

THE CHURCH IN YOUR HOUSE

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus. Likewise greet the church that is in their house” [Rom. 16:3, 5]

“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house” [Col. 4:15]

*The Nigerian-born Miss World 2001, Agbani Darego, was asked at one stage of the competition what three items she would carry if she were left alone in the desert. She replied that she would carry a **Bible**, water and blanket. It is not surprising that she won because even God would have been pleased with her wise answer! She chose the Bible (for her spirit) and water and the blanket (for her body). In a way, we live in a desert of lack and other earthly problems compared to our permanent home in heaven. But could we speak about our abodes as Miss World 2001 has done?*

When we choose a house in which to live [by owning or leasing], we pay a great deal of attention to its facilities: kitchen, bedrooms, toilets, living room, study, playgrounds, etc. However, those things can only give us bodily comfort. How many of us consider adding a place of worship (a church or chapel) for our spiritual needs? Of course, we do pray at home, and conduct Bible study and prayer sessions there. But we do those things either in the living room or bedroom or in the open space outside, not in a specific place dedicated to God! We could as well eat our meals in the study but we hardly do so! The question then is this: do you have a church in your house?

There must be something about it because “except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it” [Ps. 127:1]. Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, had a church in their house [Rom. 16: 5]. So did Nymphas of Laodicea [Col. 4:15]. For Paul to mention it, he might have worshipped there during his missionary journeys. When the Jewish exiles in Babylon were threatened with destruction during the reign of Darius, Daniel “went into his house; and his windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before God, as he did aforetime” [Dan. 6:10]. John’s second epistle was written to “the elect lady and her children,” in which he rejoiced greatly “that I found of thy children walking in truth” [2 Jn 1, 4]. He even promised to return to her household and “speak face to face, that our joy may be full” [v.12]. It sounds obvious that her house might also have had a church where she and her children were quite active.

The pressures of modern living have encroached on our ability to go to church as often as we want. A church in the house may provide some vital relief. In today’s lesson, we shall examine the subject with a view to learning how to use it for our own spiritual upliftment.

1. What is a church?

The word, church, comes from the Greek word, *ekklésia*, which means “the called out ones.” The term has come to be applied to the following:

a) The body of Christ

God has given His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, “to be the head over all things to the *church which is His body*, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” [Eph. 1:22-23]. Thus, the collectivity of all believers constitutes the church for “now ye are the body of Christ, *and members in particular*” [1 Cor. 12: 27]. It is instructive that no matter our denominations, we all are of “one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” [Eph. 4:4-6].

b) A specific denomination

When we ask people where they worship, the likelihood is that they will mention their denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, one of the numerous Pentecostal or spiritual churches, etc. Even in the early church, such divisions were already beginning to manifest themselves. It worried Paul a great deal to hear people say, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ” [1 Cor. 1:12]. In most cases, it is more a question of theological than ideological differences since we all use the same Bible, not minding the numerous versions!

c) A building

David says, “I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord” [Ps. 122:1]. The local church is in most cases a building that has been dedicated to the worship of God. There, services, Bible studies and other related activities are carried out.

A celebrated building in the Bible is the temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem. After the building had been dedicated, God appeared to Solomon by night and assured him:

If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now Mine eyes shall be open, and Mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen this house, that My name may be there for ever: and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually [2 Chron. 7:14-16].

Solomon had earlier recognized that no man is able to build God a house, “seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. Who am I then, that I should build Him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before Him?” [2 Chron. 2:6]. Therefore, the purpose of setting a place apart as a place of worship is not to house God for “God is Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” [Jn 4: 21, 23]. Instead, it is to help us to recognize when we are stepping on holy ground, and to accord God the reverence and adoration that He deserves, for “the Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him” [Hab. 2:20].

d) A place in the house

A specific part of the house, for example, a room, may be set apart for use as a chapel or church. Just as we use the toilets for their specific purposes, so also should we use the said room or place specifically as a church or prayer room. Jesus said during His sermon on the mount, “when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret” [Matt. 6:6]. That suggests apartness.

We have already seen the examples of churches in the homes of Aquila and Nymphas cited by Paul. When Peter visited Simon the tanner in Joppa, he wanted to say his midday prayers but, apparently, his host did not have a prayer room. What did Peter do? He went to the rooftop to pray! [Acts 10:5,9]. It was during that prayer that God showed him a vision of his coming ministry to the household of Cornelius the Roman officer.

In this discussion, the use of the term, church, will refer to the last mentioned type, i.e., the church in the house.

2. Significance of a church in the house

The following reasons can be noted, among others:

a) It is a source of blessings

Jesus has said, “where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” [Matt. 18:20]. A husband and wife together already meet that promise. Adding the children is a big bonus! Therefore, a church in the house will promote the family’s desire to worship together.

Soon after David was installed king, he attempted to bring the ark of the Lord (the symbol of God’s presence among His people) into Jerusalem. However, following the death of Uzzah whom God had punished for putting out his hand to steady the ark on the oxen-driven cart, it was left in the house of Obbedom and “the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obbedom the

Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obbededom, and all his household” [2 Sam. 6:11]. Certainly, Obbededom did not put the ark in the kitchen! He must have put it in a place that had been set aside and revered as holy ground.

b) A temporary place of worship on moving to a new location

When we move to a new location, such as another part of the country or another part of the world where churches (especially our denomination) may not be readily available, a little church in the house can be quite handy. A friend of mine was once on a military course in an Asian country where Christians are hardly found. In the absence of a church nearby, he had to designate one of his bedrooms as a church.

Daniel was one of the Jewish exiles in Babylon where idol worship was the national religion. When Darius made a decree to destroy those who refused to pray to him, Daniel “went into his house; and his windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before God as he did aforetime” [Dan. 6:10]. So, there was a church in his chamber and he used it quite often for worship. Why look towards Jerusalem? Solomon’s temple was there and God had promised the people of Israel that He would perpetually answer prayers offered in that temple [2 Chron. 7:16].

While the disciples were waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, they used an upper room in the living quarters of Peter and some other Apostles where they “all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren” [Acts 1: 13-14].

c) A sanctuary for itinerant ministers

When we invite a visiting minister of God to sojourn with us while on a missionary journey, a church in the house will be a good attraction. Paul has attested to that by his greetings to Aquila and Priscilla, and Nymphas.

The Shunammite woman used to serve food to Elisha and his servant, Gehazi, each time they passed through their town. One day, she said to her husband, “I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither” [2 Kgs 4:8-10]. Now, for those of us who may think that they do not have enough space in their homes, here is a good example. In that one-room accommodation, Elisha was provided a bedroom (bed), a study (table and stool) and a church (table and candlestick)! When much later, the woman’s son died, it was to that room that she brought

his corpse while she went looking for the man of God. James has said, “is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him” [**Jam. 5:14**]. The Shunammite woman sent for the elders of the church in her house and she received a miracle!

d) The womb of a major ministry

Think of how the church has survived persecution through the Dark Ages and Communist suppression, and then you will appreciate the role of little prayer cells disguised from public view in homes. The *Shroud of Turin*, the cloth with which Jesus was buried, has outlived every odd for 2,000 years because families took pains to preserve it in their homes and local churches! Therefore, that small prayer room in our homes could turn out to be the womb of an unfolding worldwide ministry.

Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, were Jews who had lived in Italy. They were tent makers like Paul. When Emperor Claudius commanded all Jews to leave Rome, the couple moved to Corinth. When Paul came to Corinth, he lived with them [**Acts 18: 1-3**]. They had the privilege to hear the true message because they accompanied Paul in his journeys to Syria and Ephesus. Paul left them in Ephesus on his way back to Jerusalem [**vv. 18-21**]. While they were in Ephesus, Apollos came to preach in their synagogue.

*This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue; whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly [**Acts 18:25-26**]*

This is the same Apollos that later commanded a large following [**1 Cor. 1:12**] and of whom Paul said, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” [**1 Cor. 3:6**]. It was the church in Aquila and Priscilla’s house that God used to give Apollos’ ministry the true direction.

3. Conclusion

Scripture has made it quite clear that the prosperity of the soul should precede that of the body, and that in deed, the former produces the latter [**3 Jn 2; Matt. 6:33**]. For too long, we have shut God out of taking a permanent residence in our homes whereas Jesus is standing at the door and knocking, seeking who will open so that He can come in and dine with us [**Rev. 3:20**]. It is true that we are the temples of the living God, that we pray in our homes and read His word every day, the same way that we wash and eat in the same homes daily. But if we can provide a parking space for our vehicles, a wardrobe for our clothes and a pen for our dogs, why can’t we set

aside a place of worship for our God? *CNN* may be a global network but only those who have cable television can watch it! Let us, therefore, be wise because “except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it” [Ps. 127:1] and “those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing” [Ps. 92:13-14].

Don't be discouraged by lack of space. Even if it is in your bedroom, make sure that God's house there is set apart from the rest of the room, and so respected. The blessings can be enormous, and I am speaking from personal experience!