Success Without a Successor is Failure

Earlier we quoted a passage that explained why our Lord chose Abraham: “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Genesis 18:19). When our Lord tells us men, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), isn’t He directing us to raise up spiritual successors also? We fathers exasperate, that is, frustrate our children by not teaching and role-modeling for them a life of trust-filled obedience to God’s Word.

Succeeded by Godly Generations

Consider the diligence of raising up spiritual successors that our Lord commanded of the Israelites. Do you think he has lessened His standard for us Gentiles—especially for us who are empowered by His indwelling Spirit?

• “These are the commands the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe

• so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands.

• Impress them on your children.

• Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:1-7).

Have your children learned religious forms, or are they learning obedient trust in Jesus? Is their trust in our Lord and in His Word a way of life, or is their religion an activity categorized away from other aspects of their lives?

Children of the Spirit

In Israel when a boy has his Bar Mitzvah he becomes a “son of the commandments.” He is now personally responsible to God for his own obedience.

At what age and in what way should we prepare our children to be personally responsible to the Holy Spirit?
Support System: Gathering in Homes
Source: Restoring the Early Church, & Pastoring by Elders

[Please see the next page for an explanation of the diagrams below.]

Gathering of Home Fellowships

- Relationships Paramount
- Intergenerational
- 7 day-a-week commitment
- Biblical Authority

Scheduled & unscheduled meetings
Recreational pastimes shared
Extended family

Congregation with Small Groups

- College & Career
- Homogeneous & Affinity Groups
- Singles Group

Single Parents
Bible Study
Worship Team
Athletic Interests

Strong relationships optional

No authority
Scheduled meetings
Activities Paramount
On the next few pages we will explain why our Lord prompted our Hebraic ancestors to gather in homes as well as tend to their obligations at the Temple. Gathering in homes preceded the Church, and was adapted for the same reasons our Hebraic forerunners came together.

Important Distinctions of Home Fellowships

• In the early Church, home fellowships represented a *seven-day-a-week commitment* of the followers of Jesus to one another. Strong relationships were crucial, and involved much more interconnectedness than a meeting-a-week could provide.

• Fellowship in homes represented an *extension of the home*, not a programmed activity of a larger congregation. This is an important distinction, one that is vital if you are to understand the significant relational progression outward from *Jesus*—to spiritual growth in the *home*—to intimacy with *fellow load-bearers* in a home fellowship— to gatherings of worshipers in *congregations*.

• The home fellowship is the avenue by which the *wisdom of the older men and women* can be incorporated into the lives of younger men and women. This is the means by which the Hebraic elders had their most profound effect on the lives of the less mature. Because of the intimacy that is grown and nurtured in a home fellowship, loving correction can be given to those who act foolishly in their responsibility toward God and toward others. One reason for the home fellowship was to strengthen families. Our Hebraic forefathers knew that a marriage could not make it on its own. A couple needed the relational support system of spiritual extended family. The intergenerational makeup of a home fellowship also permitted the development of successors to lead in the future.

  Authority to include or exclude, to commend or correct was given to the elders to shepherd the flock so that they could provide the all-important *gatekeeping* function—protecting from wolves of deceit, false doctrines, and unrighteousness.

• A home fellowship *supports the home as the basic building block* of spiritual development. If parents are not leading the way in their own home by establishing some sort of regular spiritual focus with their family, don’t expect a home fellowship to provide a “Sunday school” program to do it! Children really do need to see *their parents* as their primary spiritual authority—a privilege and responsibility that’s right out of Scripture!

*Congregation with Small Groups*

In contrast to the loadbearing relationships of extended spiritual family in home fellowships, small groups that are a subset of a congregation are characterized by the following:

• Rely on scheduled activities. Spontaneity of interaction among people is minimal.

• Groups are often homogeneous, with people of common interests, age, or life situation [such as divorced, recovering alcoholic, etc] the reason for the group’s existence.

• Authority considered undesirable. False assumption that “We’re all Christians” means that “We’re good people”, and nothing will go wrong among us.

• People look to a building as “the church” rather than the *ekklesia*, the “called-out ones”, being the church of Jesus wherever they are during the week.
Fellowship In Homes — Our Hebraic Heritage

Our research showed that every practice we see in the New Testament was already occurring among our Hebraic forefathers before the time of Christ. For instance, 200 years before the coming of Jesus, a number of rabbis had been teaching, “You must be born from above.” The verses below indicate the norm of meeting in homes:

“So every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46,47)

“Greet also the church that meets at their house” (Romans 16:5)

“Greet Aquila and Priscilla warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house” (1 Corinthians 16:19)

“Greet also Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home” (Philemon 2)

Why Did God Have His People Meet in Homes?

Purpose #1: Communal Responsibility for Sin

Our Hebraic forefathers recognized that God held them communally responsible. They knew from their own history that God chastised more than just the person who sinned and failed to repent. For instance, “When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin” (Joshua 22:20).

Our Father’s Criteria for Answering Prayer

He hears the righteous but closes His ears to the prayers of the wicked or unrepentant.

“The Lord is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 15:29).

“Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1,2).

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).
The Basic Nature of Man is to Sin

• How many children did Adam and Eve raise in the Garden of Eden?
• What happened to Cain, the firstborn child?

God knew that the nature of man is to do evil:
“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5).

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8,9).

Upholding Communal Righteousness By Confronting Sin in Your Home Fellowship

A congregation or gathering of home fellowships is too large to have sufficient relational intimacy to uphold righteousness. A home fellowship in which the elder(s) know each one personally and can render account to the Father for each individual is intimate enough for righteousness to be maintained so that God will receive glory from answered prayer.

• If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

• But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

• If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church [called out ones];

• and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:15-20).

God didn’t design His people to be eggs whose shells rub against each other. He desires scrambling, which calls for commitment and interconnected accountability. This is where the 53 “one-anotherings” of the Newer Testament come in.

How does “your brother sin against you”? When a person in a home fellowship sins and fails to repent, not only will his or her prayers go unanswered, but also those of everyone in the fellowship with them. This happens even while they are apart during the week. If a group is used to upholding righteousness through confession and having their prayers answered by the Father, it doesn’t take much to realize the “faucet has been shut off.” There is no trouble if people sin, only if they refuse to repent. Then they sin against everyone else in the group as well as against our Father.

The Lord gives us a process for bringing a person to repentance or to eviction. Because of the seriousness of renewing our Covenant through communion, the unrepentant must be removed, a process that the church has long called “excommunication.” Because a person who goes through the entire process and refuses to repent is beyond any human help, it may be prudent for their good to turn them over to Satan to bring them to repentance: “Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5). In essence, this an act of great mercy. We are not to have ill feelings against the person, but rather to receive them back openly when they repent.