

BY DAN LIRETTE

WHY HOUSE CHURCH?



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House Church (Part 1): Why House Church? Is there a real difference?

The largest and fastest movement of assemblies today is the house church movement; a simple glance at the Chinese Underground House Church speaks volumes to this statement. While North American culture glances at the House Church model with deep suspicion and often times paints house churches as “cultic”, the fact remains that multiplied millions upon millions of house churches exist all across the world, especially in persecuted nations. The house churches which exist in these countries are independent of any outside organization of denomination; no one man or one group dictates what the house churches believe or how they operate; in fact, many of these dear house church leaders don’t have any idea what the words “Calvinism” or “Arminianism” even mean. To the house church leaders in persecuted nations, division, denominationalism and dictatorial edicts sent from a committee to a church are non-existent.

If you’re a rational thinker, you’ll realize immediately that the largest cults in the world meet in buildings and have millions of followers who meet in buildings with a primary leader who they look to as God’s chosen vessel... even though they may not term it in such a way. The reality is... have you ever seen cult in a home? I dare say no yet if you have... it’s far and few between. In fact, the house church model, as we will see, has many safeguards against becoming dictatorial and cultic; safeguards which building churches, for the most part, do not have.

While both the house church movement as well as the building movement *are* used by God and while we should never ever for any reason attack a particular model of ministry, we should at the same time examine, just as Francis Chan did, what we’re calling “the church”. Francis Chan planted a traditional church which had approximately five thousand members... and resigned after reading Scripture without the lens of denominationalism. He now plants house churches. Glory to God! If you’re not aware of who Francis Chan is ... I encourage you to look him up; he’s a solid Man of God with a proven track-record of holiness and sound doctrine.

Is the church a place where we gather to hear 5 songs, a 3 point message by *the* leader and then go home only to go through the entire routine all over again next week? Is it a place where we go, sit down, face the front and give altar calls for deliverance without offering constant discipleship and intimate fellowship with one another all through the week? No... this isn’t the church as I see it in the New Testament. Whether it’s a building church or a house church, there’s much, much more to the corporate Christ Life than what we’ve given to our people.

Being one who wants more than cultural ideas and notions, I’m unapologetic when it comes to house church... because house church is Biblical. The Scripture transcends all cultures and personal ideas of what church should be; thus, while I’m certainly still learning what it is to “have church”... I praise God that in spite of all of my mistakes and cultural ideas, He continues to lead me into Biblical New Testament gatherings.

Here’s just some of what I see in the Scriptures concerning the gathering of saints:

Acts 2:46 – And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from HOUSE TO HOUSE, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart

Romans 16:5 – Likewise greet the church that is in their HOUSE. Salute my well beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

1 Corinthians 16:19 – The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their HOUSE.

Many aren’t aware of the historical fact that the Epistles were written to churches... which were *house churches*; Paul didn’t write to large building churches; he wrote to house church Pastors; homes can’t seat hundreds of people. In fact, a Pastor – regardless of who he or she is – can’t disciple hundreds of people. It’s impossible. The

fact that large assemblies use the cell group and home group models speaks to this truth. The fact is that the traditional church model and the house church are *not* the same.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26 we read: “Well, my brothers and sisters, let’s summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.”

Some are gifted in music; they need to bless and edify the body... ALL are able to prophesy in a meeting and are told that they – all of them! – can speak in a service; Scripture says so in 1 Corinthians 14:31 where it states “In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged.”

How can “everyone” speak if there are hundreds of people or even 50 people? Clearly, Paul was speaking to a house church with a small enough assembly that “everyone” had a turn to speak and share and encourage the brothers and sisters. It says “one after another” and “everyone”. How is this possible outside of the house church model? It’s not; thus the clear conclusion is Paul was not speaking to an assembly which had a mass amount of spectators staring at a pulpit while “one man only” spoke; he was telling the Corinthians that “everyone” could have a turn speaking.

The above passage of Scripture – if we’re honest with ourselves – doesn’t take place as often as it should... and there’s no excuse for this except a lack of “knowing how”. Further, this passage cannot possibly be operated in within a large format; it’s specifically designed for small gatherings. This is clear and plain from the text. Only within the house church model can the above passage be experienced on a level which is intimate; it allows for more than “one” Pastor who teaches; more than “one” who shares revelation... etc. Because of the validity of the house church format which Paul and all of the other Apostles knew exclusively as the mode of gathering (*they had no idea about mass meetings with the exception of one rented building for a temporary period for evangelization in Acts*), we too would do well to follow the example of the Early Church.

In seeking to be “non organized” in the denominational sense, we must not go to the other extreme of saying that just because people are having meals together or are in fellowship that “that is the church”. It’s not. 1 Corinthians 14:26 tells us exactly, specifically and directly what a New Testament meeting looks like; apart from this, whether house church or traditional church... it’s not a gathering based on New Testament principles. I disagree with both house church leaders and traditional church leaders that by having a bunch of Christians in a room together “is church”. It’s not; unless the Scripture is being fulfilled in our midst, we may be in the same room together... but we’re certainly not “having church”. Let’s not fool ourselves.

Many today believe that because we’re advanced and culturally different that we should no longer meet in homes; this is a personal opinion and based on cultural dictates; it’s a view which cannot be substantiated in Scripture.

Again, I’m not “against” traditional church; I’m instead “for” house church. There’s absolutely nothing at all wrong with building church believers; it’s the format that concerns me. The format doesn’t allow for active participation but instead relies on the leader, his team and a group of spectators who God wants to become active participants. This is impossible in large fellowships and regardless of how one sees it... people are *always* left out and forgotten. Without exception.

There’s a large mega-church in our city and yet members of this particular church knocked on our door asking for help with their son. They have a church with fifteen hundred people and yet they come to a house church for help. Why is this?

The same church ... one of our leaders spoke with another member of it and she didn’t know what it was to be Born Again and yet this mega-church is supposed to be a Biblical church.

The same mega-church had an attender come to our house church to be baptized. She explained her church (the mega-church) would baptise her but she didn't like large groups in this context. This young lady is not Born Again; she hasn't repented of her sin and yet this mega church was going to baptize her, in opposition to Acts 2:38-39.

At a local restaurant I spoke with a waitress who attended a denominational church most of her life, to my recollection. When I asked if she knew what it was to be Born Again, she didn't know. And this was a church just outside of our city which belongs to a denomination which is historically known for preaching the Gospel. How is it that attending church most of her life she had no idea what it meant to know and follow Jesus Christ?

The above examples are only a handful of many unfortunate testimonies of individuals in traditional churches who have no idea what it means to be a Christ Follower; what it means to be known by first name and to be a part of a vibrant, active community.

This may not, of course, be your experience... but it *is* the experience of countless forgotten people who attend church week after week without anyone knowing who they are, what they're going through or even if they know the Lord.

House church is small but can become big enough that even in a home people can be left out and forgotten; if it can happen in a house church, what then of large building formats? God forbid that we – a house church – or traditional formats see people fall by the wayside!

If assemblies were to model the 1 Corinthians 14:26 gathering of Believers, given under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we'd see a very different Christianity today. Amen? If all members of a body were truly active participants, what would happen in our lives, corporate meetings and in our communities? I dare say a mighty rushing wind of Revival!

When God's People actually know one another, fellowship regularly, pray together, hurt together, are joyful together... that's church! When God's People know one another on a first name basis, that's church! When prophetic words can be given by anyone; when miracles can be performed by more than just a "special speaker"; when healings can come through the body rather than through a pre-planned "Healing Service"... that's church!

This is my heart on the church; not on a "better way of church"... but on church "period". I'm neither for or against certain models; I'm not even all about "house church" being "the best". I do realize some will read this and feel I'm "promoting house church" and "blasting traditional church". Nothing could be further from the truth; I've written this to explain my heart on what "I" see in the Word of God as being the Biblical grounds for New Testament gatherings. In looking at various ways in which gatherings of New Testament Believers occur, I can only – and must only! – stand with the position most clearly outlined in the Word of God. After-all... Scripture is our guide in all things; should not our gatherings and the model of how we meet be based on the Scripture as much as possible?

I long for the day that our gatherings here at Revival House come into a more fuller expression of New Testament styled meetings; where everyone is prophesying, teaching, exhorting, sharing Biblical revelations, etc. In fact, this is what I long to see in all gatherings; whether here or elsewhere.

I pray you see my heart in this and that all who have taken the time to read this short note will consider the house church as being a Biblically solid alternative to the traditional church format we see in North America. God can and will use many of you to plant house churches if you'll ask Him to lead you. Why? Because you don't need a degree or a denomination to be used by God; all you need is a "Yes!".

House Church (Part 2): The New Testament model of gathering

In this section – part 2 – I want to share my heart on what any church – house church or otherwise – should come into based on the Scripture. Only in seeking God to fulfill His Word in all areas of our private and corporate lives will we come into greater and greater manifestation of His blessing on our lives and assemblies. I have no doubt that all who read this will at least agree with that statement. Amen? I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that we all want to come into a more Biblically based and Biblically sound model of New Testament Christianity which is led completely, absolutely and totally by the Spirit of God.

If one looks at North American Christianity, one cannot help but be humbled by the blessing of God on our churches; we're free to worship, free to speak in any way we wish and free to conduct our churches in any manner we so desire. This is both a blessing and a curse. In our freedom we've in fact bound others to a philosophy of church which is so far removed from Scripture that millions of sincere people now believe that church is done "this way and no other". In fact, some go so far as to call you cultic and out in left field if you stray from their idea of what church should look like.

The problem with this is that North American Christianity is simply un-Biblical. No, not in its faith or passion for truth and relationship with God, but rather in its format. The format in which millions and millions of people meet each Sunday is a format which is not only foreign to the New Testament...it's restrictive and prevents godly Saints from being used by God in the manner taught in Scripture.

How so?

Let's go to God's Word to find not only the answer... but also the solution.

1 Corinthians 14:26 says "Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you."

This is the Biblical model of a genuine New Testament gathering; anything short of the above falls short of God's perfect and revealed Will on gathering together. Without this as our guide, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can come up with all of the excuses and rants we want to; at the end of the day, this is the Biblical model that God's Spirit gave to us through the Apostle Paul. If it was good enough for the 1st century Christians... it's good enough for me.

We have a problem, however, in that "the pastor" has become the primary driving force behind North American Christianity; while multitudes of brothers and sisters talk about body ministry, where is it? We've relegated "body ministry" to every day except Sunday; we've called people to do "mid week service" and "street ministry" etc while making our Pastors "the" leaders in our churches. Is this Biblical? No, it isn't.

Ephesians 4:11-13 "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ."

God is a God of order; He doesn't place things in certain places "at random" or "by coincidence".

First: Apostles Second: Prophets Third: Evangelists Fourth: Pastors Fifth: Teachers

Notice that Pastors are positioned in the text below the position of not only Apostles and Prophets... but also Evangelists. Does this mean the others are "better than" the Pastor? Of course not; the Apostle isn't teaching any

such thing. He does, however, place the “office” of Apostle, Prophet and Evangelist in a place of authority above that of the Pastor. Why?

Pastors are appointed by Apostolic Authority; this is clear in Titus 1:5 which says: “I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you.”

In today’s modern format, we see Pastors appointing everything; this is not Biblical. Yes, they have authority; they must be respected and honored as shepherds. I myself have been called into the office of Pastor... yet I’m under no illusion that this particular office calling is somehow “above” that of the Apostle, Prophet and Evangelist in authority. Why? Because Scripture doesn’t teach it is; and I’m OK with that. God’s Word is above my own personal opinions.

Pastors, in today’s cultural Christianity, dictate who, what, where, when and why. This ought not be. The Pastor is the the “primary” speaker; the Pastor is the “primary” go to guy; the Pastor is the “primary” person who prays for the sick, casts out demons, etc etc etc... in most all things, the individual seen doing what others are called to do is ...the pastor.

Pastors are called to lead and feed; they have a responsibility to watch over the souls of their flock; this, however, doesn’t imply for one moment that Pastors are to do the entire work of the ministry. They have a God Appointed position; we have, unfortunately, given them the positions of all of the other ministry offices.

Think of this. In whatever church you attend, how often does a resident Apostle or a resident Prophet teach, speak, cast out demons, etc? In comparison to the Pastor...almost not at all! This is evidence in and of itself that we’ve placed the office of Pastor on a very dangerous plateau of the “Do it all man”. Because of this, the Body of Christ is suffering.

New Testament Christianity, if we truly desire body ministry, must come back to Biblical Christianity. Instead of pews, pulpits and pastors dictating the House of God, we need to see apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers all working together, edifying one another, building one another up and exhorting one another in Christ.

These are not professional positions; they are positions given by God to whoever He wants. Not a single congregation member in any church is without a position; God doesn’t say “That guy is something but I haven’t given YOU anything”. Thus, all members of a local church are called to one or more of the five fold ministry offices; and thus each member should be used by the local church... not told he or she can’t be used because a pastor “said so”.

Are you a Christian? If so, YOU are called to prophesy, share a revelation, a doctrine, etc. Try doing that on a Sunday morning, however, and you may be booted by security. Don’t say I didn’t warn you lol. All joking aside, there are quite literally millions of Believers today in local churches who are sitting down on a pew Sunday after Sunday ... doing nothing but listening to a man deliver a 3 point sermon.

They aren’t called on to teach, to prophesy, to plant, to deliver a doctrine, a revelation, etc... they just sit there, unused, week after week until decades have gone by. How far we’ve strayed from New Testament Christianity!

This is why I love the house church model; no one is excluded from being used. That said, many who are used to the traditional format who come into House Church are so timid when called on to teach or prophesy or share a vision that it’s very difficult to see them “come out of their shell”. They’ve been conditioned by North American Christianity to “shut up”. They feel that if they make mistake or are too shy or don’t have much to say that someone will laugh at them, etc. How unfortunate!

Have you ever been to a movie house? A movie house has seats facing the front to watch an actor portray a character. Now think of church. Churches have pews, facing the front, where people sit for one hour on Sunday to watch a pastor give a sermon.

God's House resembles the Movie House; the physical characteristics are undeniable; in fact, modern church models come from ancient Roman theater. You may be interested in the book "[Pagan Christianity](#)" by Frank Viola where you'll learn the origins of today's modern church format.

Imagine a church where the sheep are in submission to the elders... and where the elders are in submission to apostolic, evangelistic and prophetic authority. If you can imagine it, you've just imagined church as Jesus gave it! A church where the body truly functions; where when one member suffers all members "really" suffer with them; where all are encouraged to be used by God in their various giftings.

In my last note, I made the following observation: 1 Corinthians 14:31 says: "In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged."

How can "everyone" speak if there are hundreds of people or even 50 people? Clearly, Paul was speaking to a house church with a small enough assembly that "everyone" had a turn to speak and share and encourage the brothers and sisters. It says "one after another" and "everyone". How is this possible outside of the house church model? It's not; thus the clear conclusion is Paul was not speaking to an assembly which had a mass amount of spectators staring at a pulpit while "one man only" spoke; he was telling the Corinthians that "everyone" could have a turn speaking. The above passage of Scripture – if we're honest with ourselves – doesn't take place as often as it should...and there's no excuse for this except a lack of "knowing how"; further, this passage cannot possibly be operated in within a large format; it's specifically designed for small gatherings. This is clear and plain from the text.

Only within the house church model can the above passage be experienced on a level which is intimate; it allows for for than "one" Pastor who teaches; more than "one" who shares revelation... etc. Because of the validity of the house church format which Paul and all of the other Apostles knew exclusively as the mode of gathering (they had no idea about mass meetings with the exception of one rented building for a temporary period for evangelization in Acts), we too would do well to follow the example of the Early Church.

Folks, Jesus wants His Church back! No; He never "lost it"...it lost Him! The Church has strayed so far from the Biblical pattern laid out in the Epistles that we're now only a shell of what God intended for His People. Paid professionals teams of staff members with millions being left on the shelf to do...nothing.

This is fact; and while some will become upset, angered and offended... they should. But that anger should be directed – not to this note – but for the fact we've all played a part and a role in seeing that God's People are muzzled.

Remember what Jesus said He hated in Revelation 2:6? He said, "But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do."

The very word itself means: Nico-, combinatory form of *nīko*, "victory" in Greek, and *laos* means people, or more specifically, the laity; hence, the word may be taken to mean "lay conquerors" or "conquerors of the lay people". (Wikipedia)

Jesus hated much more than the above – being a conqueror over lay people (those who are not in ministry) but I want only to focus – for the purpose of this article – on the word Nicolaitans itself.

Any doctrine that places anyone "above" body ministry is a doctrine that Jesus Christ hates. Ministry is not to have victory over God's People; God's People are ALL called to ministry. The problem today is that while many "say"

they believe this ...Sunday after Sunday in the vast majority of churches the exact opposite is seen with only a handful of people actually partaking in church life. The People of God sit doing nothing but being spectators while paid professionals rule over the laity.

I'm aware that this note itself will be viewed as "divisive"...it's not. In fact, this is a call to stop the division between ministers and laity; it's a call to all leaders to lead... not rule with an iron fist that prevents multitudes and millions upon millions of godly people from being used by God in their local fellowships.

This begs the question: "Are our churches too big?"

Yes. As seen from above, "everyone" cannot prophesy (preach and teach under inspiration) in assemblies which are designed –theater style – to hold hundreds upon hundreds of spectators rather than what God intended since Jesus first instituted the church:Active, Vibrant, Participants.

Imagine if a church with 500 or 2000 members split up to form house churches across the city, in every community... what would happen? What would take place if large assemblies disbanded and became house churches, just as the Word teaches?

We'd have:

- 1• *Churches in every single neighborhood of our communities*
- 2• *No more denominations and divisions among Saints*
- 3• *Small churches where every member is encouraged to be used by God*
- 4• *Personal, intimate discipleship where it's not based on the latest "best seller" book but instead on personal, one on one, relationship*

The list of blessings could go on and on and on... but the above are reason enough to see why New Testament based gatherings are a need – and essential need! – among North American Christians today. All arguments of "House church is a cult!" or "House churches aren't really accountable!" don't work in places like China, Iran, Syria and other persecuted nations; they only work here where people have been conditioned to believe that type of nonsense.

Jesus started with 12 men and ended with 11; Judas hung himself. How we can do better than Jesus in thinking that one pastor can personally disciple hundreds and even thousands of Believers is delusion. What we need is a return to the Biblical pattern; until then, while people continue their arguments and debates, God's People will go unnoticed, unused and most importantly, unloved.

I pray that this short note on the Biblical pattern of the New Testament gathering provokes some to take the plunge and allow God to lead them to either plant a house church that follows the Biblical model or join one who is.

House Church (Part 3): Plurality, Protection and Accountability

I have no doubt that “some” house church advocates will read this and say, “You sure showed those traditional church people a thing or two!” and that “some” traditional church members will read this and think, “You’re just being divisive”. To both sets of individuals; you’re both in great error! My intent is not to “get anyone” or to “be divisive”... it’s to expound the Word of God alone, without bias or favor to any particular group, house church or not. In short, this note is written for those who want to come into deeper truth; it’s to you that I write.

All who read this need to clearly and plainly understand is this: I am not “against” traditional church in any way whatsoever. That said, I am also not under any illusion that I do not see many, many concerns with the structure of traditional church formats. In comparing house church and traditional church with the Biblical outline which the Holy Spirit gave to His Body, I am deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of those who sit under singular rule. Please see my heart in this; I believe with all of my being that both the house church and traditional church formats should work side by side; however, concerning leadership structures, I cannot remain either silent or indifferent to the problematic and more importantly unBiblical model of accountability and authority structure of traditional church. Due to this, I have written this note with the prayer that those who read it will see it as (1) a call to return to Biblical leadership and (2) an outline of why house church isn’t as bad as some believe. In fact, I welcome and all to join our house church or plant a house church based on the Biblical model given in the Word.

There’s a common charge against house churches of not being accountable and being prone to falling into the ditch of heresy. Is this a valid charge? I submit –and will detail in this note – that not only is such a charge unfounded, the opposite is in fact the case. In fact, models which rely on singular leadership are far more prone to falling into false doctrine and a spirit which breeds a lone ranger mentality. A Biblical house church is just that: Biblical. Thus, the Lord, in His great wisdom, gave us this model of gathering as it provides solid accountability and protection from falling into false doctrine due to it’s very nature. How so? Let’s look at the Biblical guidelines of house church and then compare the house church model with the traditional building model of gathering. My heart in this is not to attack traditional church structure but instead to bring Biblical clarity to the leadership and accountability aspect of house churches in comparison with the leadership and accountability structure of traditional church. In explaining and clarifying how house church is accountable and protected from heresy, my prayer is that many who have never been to or participated in house church life – yet make claims on issues they have no idea about – would come into a more full understanding of just how safe and protected the house church is in comparison to every other model of church life.

1. Biblical house churches have a plurality of leadership: In Titus 1:5 we read the following, “I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you”. Elders (with an “s”) were appointed in churches in Apostolic times for a reason. What’s that reason? When there’s a plurality of leadership, the chance of falling into doctrinal error and heresy is greatly lessened. House churches which follow the Biblical model are less prone to heresy than traditional church. While traditional churches- have “senior” Pastors who all other pastors must submit to in authority, house churches do not. All leadership within a house church is equal in authority; no one is “senior” over the other leaders; no single individual can dictate what the house church believes and no single individual can suddenly make doctrinal changes that affect the life of the church. Not so with traditional church. Assistant Pastors, Youth Pastors, Worship Pastors... none of these positions are in the Word and all of these positions are subordinate to the “Senior” Pastor.

Thus, if the “Senior Pastor” decides that the church is going to move in a direction not wanted by the corporate whole or the subordinate leadership, too bad; the “Senior” Pastor gets the “final say”. Of course there are certainly exceptions to this (Praise God!) yet for the most part the “Senior Pastor” in a traditional church is the “head shepherd” (not Jesus Christ) and what he makes as a “final decision” is final. Period. In house church, this isn’t so; in fact, let me give you an example. I once hired an actor to make a video outlining our house church gatherings. I

loved it! There was nothing in it which was wrong or immoral etc... but some of our leadership had an issue with it in that what the actor was saying was true but it was...acting.

They had a problem with that and they challenged me. I asked for a compromise and we came to a final agreement as a leadership body. House church is different in that there's no "one man show". Many will say that traditional church has deacons, denominational offices, etc, to keep "senior pastors" in check. While this is a noble attempt at protection... it falls short of Scriptural guidelines.

In fact, while many traditional churches have deacon boards to determine things, these very boards are man made; deacons, according to the Book of Acts, are to serve the church in practical things; not make leadership decisions which affect entire congregations. House church, on the other hand, has a Biblically sound leadership model based on Scripture alone without any inserted tradition; thus, the sheep are well protected from heretical influxes by lone rangers.

A plurality of elders with absolute equal authority is seen, in the majority of instances, in house church. Traditional church, while mightily used of God, has intrinsic dangers due to its top-down structure while house church is solidified against heresy due to its side-by-side leadership structure.

2. Accountability is to one another...not to a singular "leader" or a denominational board: Ephesians 5:21 tells us to "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ". Church members are to submit to "one another"... not to any singular outside influence. It's said that the Early Churches submitted to the Apostles; of course they did! The Apostles were the fathers of those assemblies, being planted by them. Yet it must also be noted that the Apostles themselves submitted to one another and to the elders of the churches, as seen in Acts 15:1-4 which says, "While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: "Unless you are circumcised are required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved." Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them—much to everyone's joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted. When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them".

All of these dear Early Christians were accountable to one another and that accountability came from relationship between elders, apostles and believers. Nowhere in the Word of God do we find people voting Pastors into denominations or voting pastors out due to minor differences on doctrinal matters. Accountability in traditional church is lacking... deeply. House church, however, being structured by God Himself as outlined in Scripture, provides accountability to "one another". This means that sheep are not left to "do as they please" and nor are leaders. From A to Z, accountability is more than to a singular Pastor... it's to a whole body of Believers. I'm disturbed when I hear people say things like, "That's my Pastor; I'm under his authority". That's dangerous.. yet it's the traditional church mindset. No lone man has any power to bring people under his authority; submission is to "one another" (sheep_ and to a plurality of elders...not singular Pastors. Is this Biblical? Yes. In Hebrews 13:17 we read, "Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit". Believers are to submit to "leaders" (with an "s"). Whenever I hear someone say, "I'm submitted to my Pastor" I raise my spiritual eyebrow. Submission to a lone authority places you in spiritual danger.

Because of the traditional church view of submission to authority, when a Pastor – a lone Pastor – makes a decision based on personal preference or makes a decision which is clearly not the proper one, many Believers will heed it anyway. House church is much different in that if a leader makes a decision of deep significance, it must be made, without exception, with the Mind of Christ as revealed through the other leaders and affirmed by the corporate body. No one Pastor has any Biblical authority to demand submission to his office as a singular entity.

While some will disagree, there's no Biblical support for such a view; on the contrary, submission is to "one another"... not to "one".

3. In Acts 15:28-29 we read, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell". Notice that the direction given to the early churches was given by "us"... not a singular individual. The "us" shows an agreement among the leadership of the Early Church. There was no singular "Senior Pastor" to overrule the others; there was a common consensus and thus the protection of the church from false doctrine and cultic rule flourished. In Acts 13:1-4 we read, "Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called "the black man"), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas, and Saul. One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way. So Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit..."

Notice here that the body of Christ was used by God to send out the Apostle Paul and Barnabas; even the Apostles were required to come under the authority of the local church as a whole. This is a perfect example of submission to "one another". The work of the ministry in the Apostles in the text above was affirmed by the Holy Spirit through the corporate church; this is the Biblical model and it's how house church operates.

4. Finally, singular rule in an assembly is seen in the Word of God as being an aberration of God's Will and dangerous to God's People. In 3 John 1:9-12 we read, "I wrote to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us. When I come, I will report some of the things he is doing and the evil accusations he is making against us. Not only does he refuse to welcome the traveling teachers, he also tells others not to help them. And when they do help, he puts them out of the church. Dear friend, don't let this bad example influence you. Follow only what is good. Remember that those who do good prove that they are God's children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God. Everyone speaks highly of Demetrius, as does the truth itself. We ourselves can say the same for him, and you know we speak the truth".

Notice that a singular man wants to be "the leader"(singular). This singular leader made accusations against "us"(the Apostles). The Apostle John tells us that those under the singular leadership of Diotrephes are kicked out of the church for receiving and helping traveling teachers (plural). Singular leadership, as seen here, rather than the Biblical model of equal and plural leadership, can bring great harm to a local congregation. If a church has a "one man show", the potential of falling into error, condemning others, excommunicating those who do not follow "the leader"... it's all possible under one man rule, just as seen here.

For example, if I'm welcomed in an assembly by several brothers and sisters, and yet "the leader" happens to not like me for whatever reason, those Believers who have received me can then be shunned, hear malicious things about me, etc... just as Diotrephes did with the Apostles. Singular rule in an assembly is unBiblical and fraught with danger from every side. Only within a genuine structure of plural eldership is the church safe from error, lone ranger decisions and a "I'm THE leader and my decisions are FINAL!" mentality.

In Conclusion

Far from being cultic or unaccountable, the house church model is far more accountable and solidified against heresy than the traditional church format. In fact, as demonstrated above, house churches are clearly safe havens from singular rule, dictatorial authority and a "I'm submitted to my Pastor" mentality rather than "I'm submitted to the elders and the congregation as a whole" Biblical view. House church provides its members with personal and corporate accountability which is found in no other structure.

Certainly, the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, knew what He was doing when He gave us His Word... and His Word is clear on leadership, accountability and safeguarding the ministry, its leaders and its sheep. Thus, if you're ever told that house churches are not accountable or lack proper leadership, etc... simply direct those who make such claims to this very note.

My prayer is that whether you're in a traditional church structure or a house church structure, you'll always go back to the Word of God to question, challenge and find answers for what you're being told and taught. Only when a heart longs for truth can it be freed from deception and man centered philosophies. Amen? Amen!

I pray that this three part series has provided you with exactly how house churches are accountable and protected in a manner which is Biblical and sound.