Principle 6
Not Depending On or Needing Buildings

One of the things you do not find in the Book of Acts is the reliance on church buildings. Yet in almost every Christian circle and denomination, there is an emphasis upon building the church, not that “the body of Christ may be built up” but rather the building of an actual structure that we refer to commonly as the church. There is a great benefit at times in having a building where the Lord’s people can meet in and use for the ministry of the Gospel. Yet, when we look at the Book of Acts, we find no visible record that the Church built buildings. Though they met in some physical locations such as Solomon’s Colonnade and the hall of Tyrannus for even two years. Yet, this was not the common practice of how saints met across the rest of God’s Churches. Even when looking carefully in Church history there is no evidence of a large building being used until 300 AD when pagan temples were being converted into churches under the reign of Constantine.

The clear indication is that the early Church primarily met in believers’ homes. Also other
venues were used such as caves, rivers and the catacombs in Rome, which were underground tunnels. When persecution came, as it did constantly in the record of the Acts of the Apostles, they were able to minimize the effects on the Church by relocating meetings to other secret locations in the city or towns and villages nearby. “The Church was always low-keyed, there were places where there were tens of thousands of believers, like Ephesus, and they had no building at all.”

Even as Church history progressed and an institutional system that became the Catholic church took the stage, many true believers in sects and groups met in homes. Such were the meeting places of many who were severely opposed for the testimony of Jesus Christ which they held. The forbidding of believers meeting together has been the reality of the Church since its inception.

In our day the chief obligation and goal of many new church plants is to get to a place where they can build or buy a building. We need to reevaluate that desire as times of persecution are and will be increasing. Owning no building will put the emphasis and goal back to what the early Church did, which was to spread the message of the Gospel and to help the poor. Some will be called to have a building but it seems—especially under persecution—that the Church will thrive and exist well without owning any church buildings. A brother
who works world-wide with persecuted Christians stated: “Christians of the first three centuries usually met in private residences that had been converted into suitable gathering spaces for the Christian community.”\textsuperscript{167}

House churches include the gathering of Aquila and Priscilla,\textsuperscript{168} Paul the Apostle,\textsuperscript{169} Apphia and Archippus,\textsuperscript{170} Nympha\textsuperscript{171} and many others. House churches are a Biblically based model.

“During Jesus time the Jews worshipping God in synagogues. They preformed an outward form of religiosity while living entirely contrary to God’s will. Jesus led His disciples away from these religious meetings to Martha’s house\textsuperscript{172} at Bethany.”\textsuperscript{173}

“For the first two centuries, the Church met in small groups in the homes of its members, apart from special gatherings in public lecture halls or market places, where people could come together in much larger numbers. Significantly these two centuries mark the most powerful and vigorous advance of the Church, which perhaps has never been equaled. The lack of church buildings was no hindrance to the rapid expansion of the Church; instead, in comparison to the situation after A.D. 200, it seemed a positive help.”\textsuperscript{174}

“The Church is never a place, but always a people; never a fold but always a Flock; never a sacred building but always a believing Assembly. The
Church is you who pray, not where you pray. A structure of brick or marble can no more be the church than your clothes of serge or satin can be you.”\footnote{175}

So, historically the most readily accessible and available option was to meet in homes with smaller fellowships. This type of meeting caters more to disciple-making,\footnote{176} and helping the needs of individual fellow-believers.\footnote{177} Also keeping the body of Christ persecution proof!