklesia*, which means “called out ones” or “assembly.” It never refers to a building or place. The English word *church* is an interesting word. Where did that come from? It came from the old English *kirch* or *kirche* like in the Scottish *kirch*, and it comes from the Greek *kuriokos* which means “belonging to the Lord.” So, the word *church* means “belonging to the Lord” in its etymological origin, and could refer to a place or could refer to a people. So, that is where the English word *church* comes from and doesn’t prove anything about where a people should meet.

But in this whole discussion, it is utterly crucial to keep in mind that, in the New Testament, nothing is said about the church’s place and much is said about the church as people. And just to give a few examples, in [Matthew 16:18](#), Jesus says to Peter, “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” That was not a building he is talking about. Or in [Matthew 18:17](#) in church discipline he says, when all private entreaties fail, “tell it to the church.” That doesn’t mean “talk to bricks.” In [Acts 9:31](#), it says, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.” And in [Acts 13:1](#), it says, “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers” meaning, among the people, those were some of the gifted folks. So, that is my first observation. The church in the New Testament is always — without exception — people, not places.

2) My second observation is that the New Testament portrays local churches, that is, local assemblies, gatherings of the universal church in a local place, and the expression of the universal church gathered in a local place. It portrays these churches often as gathering in homes. So, in [1 Corinthians 16:19](#), “The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings.” [Colossians 4:15](#), “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.” [Philemon 2](#), “[I write to] Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in

your house.” So, it is clear that, in the earliest days of the church, the church regularly met in homes.

3) Don't overstate that, or idealize that fact, because we know that houses were not the only venue for church gatherings. In [1 Corinthians 11:17](#) and [22](#), Paul says, “In the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for better, but for worse. . . . What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” In other words, he is saying: You are getting together someplace other than your houses and you are eating in a way that shames those who don't have a lot to eat and you brought a big basket and you are eating it. Go eat in your homes, not where we are gathering as church. So, it seems to me pretty clear that people were leaving their homes and going to some common place of assembly for gathering of the church service, whatever it was.

4) Nowhere in the New Testament is it commanded or forbidden that local churches meet in homes. It is perfectly acceptable that they do and acceptable that they don't. This is not something God thought it wise to regulate. No doubt, I think, in part because of the incredibly diverse cultural situations the church would find itself in for the next two thousand years: under trees, in garages, in stores, in cellars, in caves, in cathedrals, in homes.

5) Therefore, in all of those differing cultural situations, leaders of the church should seriously think through and pray through the relative advantages and disadvantages of place and location given the nature and goals of the church, whether they should limit their gatherings to homes or rent a space or purchase a space or build a space. And we should be really slow to judge the decisions that are made here since God, it seems to me, has been pleased to bring great awakenings and massive church growth during times with and without church buildings. He is not limited in that way, and woe to the denomination or movement that presumes to say architecture, buildings, location is the key to the dynamic of the almighty spread of God's kingdom.

6) And the final observation is that, whatever the limitations are culturally — it is pretty hard to get a space in downtown San Francisco, Vancouver, Manhattan, because you have to pay a million dollars for a tiny, little place. And, of course, I just read this morning as I was praying through Operation World that in Libya there is a law that forbids any religious gathering over six people. Well, that is pretty limiting, and you don't have to obey that law since it is not biblical, but you might want to obey it and spread the gospel that way.

So, whatever the limitations are culturally, financially, legally, it is a wonderful and fitting and helpful thing when local churches can find both small expressions of fellowship and mutual ministry, one-another ministry, and larger gatherings for worship and encouragement and witness. And I think it is significant that [Acts 5:42](#) says, “Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus,” which seems to imply that there was an early sense of need that there be both larger and smaller gatherings.