

The Temple of God

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Introduction

Devaluing: We have habit in our world of taking things that are valuable and devaluing them.

- Airplanes (used to wear three piece suits; Sunday best; now wear sweatpants; I'm still wearing sweatpants but we need to recognize the crazy amazing idea of flight).
- Stanley Cup (eat out of it, etc.).
- Don't get hung up on the aesthetics (you see how I'm dressed) but consider the heart. When you honor something, you give it **weight** in your life. It's **non-negotiable**. Too often we take the things of God and treat them as inconsequential, unimportant, and optional.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

¹⁶ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν; ¹⁷ εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθείρει, φθερεῖ τοῦτον ὁ θεός· ὁ γὰρ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιός ἐστιν, οἳτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς.

1. The Reality of God's Presence

Forgetful: ¹⁶ Do you not know (οὐκ οἴδατε). Mild rebuke (used 10x in 1 Cor.). The Corinthians seem to be suffering from the disease of "should know better." Either they are **willfully ignorant** or **foolishly forgetful**.

- The Corinthians should know better but they don't (*immature* cf. 1 Cor 3:1-2).
 - They are set apart but living like the world. They are spiritual but living according to the flesh.
 - ¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain (1 Cor 15:1-2).
 - **Remind** (because we forget), **Remain** (because we wander).
- A lot of walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16) is continue to stay in the gospel (e.g., daily dose of Greek; Scripture memory). The Bible talks all the time about the importance of remembering (remember how God provided in the past). We suffer from **spiritual amnesia** (Adam situation, worried about God's provision; he's provided every time, why do I forget he's a providing God)?
 - The Corinthians seem to have forgotten. *Don't forget what got you to the dance.* Recapture the beauty of those initial moments.

Temple: that you are God's temple (ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε). Last week Paul discussed the church as a field (planted, watered, growing) and as a building (foundation, built upon). Now that building **metaphor** has been expanded to the temple. You are not just *any* building but you are a *temple*.

- At the time of this writing, **temple in Jerusalem** was still in existence (second temple). It hadn't been destroyed by the Romans yet. It wasn't as grand as Solomon's but it was still a site to behold. Not to mention, that Corinth had many temples that had been around for centuries (e.g., Aphrodite, Apollo) and were either rebuilt or reinhabited under Roman occupation (ca. 44 BCE).
- All of Jewish life was centered around the tabernacle (first) and the temple (later). Rhythms, rituals, liturgies circled this location as the 'hub of the wheel' of Jewish identity.
 - The way the temple was treated was meant to highlight the holiness of God.
 - The temple is the place where God's Spirit dwells. It's the place where you go to meet God. It's the place where heaven and earth **intersect**.

But now, **you are the temple of God**. What an amazing reality? You no longer have to go to a building to meet God or offer a sacrifice to please God, God himself lives inside those who are his.

- These Corinthian believers, gathering in house churches are God's temple (not the grand buildings of Corinth or the massive temple in Jerusalem).
- This is a significant theological development. Is your life *organized* around the presence of God?

Cultivate: "The indwelling of the Spirit must be recognised, yielded to, and humbly maintained in adoration and love. We must own the reality of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. The lives of the priests of Solomon's Temple were controlled and inspired by the faith of the unseen indwelling glory within the veil of the Holy of Holies. It is not different with the believer. Until she learns by faith to tremble in the presence of the wondrous mystery that she is God's temple, because God's Spirit dwells in her, she will never yield herself to her high calling with holy reverence and joyful confidence" (*adapted* Andrew Murray).

2. The Significance of God's Presence

Dwelling: and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν;)

- This is the progress and fulfillment of God's plan. The Spirit of God was a promise from God after Jesus returned to the Father.
- OT believers did not experience this type of relationship with God. Though God dwelled with and among them in the tabernacle and the Temple he did not dwell in them until after Christ returned to heaven, at least not in the same permanent and present way.
- What OT believers had in moments and shadows, in symbols and pictures, we have in reality.
 - They went to the temple to meet God, God makes us his temple.
 - The Spirit **came on them** to empower them for the mission, the Spirit **takes residence in us** to equip us for mission.
- ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh (Ez 36:26).
- ¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the

world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you (Jn 14:15-17).

The very God of creation, if you are in Christ, lives in you. **This should change everything.**

- *HS is not a force but a person. There is legit heresy going around on the internet *this week* (neopneumatomachians). If he is a person, then there is a relationship to cultivated through trust and obedience. He is not a force to be wielded but a person to be obeyed.
- “We don’t activate the HS, the HS activates us.”

Individual: In 1 Cor 6 we’ll see that *how we live as individuals* matters because we have been united Christ and we have the Holy Spirit in us.

- Everything we do takes the Spirit of God with us. Where are you going? What are you doing? What are you participating in?
- It also means when you devalue a Christian you denigrate the chosen dwelling of God (it is impossible to love Christ and hate his bride).

Corporate: But in this context, Paul is clear that the emphasis is not on the individual Christian but on the entire body of Christ.

- The temple of God is not a building but a **people**. The people of God form the spiritual house *together* for the presence of God in the world.
- The local church is a body (with many parts), a family (“the church is a family before it is an organization”). “We are a **gospel community** on mission.” This building is not God’s temple, the people are God’s temple.

Individual to corporate: “Jesus isn’t saving a person, he is saving a people.”

- Every “you” in this passage is really a **y’all** (there isn’t a better translation).
- “Even when **we** were dead in **our** trespasses, made **us** alive **together** with Christ—by grace **you** (2nd pl) have been saved” (Eph 2:5).
- This pushes back at our hyper-individualistic thinking (that I belong to nobody but myself). There are no individuals of God, no independent parts of Christ’s body, and no one who has fellowship with him or herself. This should warn us that the typical American emphasis on individualism is inconsistent with biblical ecclesiology.
 - A **singular temple** but a **plural people**.
- The indwelling of the Spirit is not only individual but also corporate, such that Christ promises his presence in a special way when his people gather in his name.
 - “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matt 18:20).
 - “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 5:4).

Knit Together: For a corporate body to be a temple, the individual members need to be joined together. The gospel writers never used the word for fellowship (κοινωνία), that doesn’t come until after Pentecost, after the Spirit filled the church.

- “The Spirit is the creator of fellowship: He unites all believers to Jesus, baptizes all of us into the same body. He creates fellowship because he awakens us to all we have in

Christ. The Spirit serves as the cement in the church, making us a true temple rather than a disconnected pile of stones” (Hammett *adapted*).

- Bakes us together like all the ingredients become a united cake.
- The world will know we belong to God by our love, not for them (though that’s true) but by our love for one another (Jn 13:34-35).

Known: “(1) To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. (2) To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. (3) But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us” (Keller). This is the truth of the gospel and should be true of our church. You should be truly known and truly loved. Don’t hide, don’t stay on the surface. It’s going to take vulnerable risk. Some folks choose a church to casually attend where they can go unnoticed, unpastored, and unasked to do things. May it never be here. We want to be all up in your life (in a good way).

Active Presence of God’s Spirit in the Church: The presence of God is and should be active and tangibly felt in his church. We should go to the church (the people, not the building) to see God’s glory and hear his voice. “A legacy of faith can’t sustain a church, only a living faith can” (Gulledge).

- We often don’t have a high enough view and value of God’s church (and sometimes for good reason).
 - Some have used the church for personal gain.
 - Some have abused the church rather than protected her.
 - Some have manipulated the church to misrepresent Jesus.
- We need *healthier churches* not *less churches*.

Some of us need to wake up to the living God who is here, now in our midst. He’s healing, redeeming, and transforming. He’s here in a unique and special way.

- In some real way, this church is where heaven touches earth, where God’s perfect presence intersects with our broken world.
- “Christians who gather with the church casually usually have a more casual commitment to thie faith. Infrequent attendance is often a sign of diluted devotion” (Nieuwhof).
- You can’t truly love the Word of God and the people of God if you don’t worship joyfully and consistently with the local church when she gathers.
- And this is so much more than getting your perfect attendance badge, it’s about a lifestyle of mutual participation and commitment.

Worshipping Community: What is a temple for but to worship God? That’s one of the reasons that worship is central in the life of the church.

- Members of the church are called to live their entire lives as acts of worship and gather with other members regularly for corporate worship.
- One way the church participates in God’s mission is simply by being a worshipping community. One of the best things we can be is a gospel presence in our world.

- As a worshipping community we mediate the presence of God to others, and call them to worship God as well. Our worship can be evangelistic!
- Paul describes in Ephesians how the people of God is “being joined together”, “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” and growing “into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 5:21). God’s temple is continuing to “expand to include more and more people until God’s presence will pervade the entire earth at the end of the age” (Beale).

3. Our Response to God’s Presence

Be Careful: ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. (εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθείρει, φθερεῖ τοῦτον ὁ θεός·)

- God will deal severely with those who corrupt or damage his temple.
 - Paul has been vigorously reminding us of the danger of division in the church. Division in Corinth is motivated by tribalism, power plays, personal arrogance, and spiritual vanity.
- (1) Destroyed by remove pillars, buttresses, supports, chipping away at foundation.
 - Jettison the teachings of God and the holiness of his people to make it more palatable to larger society. *If Jesus knew what we knew he’d do things differently than we do.* The teachings of the gospel become pesky annoyances rather than life giving guidance.
- (2) Building beyond the foundation, so that it doesn’t rest on sturdy support and will collapse.
 - Mao Zedong’s “Four Pests Campaign” to rid China of mosquitos, rats, flies, and (oddly enough), sparrows (believed to eat too much grain that people needed). “If China was to increase, the sparrows must decrease.” Unfortunately, they didn’t realize sparrows were less pests as much as an integral part of the ecosystem. Without them, real pests like locusts flourished and destroyed crops. Couple this with some deforestation, bad weather, and bad policies, famine ravaged the nation and millions of people died.
 - When you misunderstand the nature of things it makes you blind to their reality, function, and significance. And it always carries a cost.
 - When you devalue the church, when it becomes (in your mind) a hindrance to the gospel rather than a help, when it’s just a social club or historical artifact, you think you’re helping but you’re really harming.
 - We believe in the church, the local church, the neighborhood church made up of real, flawed people among whom God dwells.

Consequences are Dire: This is such a grave sin and it results in a grave penalty. God himself will destory those who destroy his church.

- It is precisely the value the love and value God has for his people that makes harming them such grievous behavior.
 - Paul says, If a teacher does that to a church, he will pay with his eternal life: "If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him."

- Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness (Jas 3:1).
- Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account (Heb 3:17).

Build Up: God calls us to build up the church, not tear her down. Even when we discipline and point out missteps, its for the purpose of purifying not vengeance.

- The greatest threat to God's church is God's people (the danger is always greater from within than without).
- "For people who point out that Jesus was never married, I want to point out that he's had the most high-maintenance spouse in human history for 2000 years" (Svigel).
- We need each other. We need to value each other, show up for each other, hold each other accountable, build each other up.

Purpose: For God's temple is holy, (ὁ γὰρ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιός ἐστιν). The people of God are holy (i.e., saints, sanctified). Not because of what they do but because of whose they are (what they do is a result of their identity). They are holy because they are God's so they are called to live holy.

- We are holy because God is holy.
 - From what can you separate God to make him holy? "The very god-ness of God means that he is separate from all that is not God. There is an infinite qualitative difference between Creator and creature. God is one of a kind. [He's] in a class by himself. In that sense, he is [completely] holy... When asked his name in Exodus 3:14, he said, 'I am who I am.'" God's being and character are undetermined by anything outside himself. "He is not holy because he keeps the rules. He wrote the rules! God is not holy because he keeps the law. The law is holy because it reveals God. God is absolute. Everything else is derivative" (Piper).
 - God is God and we are not. OT genocide, 1-2 Samuel Bible Study. God doesn't owe us explanations. God is not on trial, we are on trial. He is the Creator and Judge. Only he can give life and can take life.
 - So we are holy by virtue of our belonging to God. We are set apart by him and for him. We are separated from the world and devoted to God... **or at least we should be** (that's the problem in Corinth).
- Why would God choose *us* to be his holy vessels? To magnify his power in our weakness. It doesn't weaken him, it exalts him. We don't diminish God, he exalts us. We don't sully God, he sanctifies us.
 - Are you living holy (set apart, dedicated to God)? Is our church set apart for God? Or is it simply for personal fulfillment, advancement, and help? Do I and my church exist for me or for God? Getting this right changes everything. Cause if you get it wrong, when things get difficult or uncomfortable, you'll go. When someone is annoying and offensive, you'll go.
 - The covenant (vow) free us to discipline, accountability, grace, and love. You won't cancel me, you'll love me.

Fulfill Your Purpose: and you are that temple. (οἳτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς)

- The journey of faith is the journey of becoming what we already are in Christ. As his church, the call is to become a suitable dwelling place for his presence.
- The church is built *by* God *for* God.
 - It is meant to be a visible manifestation of the presence and activity of God, so that people see imperfectly but truly the Spirit of God at work among us.
 - Since Christ is committed to work through the church, why wouldn't we do the same? Since Christ is building the church, isn't that what we should be doing? Since Christ loves the church, shouldn't we love her, too? The local church is the means of the gospel message going out. It is the answer to Jesus' prayer of unity. We are being built into a gospel outpost. We should be thankful and in awe at the church, its diverse unity is a picture of the gospel. You might be thinking, "Well, that sounds a bit limiting. I'd rather do my own thing for Christ." Maybe *you* would rather do your own thing, but is that what *Christ* wants you to do? You say, "I don't want to get tied up with the church." But that is what Christ has chosen to do. Jesus, our glorious Head, joins himself to such a feeble body? Isn't that amazing to you that he would do that? The church is where he chooses to display his glory.

Conclusion

Value the Church: Are we valuing the temple of God?

- We don't care about the church because we are pastors, we are pastors because we love God and his church. The church is God's plan and his treasure.
- ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰ so that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Eph 3:7-10).
- For many the church has become a bygone cultural artifact, an unnecessary social order, and an outdated moral force.
- But we know that the church, the true church, is the people for whom God died and the means by which he is revealing his wisdom to the world. It is the people among whom God displays his glory and his Spirit moves.
 - **If it's not that, we need to build that.** Let's not just complain about what it isn't but work to make it what God wants it to be.

Suitable Place for God's Dwelling: Are we making the church a suitable place for God to dwell? Or are we just like the world? Self-absorbed, fractured, prideful, corrupt, worldly, etc.