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House Church Thoughts, Cell phones in house church

2013-03-29, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

From time to time a single issue arises from multiple house churches in the network, so I know it must be an issue to many more, and there is an issue I've been asked about a lot in the last month:

Use of cell phones in a house church meeting.

Many of us, myself included, have one or more Bibles on our smart phones - and often there are Bible related app's as well - concordances, word studies, etc.

A typical situation:

House church is well underway with a lively discussion and study taking place, when everyone notices 1 or more people texting or playing games, when everyone else has (pick one) paused, looked up, or become involved in the discussion, so that the person playing the game or texting stands out like a sore thumb and is immediately revealed for not being engaged.

The person leading is frustrated at the rudeness of that person, and the others present become disappointed they have chosen a video game over discussing and studying God's Word.

The scriptures that cover this include I Corinthians 14:26-33, where Paul talks of social courtesies while attending a meeting of the church in someone's home.

Its in the Greek, really!

These include taking turns, not dominating a conversation, if you don't have an opportunity to share then remain quiet and keep it between you and the Lord, and somewhere in the Greek I'm sure in the fine print, is something like 'and if someone doth text thee while in the meeting, thou shalt not be rude to those present, but putteth it away that you showeth full attention to thy brothers and sisters.'

In each situation I've been asked about, the issue of people being offended at being asked to turn cell phones off, or silent, or refrain from texting and games during meetings comes up.

It is sad that many who call themselves by the name of our Lord also have the thinnest skin and wear their feelings on their shoulders for all to see. Yet bringing it up as a group and providing context of cell phone manners in the general public can help:

We turn our cells on silent at movies and refrain from looking at them when they buzz in our pocket?
We turn phones on silent at restaurants.

There is a sign to 'turn cell phones off' at the local driver's license branch.

We turn our cell phones off or silent at doctor's offices, business meetings, any number of situations in day to day life and we turn phones off or on silent - so why would people be offended at being asked to be polite in a meeting of the body of Christ?

It is because we are asking to go beyond silent, to issues of self-control - not gaming or texting while 'churching'. Can you see a billboard: "Don't text and church" like so many 'Don't text and drive' notices.

If they are offended, they have deeper issues and have a choice to do right, or leave - pretty simple.

How to handle?

Depending on whether it is continually just 1 person doing it or a larger issue that all from time to time text and/or play video games while in the meeting, you could either gently go to the single person privately and let them know their texting is a distraction and very noticeable, and ask them to stop - or bring it up to the whole body if all have been guilty at one time or another.

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Because it is so prevalent in society, I'd advise as a whole house church, go over I Corinthians 14:26-33 and talk about Corinth's situation - Acts 18 reveals 3 cultures thrown together in Justus' house, and some of them needed instruction on basic manners of what it means to be a guest in someone's home, and how to act while in a small group in someone's home: Taking turns, deferring to another, controlling themselves (what they say or don't say, prophesy or don't prophesy), not dominating conversation, etc.

Then tie this teaching to updated manners - cell phones included, how if a person must respond to a text (like they're going to be late to granny's 96th birthday party) then leave the room to do so. And in general exhibit the self control required to not play video games during the meeting.

If you are taking the time to go over I Corinthians 14:26-33 admonition of 'decently and in order' and 'God is not the author of confusion', then just take a minute to bring it up using today's accepted manners of society as above - we turn them off in movies, restaurants, doctor's offices, government offices, business meetings - so turn them off during meetings of the body of Christ or otherwise use them only as it relates to the meeting.

Fear of offense

The greater issue many times is leaders fear leading - because it doesn't come naturally to them - meaning they are as much afraid as offending as they are miserable at letting a person continue to be rude. I'd encourage leaders to step up, shake off the fear of offense, and politely and gently bring the issue to the body.

IF someone does get offended, as I said earlier, they have larger issues - this is an opportunity for them to grow up, for it is Christ asking them to grow, and if they don't then their offense is at Him, not you.

And if all else fails, plaster your home with 3 dozen big signs saying 'turn cell phones off', and pictures of a cell phone with a big line through it - but maybe just including cell phone manners as part of a larger teaching will help bring everyone up to speed, and for those who are distracted along with you, they will be relieved you brought it up and will support you in the discussion, so that you are not alone.

Blessings,

John

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