

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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“House” – “Household” and the Lord’s Supper

(Jerry Fite)

The Greek word “*oikia*” denotes an “*inhabited dwelling*” in the New Testament. How we understand the word is determined by its context. For example, when the wise men came to see Jesus, as they entered “*into the house,*” they “*saw the young child with Mary His mother*” (Matthew 2:11). The house was not only a literal structure, but it also housed inhabitants. Sometimes “the house” denotes only the inhabitants. When Jesus healed the nobleman’s son, who was near death, the father “*believed*” and “*his whole house*” (John 4:53). The house of wood, stone and mortar did not believe, but we correctly understand all the inhabitants dwelling in the house believed.

The root Greek word, “*Oikos,*” also denotes the family designation in the New Testament. Paul identifies the church as “*...the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15). The church is described as the “*house of God*” or as “*the household of God.*” The imagery directs our mind’s eye to a supporting structure with foundation and pillars. The united family aspect of the called-out people of God is established to support the Truth of God.

The “house” and “household” denote the “private” side of comparisons, when contrasted with “public” places of gathering in the New Testament. For example, Paul addressed the elders of the church in Ephesus reminding them, “*...how I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Acts 20:20-21). Some assume that Paul went from one “house church” to another “house church” in Ephesus ministering to God’s people with the word. It is an assumption without proof. In this context Paul is reminding the Ephesians that he not only taught the word in public places, but also in private homes.

This “private-public” contrast is not an anomaly in the book of Acts. After the apostles were beaten for preaching Christ, they, “*every day in the temple and at home*” did not stop teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:42). We correctly understand the apostles did not stop preaching publicly (in the temple) and privately (at home). When the church was first established, they were “*day by day continuing steadfastly with one accord in the*

temple, and breaking bread at home...” (Acts 2:46). They were meeting publicly in the temple for teaching and meeting in private homes to eat their food together as joyful united Christians.

In correcting an abuse, Paul asked a rhetorical question: “*What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?*” If you lived in Corinth you would know that the logical answer would be, “Yes.” When the church in Corinth was founded, there was more than one house inhabiting individual Christians and their families. Crispus “*believed in the Lord with all his house*” (Acts 18:8). Stephanas and his household were “*the first fruits of Achaia*” (1 Corinthians 16:15). And Gaius is noted as Paul’s host, probably offering hospitality to a newcomer in his own home as he did from time to time with the whole church (Romans 16:23).

The Lord’s supper was to be partaken when these people left their own private homes and came together in the assembly of the established local church to eat. (1 Corinthians 11:33-34). Christians continue to do so today. Like Corinth, we gather together in a place large enough to accommodate the assembly of the established local church to partake.