

A photograph of a brick house at night, covered in snow. The house has a dark roof and a brick chimney. A snow-covered evergreen tree is on the left, and bare trees are in the background. A wooden fence is in the foreground, and a car is partially visible in a garage on the left. The sky is dark blue.

# What Does the Bible Teach About the House Church Movement?

November 18, 2021 Indepth Bible Class  
of the Trilacoochee church of Christ

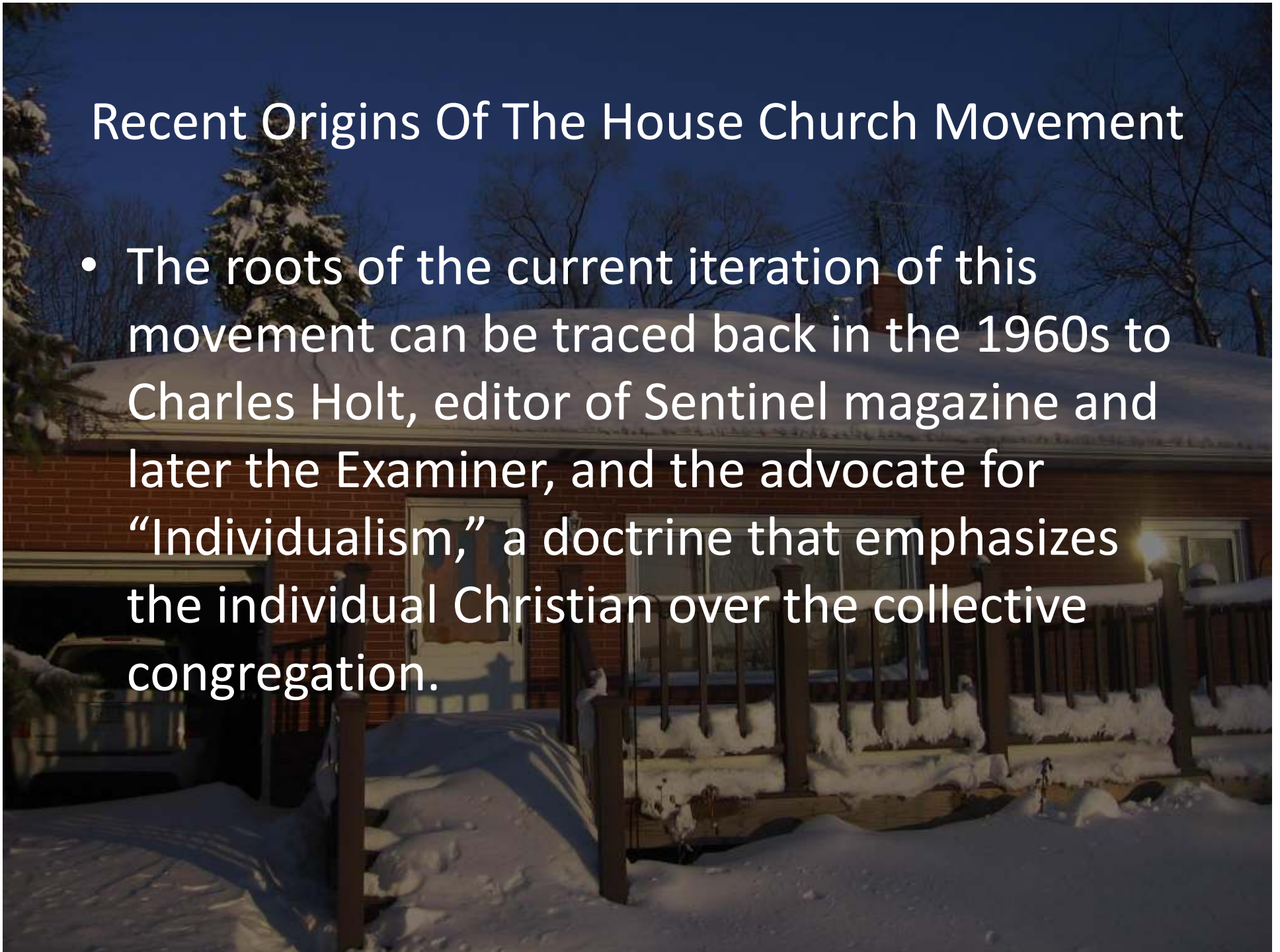
# What Is The House Church Movement?

- The House Church Movement is a theology that advocates that organized sound churches of Christ are not according to the New Testament pattern, and that Christians should meet in their homes informally for worship. *(prb)*
- House church is an informal term for a group of Christians gathering regularly or spontaneously in a home instead of a building dedicated to the purpose. Another term with the same meaning is “home church.” *(Wikipedia)*



## Recent Origins Of The House Church Movement

- The roots of the current iteration of this movement can be traced back in the 1960s to Charles Holt, editor of Sentinel magazine and later the Examiner, and the advocate for “Individualism,” a doctrine that emphasizes the individual Christian over the collective congregation.



# Recent Origins Of The House Church Movement

- His premise was built on four assumptions:
  - “We should preach Christ and not the church,” in which he advocated that there is no such thing as the New Testament church.
  - “The Brotherhood is in deep trouble,’ claiming that the organized local church is the source of this trouble.
  - The “Unity in Diversity” movement created an over-reaction in many who, rather than opposing this doctrine because it is erring, opposed it because they were intolerant and stubborn. Such persons were drawn to a Holt’s teaching that the authority of elders in a local church is unscripturally restrictive with a high potential for error.



## Recent Origins Of The House Church Movement

- His premise was built on four assumptions:
  - “The individual must be exalted at the expense of the group,” was the dominant culture influence that guided Holt and his followers. Therefore, many persons already chafing under the leadership of elders and wanting to do things their own way without objection, left local churches to worship casually, spontaneously, without oversight or objections, drawing a few likeminded persons with them. *(Jack Holt, Individualism, Truth Magazine)*

# Recent Origins Of The House Church Movement

- F Lagard Smith, “Radical Restoration,” York College, October 13, 2000, York, Nebraska: “When I was sitting, where you are sitting, at a junior college in Florida (Florida College), I had some thoughts and some ideas, some concerns that I couldn't share with a lot of people, because they were pretty unorthodox...”
- “As long as we get the function right, then the form isn't so important. Well, form may be important, of course, with baptism and with the Lord's Supper, but apart from that, I don't know what's important to him. Maybe instruments are up for grab, maybe gender roles can be changed... What I'm talking about here are small congregations that are like the "stealth bomber". You can't see them! They're stealthy! No building! No sign! No yellow pages! They may not even know the other people in town in a large city. May not know where they meet. All you've got is something happening--a movement that's taking place!”



## Recent Origins Of The House Church Movement

- F. LaGard Smith on House Churches: “Maybe that’s where it all went wrong in the first place. Maybe the church should never have left home” (143).
- “There seems to be little question but that first-century Christians met together in small groups as house churches” (148).
- “The house church... was also a natural setting for edification and exhortation” (150).
- “Historically, of course, we know that it was not until the third century that Christians began to erect what we today would recognize as church buildings. Piecing together archeology and history, it appears the primitive church typically met in a room (sufficiently large enough for probably 40-50 people) in the house of a wealthy member” (148).

## Recent Origins Of The House Church Movement

- “In the house church, the role of official clergy virtually vanished in the midst of a simple fellowship meal. As did the structured ritual and liturgy. And sacrosanct tradition” (151).
- “There is nothing to rule out the possibility that the role of elders in the early church might well have encompassed more than one level of involvement -- even simultaneously. Perhaps there were elders shepherding the disciples in each house, depending upon their size and make-up. And perhaps elder oversight may have been exercised throughout a group of house churches which collectively comprised a larger, recognizable ‘congregation.’ More thought-provoking for us, of course, is the third possibility -- that elders in individual house churches might also have come together as a group of city-wide elders to discuss matters of importance to the entire community of believers.... Nothing necessarily precludes ‘Jerusalem’s elders’ from being gathered from among elders in a multiplicity of house churches” (178).



# The House Church Movement Is Different Than The New Testament Church

- Where did Christians meet in the first century?
  - In the temple - Acts 2:46
  - By a river side - Acts 16:13
  - School of Tyrannus - Acts 19:9
  - An upper room - Acts 20:8
  - Government housing - Acts 28:30-31
  - Synagogue - James 2:2



# The House Church Movement Is Different Than The New Testament Church

- And yes, in the homes of Christians
  - Acts 5:42 - “daily in the temple, and in every house”
  - Acts 12:12 - “the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying”
  - Acts 20:20 - “taught you publicly and from house to house”
  - 1Cor. 16:19 - “Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house”
  - Rom. 16:3-5 - “Likewise greet the church that is in their house”
  - Col. 4:15 - “Greet ... Nymphas and the church that is in his house”
  - Philemon 1-2 - “to the church in your house”



# The House Church Movement Is Different Than The New Testament Church

- The command to assemble implies a place of assembly; however, the place is not specified, but is an expedient.
- Expedient means whatever best facilitates the purpose of assembly and the needs of those who assemble.
- Whether it is a home, store front, school, rented office, barn, or church building is not specified.
- Since it is not specified, to object to the use of a church building mandates that the burden of proof falls to the one making the objection, and there exists no scriptural objection to the use of a meeting house for worship.

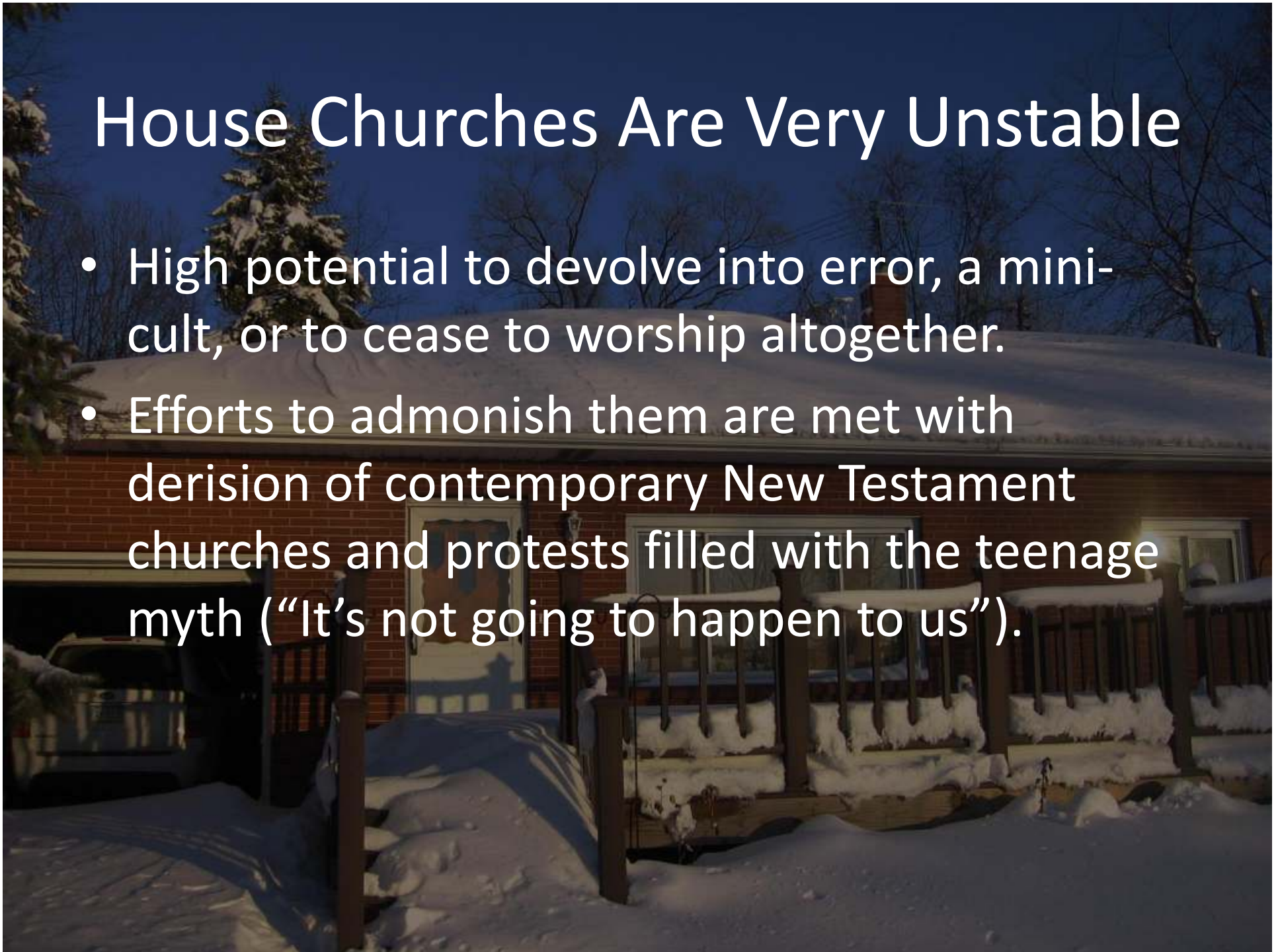
# House Churches Are Very Unstable

- Separated themselves from important, scriptural grounding mechanisms
  - No Bible based oversight, no elders, usually one person leadership
  - No consistent teaching and preaching, Bible study is spontaneous and random
  - No broad base of Bible knowledge, very little opportunity for increased understanding
  - Typically led by a single individual with few objecting to or able to oppose his errors or hobbies
  - Highly casual approach to worship eventually leads to decline in Biblical pattern and purpose for worship
  - Blurred lines between fellowship in worship and social interaction



# House Churches Are Very Unstable

- High potential to devolve into error, a mini-cult, or to cease to worship altogether.
- Efforts to admonish them are met with derision of contemporary New Testament churches and protests filled with the teenage myth (“It’s not going to happen to us”).



# In Contrast, New Testament Churches:

- Had preaching of the Gospel in assemblies
  - 2Cor. 1:19 - “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me, Silvanus, and Timothy”
  - Rom. 1:15 - “So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.”
  - Col. 1:28 - “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”



# In Contrast, New Testament Churches:

- Had structure of orderly worship
  - 1Cor. 14:1-40 - “40 Let all things be done decently and in order.”
- Had an authorized organization
  - Phil. 1:1 - “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”
- Were identified with Christ
  - Rom. 16:16 - “The churches of Christ greet you.”

# In Contrast, New Testament Churches:

- Had all members working together taking part
  - Rom. 12:4-6 - “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them...”
  - Eph. 4:11-16 - “16 ...the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share...”



# Biblical Christianity Depends On The Local Church

- The church is an indispensable part of the New Testament
  - Matt. 16:18-19 - “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”
  - Acts 2:47 - “The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”

# Biblical Christianity Depends On The Local Church

- Salvation is in the church
  - Acts 5:14 - “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”
  - 1Cor. 12:13 - “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”
  - Gal. 3:26-27 - “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ ... you are all one in Christ Jesus”
  - 2Tim. 2:10 - “I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus”



# Biblical Christianity Depends On The Local Church

- Many commands given to the Christian depend on involvement in the local church for completion
  - Acts 20:7 - “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread”
  - 1Cor. 16:1-2 - “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”
  - Eph. 5:19 - “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”
  - Heb. 10:24-25 - “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

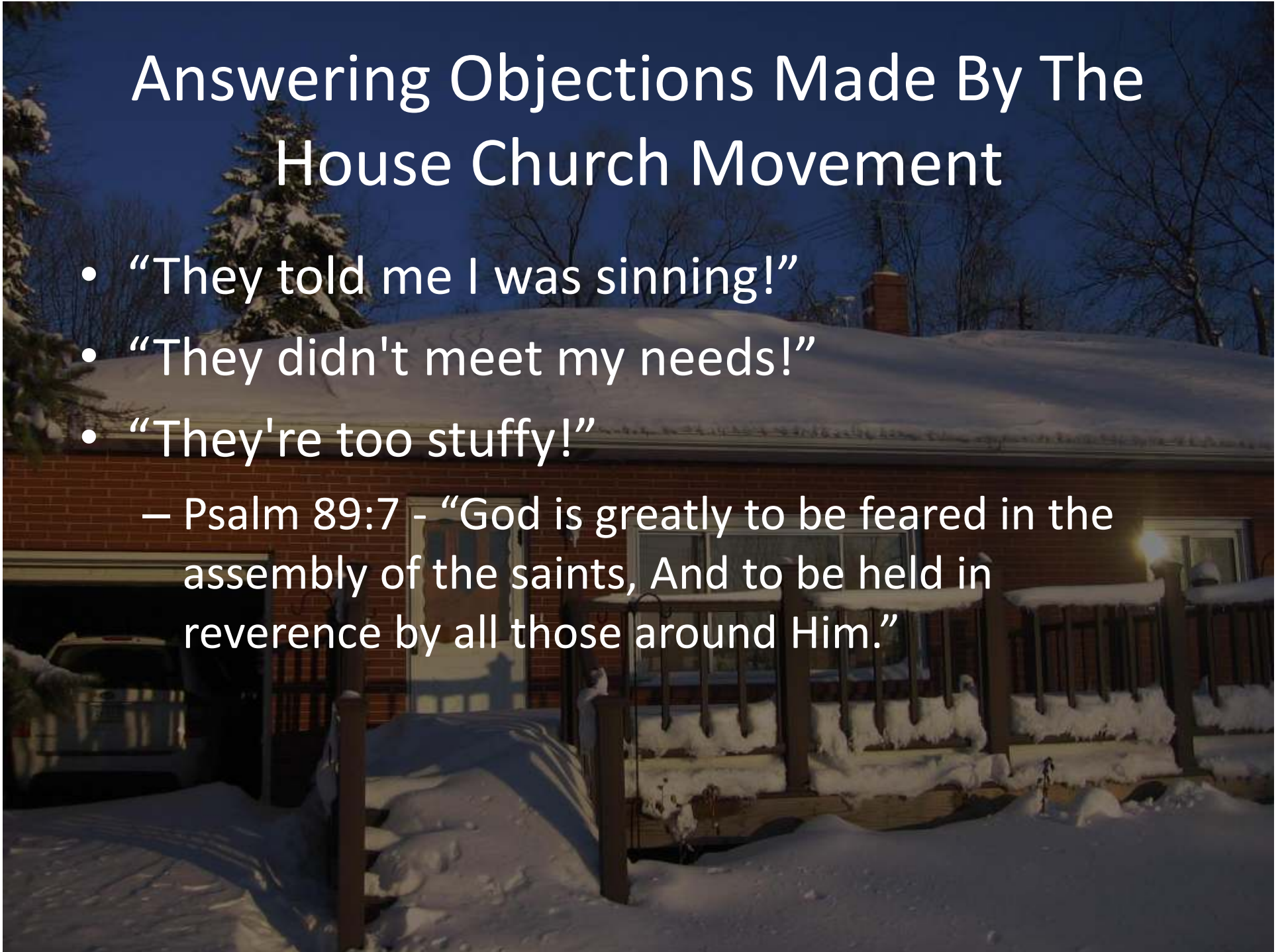
# Answering Objections Made By The House Church Movement

- “They told me what to believe!”
- If the local church is faithfully teaching what is written in the word of God, then I need to believe it whether I like it or not
  - 2Cor. 5:20 - “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God”
  - Acts 20:27 - “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”



# Answering Objections Made By The House Church Movement

- “They told me I was sinning!”
- “They didn't meet my needs!”
- “They're too stuffy!”
  - Psalm 89:7 - “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all those around Him.”



# What Does the Bible Teach About the House Church Movement?

The House Church Movement is yet another in a long line of dangerous over reactions to a few congregations who may have forgotten the Lord's will for the work, worship, and organization of the church. The answer to a local church that has drifted is not to generate another type of church with an even higher potential for error; but to help them to return to the Lord's way. This will require patience, prayer, and wisdom. Answering an erring spirit with a rebellious one will not work, nor will it ever be acceptable to the Lord.