

# “MY CHURCH, MY HOUSE”

Most Christians think that a church is just an institution and a place of religious activities. A place that we are suppose to be blessed and receive spiritual nourishment, that whenever we are no longer blessed, our needs and expectation are not being met, then we have the right to transfer from one church to another church. This idea is a shallow understanding of what the church really is. They over look and never see the truth, that the church of God is *a house*. A house is a place where family lives, eat together, fellowship and develop a strong relationship.

The bible clearly teaches that the church *is a house and a household of God*.

*“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God...”*

*(1 Peter 4:17a)*

*“But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”*

*(1 Tim. 3:15)*

*“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”*

*(Eph. 2:19)*

*“Samakatwid, hindi na kayo dayuhan o taga-ibang bansa, kundi kababayan ng mga hinirang Diyos at kabilang sa kanyang **sambahayan** (sambahan + bahay).”*

*(Efeso 2:19) TPV*

Our understanding about the church must goes deeper from a place of receiving to a *place of sharing*. The church is not just a place of worship but also a place of *relationship*. The reason why many Christians lack commitment is their perception that a Church is just a place where worship services are held. We can see Christians with this attitude for those who appear only during Sundays. They just come and go. They never consider that their seatmates are *real brothers and sisters*. The word brother and sister are just a title when they call one another. They never devote themselves nor develop an atmosphere of a family among other member of the house. These Christians can easily leave the church and ran away when things go wrong. Why? Because they have nothing to loose, to consider or relationship to value with.

The church today must go back to the kind of church that Jesus built in Jerusalem.

*“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.*

*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

*Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.*

*Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.*

*So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.”*

*(Acts 2:41-46)*

The church that Jesus built is a church that has a family culture.

*“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.*

*Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold.*

*And laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”*

*(Acts 4:32,34 & 35)*

The Lord use the relationship of a family in the church to show how important the presence of one another. Everyone needs a family. None of us can live happily without a family. We feel secure and strong even we are in the midst of the storm when the members of our family are around us. As Filipinos, we value our family so much that wherever we are and how busy we are we always go home when the sun had set.

It is not only important that we have a house [church] but we should also develop and give ourselves to a family commitment in that house. In other word, we are part of the family in whatever church we commit ourselves into. That we will love and accept people just as they are; we will stay there until the Lord takes us home; we will release forgiveness for those who hurt us; we will support every program and activities of the house. We will draw ourselves close to the other members of the house and we will be part whether of the strength and weakness of the house because they are part of us and we are part of them. The question now is where is your house? Are you committed to that house? If you have none, find a good one and when you find it commit yourself to the people of that house for they are your spiritual family.

## **RELATIONSHIP MATTERS**

What makes a family a good family? Simple, the quality of relationship that exists in the house, as a song says, *“A house is not a home and a home is not a house.”* To make the house a home each of us who are members should know how to behave properly and exhibit the components that made up of a good home such as love, acceptance, forgiveness, understanding... etc.

## **THERE MUST BE LOVE**

Love is the number one factor which contributes to the quality of life we have in our family. There is no such thing as perfect church. Therefore every member of the family must filled their hearts with love because love forgives, accepts, understand the un-understandable and bears each other.

*“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”*

*(Col. 3:12-14)*

*“Do not owe people anything, except always owe love to each other, because the person who loves others has obeyed all the law. The law says, ‘you must not be guilty of adultery. You must not murder anyone. You must not steal. You must not want to take your neighbor’s things.’ All these commands and all others are really only one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ ‘Love never hurts a neighbor, so loving is obeying all the law.”*

*(Rom. 13:8-10)NCV*

*“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, and it is not proud. Love patiently accepts all things. It always trusts, always hopes, and always remains strong.”*

*(1 Cor. 13:4,7)NCV*

*“Hatred stirs up trouble, but love forgives all wrongs.”*

*(Prov. 10:12) NCV*

## **FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER**

Real love forgives. None can say he knows what love is when he is not willing to forgive. The more we get closer the more an opportunity that we can hurt each other whether intentional or unintentional. Therefore one must be willing to forgive others because staying together requires a lot of forgiving and forgetting. Aside from that is the fact that none of us is so perfect that we don’t need to ask for forgiveness or forgive others. Forgiving always does good things for us especially to one who forgives. It will set us free from the bondage of bitterness and pain from the past. This is the reason why the Lord wants us to forgive those who hurt us.

Forgiveness is a matter of choice and not of feelings. Whether we like it or not we have to forgive if we want to be happy. Because one of the robbers of happiness is the inability to forgive and forget the wrong doing of others.

The decision to leave a house [church] is the most immature decision a Christian can do. Running away is not the solution. If we always run when there’s something wrong

in the church, then we will never grow and reach the Christ like life. We will also never find peace in any church.

Every member of the family in the house today must have a covenant that they will practice forgiveness to one another; that they will not run and leave the church when their relationship is being tested. Their statement should be like this: *“Promise there is nothing that you can do or invented that I will not forgive.”* When this becomes our agreement we are indeed true disciples of Jesus and we will always be happy. We may be sad for a while but not for the rest of our life.

*“Do not be bitter or angry or mad. Never shout angrily or say things to hurt others. Never do anything evil. Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ.”*

(Eph. 4:1 & 32) NCV

*“Get along with each other, and forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you, forgive that person because the Lord forgave you.”*

(Col. 3:13) NCV

## **ACCEPT EACH OTHER**

*“Christ accepted you, so you should accept each other, which will bring glory to God.”*

(Rom. 15:7) NCV

Each one of us is unique. We have different personalities, likes and dislikes, moods and temperaments. In spite of these differences *a good and healthy church* accepts and enjoys one another. Acceptance is another expression of love. We must accept people just as they are whether we like them or not, whether they are lovable or unlovable. We accept them but not tolerate them when they have done wrong. The church must be like a home – a center of love, warmth and fellowship. A mark of a good church is when the believers are enjoying the presence of their fellow believers. This can only happen when we *learn to accept and adjust* to our differences.

When I try to insist that you should be like me, trouble begins. This is the mentality of some of us. We are trying to do the work of the Holy Spirit. To change other is not our business but God's. Our responsibility is to show them how, then it's up to them whether they want to change or not.

The best way to accept people is to change our attitude toward them. *“If I cannot change you, then it's better to change my self.”* This should be our attitude toward others, in that way we could be happy and free from disappointment and stress of life.

# BLESSINGS OF HAVING A HOUSE

*“(11) Then Jesus said, a man had two sons. (12) The younger son said to his father, ‘give me my share of the property.’ So the father divided the property between his two sons. (13) Then the younger son gathered up all that was his and traveled far away to another country. There he wasted his money in foolish living. (14) After he had spent everything, a time came when there was no food anywhere in the country, and the son was poor and hungry. (15) So he got a job with one of the citizens there who sent the son into the fields to feed pigs. (16) The son was so hungry that he wanted to eat the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. (17) When he realized what he was doing, he thought, ‘All of my father’s servants have plenty of food. But I am here, almost dying with hunger. (18) I will leave and return to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against God and have done wrong to you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son, but let me be like one of your servants.’ (20) So then son left and when to his father.*

*While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for his son. So the father ran to him and hugged and kissed him. (21) The son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against God and have done wrong to you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ (22) But the father said to his servants, ‘Hurry! Bring the best clothes and put them on him. Also, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (23) And get out fat calf and kill it so we can have a feast and celebrate. (24) My son was dead, but now he is found!’ So they began to celebrate.”*

*(Luke 15:11-24) NCV*

The story of the prodigal son reveals so many truths of the benefits we can receive when we have a house.

## A PLACE OF SAFETY AND REFUGE

There are three basic needs of men such as: foods, shelters and clothings. A house is our shelter, a place of safety and refuge, a place where we can run into whenever our life is in trouble. This illustrates thru the experience of the “*prodigal son.*”

*(15) So he got a job with one of the citizens there who sent the son into the fields to feed pigs. (16) The son was so hungry that he wanted to eat the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. (17) When he realized what he was doing, he thought, ‘All of my father’s servants have plenty of food. But I am here, almost dying with hunger. (18) I will leave and return to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against God and have done wrong to you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son, but let me be like one of your servants.’ (20) So then son left and when to his father.*

*(vv. 15-20)*

What came up to the mind of the young son? Simply, return to his father’s house! There is no safety in the street. This is the reason why we always remind our children to

go home right after their classes. Their lives are vulnerable to any danger when they are in the street especially when evening comes.

Look at the younger son, because he left the house he ended up in a pigpen. (v 15 & 16)

Nothing can replace to the safety we enjoy in the house. The reason why Jesus came back to heaven is to prepare a place for us in his Father's house.

*“Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me.*

*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

*And if go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”*

*(Jn. 14:1-3)*

## **THERE ARE INHERITANCE IN THE HOUSE**

Inheritance cannot be found in the street, only in the house. Look at the prodigal son, he received his inheritance in the house and lost it in the street. And the saddest experience is the street made him a slave.

*(12) The younger son said to his father, ‘give me my share of the property.’ So the father divided the property between his two sons. (13) Then the younger son gathered up all that was his and traveled far away to another country. There he wasted his money in foolish living. (v.12-13)*

Every house has its own inheritance from the Lord. Whatever is in the house, sons and daughters has the right to claim and use them. Every believer should understand that there are lots of things they loose when they leave the house where God called them. Every Christian should not move from one house to another house. They must have one definite house to stay with if they want to grow up in all aspect of life.

## **YOU HAVE HONOR IN THE HOUSE**

A manner of life in the street and in the house is different. You will never learn to behave properly when you are in the street, because there are no *“ethics and manner”* there. Look at the behavior of the street children; they fight in order to survive. They are potential robbers, snatchers and gang leaders. The environment of the street forces them to behave in such way. The place where they grow up has a great effect in their personality development.

The street will never groom them to be a good person. The street only teaches them how to survive. In the same way, Christians who have no house will never grow to the fullness of Christ.

## THERE ARE FOOD IN THE HOUSE

Every house has its own kind of food and the food there is free. It is available to every member of the house. And when you leave the house, you also leave the food you enjoy in the house. You cannot find it anywhere but only in your house. This is what OFW (overseas Filipino workers) miss – Filipino foods. How blessed are those who found their own houses. Different house has different food. The menu may be the same but the taste is different. Problem starts when one left his house and tries to seek what he enjoys in his house to the new found house. If you don't like to be starved, then don't leave your house [spiritual house] unless it becomes a cult and lost its accuracy.

## YOU HAVE AN ADDRESS

Where is your house? This is a question every believer must answer honestly. Your house gives you an address and identity: the place where you belong and the place where you are a member not in a roll but of a family.

Family is very important. Its always part of our life and no one can live without it. Your family is the place where you grow and a place of reference. No Christian will grow in his spiritual life if he is moving around from one house to another house. It is necessary therefore that we stick and commit our self only to one house.

There maybe rules and discipline in the house but still its good to be in the house. Many Christians are afraid and have wrong connotation with the word discipline. The word *discipline* has the purpose of restoration for effectivity with the aim of conforming to the likeness of Jesus. Whoever resists discipline resists righteousness in his life.

*“(5) You have forgotten the encouraging words that call you his children: ‘My child, don’t think the Lord’s discipline is worth nothing, and don’t stop trying when he corrects you. (6) The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as his child.*

*(7) So hold on through your sufferings, because they are like a father’s discipline. God is treating you as children. All children are disciplined by their fathers.*

*(8) If you are never disciplined (and every child must be disciplined), you are not true children.*

*(9) We have all had fathers here on earth who disciplined us, and we respected them. So it is even more important that we accept discipline from the Father of our spirits so we will have life.*

*(10) Our fathers on earth disciplined us for a short time in the way they thought was best. But God disciplines us to help us, so we can become holy as he is.*

*(11) We do not enjoy being disciplined. It is painful, but later, after we have learned from it, we have peace, because we start living in the right way.*

*(Heb. 12:5-11)NCV*

There are no discipline in the street. The street will make you a criminal but the house will make you a good citizen.

A disciple is a discipline person. No one becomes a good disciple without passing the road of discipline. What made him a good disciple is the discipline he underwent. Let us be thankful when the father of the house disciplines us whenever we commit sin. Discipline does well on our behalf such as:

- You are loved and accepted as sons and daughter (v. 5 & 6)
- Prove you as sons and daughters (v. 7 & 8)
- You learn respect and submission (v.9)
- Discipline is for our benefit and profit (v.10)
- Discipline produce a life of righteousness (v. 11)
- Discipline becomes a training for righteousness (v. 11)

In other word, discipline produces development and quality on our spiritual stature.

## **YOU HAVE FAMILY IN THE HOUSE**

There is no place like home. Wherever you go, home is the most important place in your life. Home is the place where everyone wants to go after work, after school, after a job, after a contract as OFW, after a tiring trip around the world. We may ask why? The simple answer is because the most important people in our life are there – your family.

Family is very important. No one can be happy and live normally without them. Men were created with the purpose of connection. We are not only spiritual beings but also social beings. We need to connect and relate to other people in order to become a normal human being.

Your family is where your connection should starts. They are the kind of people who can love and accept you just as you are. People who can have patience and accept you no matter what life may bring and whatever happened to you. They are the people who will always be on your side no matter what. Therefore our connection first should be on our own family where we eat together, laugh together, fellowship together...

Togetherness is what makes a true family. There are some who are in the house but their hearts are not connected to the people there. This should not be our attitude to our fellow brothers and sisters.

Together with our presence is the connection of our heart to them. We should not only "*kasambahay*" [*kasama sa bahay*] but also "*kapuso*." In other word, your heart must be where your house is. We never pattern our life with what the song says, "*I left my heart in Sn. Francisco*." When we have such kind of experience then we don't need the house where we stay now, as well as they don't need us. Please be in a place where our hearts is.

# COMMITMENT IS A MUST

It is not enough that we have a house. We must have relationship to the people. Each member of the house must be connected to one another. We should not be happy because we are in a good house. Be happy if you belong and member of the family in that house. In other word one should *be committed* to other family members of the house. We should understand that the purpose of living in one house is to be *built up*. We cannot be built if we keep distance from others.

*“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

*(1 Peter 2:4,5)*

The bible calls us living stones. Why living stones? Because *living stones has the ability to grow and fill the space so that it fit to other stones*. What the house of God need today are living stones, not dead stones. Dead stone has no ability to adjust or adapt to other stones. If one believer says, *“I don’t like to be hurt, the reason why I never commit myself to my church or any church”* Then he is not a living stone.

Imagine if a church is composed of dead stones [people who are not committed to one another] that church sooner or later will going to collapse.

The word *commit* come from the Latin word *committere*<sup>1</sup> means *“to connect”*, *“entrust.”* A person who is committed is connected and entrusting himself to other members of the house. Commitment is very important in any relationship. Without it relationship is shaky, swallow, has no strength and can easily disband when things go wrong. It has no ability to work out on differences and weaknesses of others. For a relationship to last, commitment is the basic foundation that should be lay down. We never become a member of the house because we are water baptized there but rather we are committed there.

## HOW TO BE COMMITTED?

To be part of a spiritual family, one should take the necessary action that requires commitment such as:

- *A Decision To Join And Draw Close With Others*

It is the person’s responsibility to be a part of a Local Church. It is his decision neither the pastor’s nor the membership committee to join and be part of a family. The basis of his decision is a belief that he was called to such family and his desire to be part of the family. Therefore, the act of closeness is an action that a person should be taken.

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<sup>1</sup> *Miriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition 1993*

He must close himself to the other members of the house or else he is not part of it – he is just an attendee.

In order to be built and be closely knit together, a person should *intentionally come and allow himself to be molded* as part of the house. To be able to do this his heart must be connected to the heart of other member of the house. Commitment goes beyond physical presence but a “*heart to heart*” connection. In other word a person may be physically present but heartily absent.

*“Come to the Lord Jesus, the ‘stone’ that lives. The people of the world did not want this stone, but he was the stone of God chose, and he was precious. You also are like living stones, so let yourselves be used to built a spiritual sacrifices to God. He will accept those sacrifices through Jesus Christ.”*

*(1 Pet. 2:4 & 5) NCV*

One cannot be molded and fitted to the other member of the house if he is not connected nor come close to the other part of the house. He should be like *a living stone*, not a dead stone. A living stone has the capacity to grow and fit to other living stones.

Closeness goes beyond attending church service. It requires social responsibility and companionship toward others. Look at the attitude of the early believers in Jerusalem.

*“They spent their times [devote themselves] learning the apostle’s teachings, sharing [fellowship] breaking bread and praying together.”*

*(Acts 2:42) NVC*

People who just come and go after the service are not demonstrating the desire to be part of the family. Word of God says, that we *should spent time together* – praying as well as playing together; eating together; laughing together... the key is being together and this is to be done *intentionally and regularly by everyone*. If a person wants to be part of a spiritual family, he should make every effort to get closer to people. We should not just join or fill up membership’s application form but rather close ourselves with people in the house of God.

- *Acceptance And Allowance To People*

After joining, the second action a person has to develop towards others is acceptance.

Romans 15:7 says, *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”(NIV)*

When we join to a group our intention is not to change people but to be flexible and adopt what is already there. In other word we have to accept people just as they are, not because they are good and then leave them when they show up their real color. Commitment is like a husband-wife relationship. A relationship which is *“till death do us part.”* A believer has the right to leave the

house when it became cultic or he transferred to a very far away place, where he can no longer come to join them. He should not leave because he was hurt for it won't settle the problem nor helpful to him. He should face the problem, not to run away from the house, especially when he is under discipline. Transferring to another house [local church] is not the right solution by this time. We are not in the business of changing people. It's God's business. Don't try to find a perfect church. We will always be disappointed if we do that. What we only have today is a strong church. *A strong church is a church where people learn to accept each other in spite of their weaknesses and faults. They have the ability to adjust and they believe that God is continually working to perfect them.* When we join to a certain house, make sure that we have a room for the mistakes that other may commit against us in the process of relating with them. It is a room where you *dispose all the hurts and pain* you may experience. It is like a comfort room in our houses. When we do that we will be free from the danger of bitterness. One of the easiest ways to make room for mistakes is by giving them an allowance.

*“You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”*  
(Col. 3:13) NLT

Do not have too much expectation with our brothers and sisters that they can no longer commit mistakes. Remember this, *as long as there is relationship, there will be always conflict and the closer the relationship, the deeper the pain.* Kaya nga ang tawag sa atin ay kapatiran. Dahil ang kapatid mo ang iyong makakapatiran. Therefore, each of us should learn to give allowance for each others because as imperfect human, we can hurt each other whether intentional or unintentional. Before it happens make a *“room of mistakes”* to every member of the house. Also we should not put them inside the box dictating them *‘they must be like this or like that.’* Everyone has the right to choose what he wants to be. And we choose what brings glory to God.

- *Submission*

The third action the person has to do in committing to a house is submission. First is *submission to the current leadership.*

*“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”*

(Heb. 13:17)

The word submission means to yield to governance or authority or to permit oneself to the authority or will of another; to defer to or consent to abide by opinion or authority of another. Submission is not to give but to give in and obedience is the action of submission.

Every house is unique and has its own style of leadership. Whenever we join in any house our responsibility is not to look for the shortcomings or weakness of the leaderships but to *be loyal* to them. We will never be disappointed if we will always look to the shortcomings and weaknesses. All of us have shortcomings, a lot of shortcomings.

Our desire when we join to a certain house is to be a vital part of the family. We join not to be a divisive factor but to contribute to the unity of the body. Our *obedience* and *submission* to the leadership maintains the unity within the body of Christ. We may seem feel loosing our right but obeying our leaders does well for us. We have to obey them because they know what is best for us. We have to know and understand that our senior pastor is our spiritual father, who take care and watch for our spiritual welfare, that one day will give account before God in behalf of us.

Our pastor is also the father of the house that we should listen to and obey his voice.

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”*

*(Eph. 6:1-3)*

*“And when he[shepherd] brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”*

*(John 10:4)*

Second, is *submission to the other members of the house.*

*“...submitting to one another in the fear of God.”*

*(Eph. 5:21)*

All of us are equal in the sight of God there are no “big shot” or “*small shot*” before Him. We should learn to submit to one another, respect one another and honor one another.

*“Render therefore to all their due... fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.” (Rom. 13:7)*

*(1)“Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers,(2) older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.*

*(3)Honor widows who are really widows.*

*(17)Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.*

*(18) For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain, and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wage.’”*

*(19) Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.”*

*(1 Tim. 5:1-3,17-19)*

# OUR RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE HOUSE

## TAKE CARE OF OUR HOUSE

The first thing we do in our house is we take care of it. We do some repair, strengthening and putting some pillars when necessary. We inspect it regularly so that no termites may take over and destroy it. Termites are insects or “*white ants*” that eat woods. They form as a colony and very destructive to wooden structure and trees especially to the houses made up of woods. They eat the inner part of the wood silently and if the owner of the house is not conscious the house will soon collapses without warning.

This truth also happens in the House of God and there are some who play like “termites.” These are people who speak up and spread out words against their brothers and leadership, destroying their integrity and reputation. If we take care of God’s house we will never play the role of a termite. If you have something against someone our rule is, you have to go directly to the one who offended you and discuss it to him or to someone [right person] over you and not to anyone else around you nor under you and people outside our house. Termites in the house lack wisdom because they do not realize that when the house collapsed they too are one of the casualties because they are inside the house.

## WE PROVIDE THE NEED OF THE HOUSE

The early church experiences no lack because everyone shares to meet the needs in the house.

*“Now the multitudes of those who believe were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.*

*Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”*

*(Acts 4:32, 34 & 35)*

Believer today must exhibit concern and practice generosity to bless the house of God. For example, we should bring our tithes and offering whenever we worship in the house of God. This should be done regularly into our own house even we work abroad. The word of God says; bring the tithes, into the store house.

*“Bring all the tithes into the **storehouse**, that there may be food in My house...”*  
*(Mal. 3:10)*

Where should we bring the tithe?

In the storeroom of the house! In other words, our tithes is to be brought in our *own house* not to any house around you nor sent it to any mission and evangelistic ministries. There is nothing wrong to give to other ministries but make sure you already given your tithes first to your own house [local church]. Wherever it is, your tithes should be brought there. When you work abroad you should send your tithes to your house not to the new found house where you temporarily attend while staying there, unless otherwise you stay there for good. Out of gratitude you should only give an offering there, not your tithes because tithes is to your own house.

## **WE MUST PROTECT AND BE PROUD OF OUR HOUSE**

No one loves and protects the house except the people who live there. In the same way we should love and be proud of our spiritual house by protecting and defending it when there is an attack from the outside. Our responsibility is to protect our house against them by being *loyal* to one another especially to the leadership. Times are coming that relationship has to be tested. Those who remained standing are indeed real brothers and sisters and sons and daughters of the house. *“A healthy and strong church is a church that joins together in fun and in sorrow, in thickness and thinness [for better or for worst].”*

## **WE SHOULD LOVE THE PEOPLE IN THE HOUSE**

A church is composed of people with different personalities, principles and backgrounds, attained education and outlook in life. Our love with one another must be *sincere and without reservation*. The word of God encourages us to love our fellow brothers in Christ.

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

*If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*

*And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”*

*(1 John 4:7 &8, 20-21)*

We should never show partiality nor display social discrimination [racial and financial standing in life]. We must love our brothers whoever and whatever they are. Whether they are loveable or unlovable, in fact the acid test of true love is when we are able to love the unlovable.

## MAINTAIN AND GUARD THE UNITY

Each member of the house has the responsibility to make sure that peace and unity is maintained in the house. This could be done by guarding the unity. The only power that can destroy the church is when members are divided.

*“But Jesus knows their thoughts, and said to them: ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.’”*

*(Matt 12:25)*

God wants His church to walk in total unity, 1 Cor. 1:10 says, *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”* This can be done when each member of the house will keep it. Unity is not something we ask and pray for because we already have, we just simply maintain it and make sure *we live in harmony*. One of the marks of a strong and healthy church is when God’s people live in harmony. The responsibility to keep the unity within the body is never God’s responsibility nor the pastor’s but by everyone.

*“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

*(Eph. 4:3)*

*“Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

*(Eph. 4:3) NASV*

The church can keep unity when the people of God will always *live and keep peace to one another*.

The devil wants to destroy the church of God and the easiest way to do it is to divide the people within. Therefore, do not be surprise when there is an attack to the unity of the body. What we need to do is to *protect* our unity against the people who will try to destroy it, from within and outside the house.

The question is how we can keep unity?

- *By walking in the spirit of humility.*

*“With lowliness of mind...” (Eph. 4:2a)*

Pride is the number one enemy of unity. When people begin to insist what they want and their own interest, without thinking of others, unity starts to be at stake.

Humility is not being silent, it is thinking of others better than our self. It is giving regards, importance and value to others.

*“Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”*

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteems others better than himself.*

*Let each of you look out only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”*

*(Phil. 2:2-5)*

Humility is not an action or words but an attitude of the heart and mind. Our model of humility is Jesus whose main concern is not for himself but for others.

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.*

*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

*(Phil. 2:5-8)*

Our attitude should be like Jesus who seeks the interest of others. When one insists what he wants and starts to push himself to the front, division begins.

- *Bearing and making allowance with one another.*

*“...bearing with one another in love.” Eph. 4:2b*

When we are hurt, we think that we have the right to speak out what is in our minds without realizing that using that “*right*” creates division in the body. Meaning you begin to get others’ feeling to sympathize and believe you. As a result you form followers of sympathizers – people who rally with you.

To guard the unity of the body, we must guard our actions, feelings or emotions and words especially when *we are hurt*.

We must be like teeth and tongue that when hurts, life must go on. Tongue never walks out of our mouth, it just stays and remains its patience with teeth, living and staying together. That is what exactly commitment is all about. We may fight like cats and dogs, like my three sons but we will stick together.

- *Never play politics.*

There are people in the house whose “*ministry*” is to oppose and criticize what’s going on. They criticize the leadership, activities, everything. They are happy to oppose thinking they are a big help in doing it. Their purpose is to find fault and causes others to follow them rather than the leadership God has placed in the house. This attitude has been warned by the Lord in Phil 2:3 it says “*Let nothing be done through strife.*” Strife here in Philippians means selfish ambition, self-seeking, rivalry, a desire to win followers, a concept of almost politicking<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. David Sumrall, The Local Church p. 80

When church starts to get involve in politics, division starts. The church should serve as mind and heart to the politicians, but what is happening today, the spirit of politics is invading and influencing Christians by speaking against and biting each other in order to create followers. Thus, the house of God is divided.

To keep the unity of the body we must not push ourselves to the front row but rather be *submissive and loyal* to the leadership God has placed over us.

*“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”*

*(Heb. 13:17)*

Loyalty simply means never speaking something against behind. Politics should be named among outsiders not to the body of Christ. It should leave outside the house of God. Always remember, politics is politics, it will never change its color. It is always dirty. We should never bring it inside the house of God. We can avoid it by putting the welfare and need of our brothers ahead of us and not insisting what we personally desire but what the leadership's. Unity and division is just on our hands. So, *choose!*

## **THINK AS ONE MAN**

It is impossible to achieve unity when people in one house think differently. The reason why Paul is admonishing all Christians to have one mind and one judgment is for them to think as one man- one body. If a church has one hundred members, what chaos do you think will happen if a hundred ideas will be implemented?

*“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*

*(1 Cor. 1:10)*

We can learn to think as other think when *we spent time together*. Like husband and wife because of spending years of living together even without communication they can have one decision in any given situation. For example, the husband knows what it meant when a wife raise her brow. The people of God too will think alike as they spent time together.

When we decide to be committed to a local church we should agree to walk in the path of unity. 1 Corinthians 1:10 reveals the secret of having one mind such as:

- Learning to agree with each other.
- Joining together [one heart and one soul]
- Have one kind of thinking.
- Have one goal and purpose

Therefore, whatever talents, abilities or gifts each of us has, they should be submitted and be used for the mandate and goal of the house. We should never do anything apart from the purpose of the house nor work separately. Our hearts, gifts, supports... everything should be given to our spiritual house. For example if one has the gift of evangelism, his ministry should be operated under the leadership of the house. He should not conduct evangelistic crusades without the knowledge of his pastor. His gift must collaborate with the evangelistic program of his pastor.

We should also learn to *cooperate*. For example, when one is being discipline, the leadership including the whole congregation must observe that the discipline is implemented to an erring brother. One of the reasons why church discipline is not easy to implement is when the members do not cooperate with the leadership.

We should always remember that the church is not just a place of worship. The church is our family, our home, our house, a place of growing, a place of learning and a place of living together.