

“Temple of God”

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

These two verses are part of the context that began in verse one, with the emphasis going back to verse nine, and the words “God’s building.” It continues with the principles we looked at over the past few weeks in the building of the church of God as He wants.

In these verses a symbol is used that both the Jews and Gentiles alike would be familiar with in their background and culture – the “temple.”

1. The word for “temple” in this verse (ναός) is one that refers to the holy place, and the most holy place rather than the entirety of the temple (there is another Greek word for that)
2. This is referred to as the “sanctuary” – the place God set aside for the priest to fellowship with Him – it is a place where only those anointed and holy could go
3. The “temple of God” reference here is not to our bodies, as it is in 6:19 (“temple of the Holy Ghost”), but is referring to the church, the body of Christ as a whole, that God has chosen to meet with His children

I. A PLACE OF SAFETY – VS. 16

A. Because it’s a place where God is, in the Person of the Holy Spirit

B. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God”

1. “Know ye not” – a very common phrase by Paul in his writings that points to something they should have already know,

something he most likely had taught them in person when he established the church. It's also something we're to know today.

2. "That ye are" – the whole of you together, as a unit, as a body of believers
3. "The temple of God"
 - a) The article "the" is supplied by the translators – some show it as "a temple" – the point being that they were no more important than any other local body of Christ in other cities and towns
 - b) "Temple of God"

(1) The place where God dwells in the earth

(2) There is a growing trend today among many that call themselves "Christians" that say church is not important – this one phrase teaches otherwise

(3) God chose the Temple of the Old Testament as the place to meet with His people, and He chose the congregation of assembled believers (the local body of Christ) in the New Testament as the place He meets with His people

(4) That is not to say that the church is Israel, or the church building is the temple, but it is to say that the local church is the place of meeting with the Lord

(5) The reason for this is because the individual believer is indwelt with the Holy Spirit of God and when we meet together for fellowship around the Word we have the assurance that He is there

[Matthew 18:20](#)

(20) For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

C. "And that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you"

1. This is where the "safety" comes from – the church, the assembly of believers, is a place meant to be safe from the attack of the enemy that we face today
2. There is an account in First Kings 1 and 2 that relates the aspect of the Tabernacle (precursor to the Temple) being a place of refuge and safety – this is where we get the type presented in First Corinthians

1 Kings 1:50-51

(50) And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

(51) And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon: for, lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to day that he will not slay his servant with the sword.

1 Kings 2:28

(28) Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

"The altar was a privileged place, and it was deemed sacrilege to molest a man who had taken refuge there." (Barnes on 1 Kings 1:50)

3. It's not talking of physical safety and

security in First Corinthians – it's referring to spiritual safety – when we meet for the purpose of worship and edifying then we can have confidence that the Spirit of God will keep us

Proverbs 18:10

(10) The name of the LORD *is* a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

4. Another very important point to be made here is to show that this verse is also stating the truth of the Trinity – that the Spirit of God IS God (seen in the second part being a restatement of the first part of the verse)

II.A PLACE OF SACREDNESS – VS. 17A

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy”

- A. Seen in the fact that it can be defiled or destroyed***
- B. The church, the body of Christ, both locally and universally, is to be kept from defilement and destruction – this is done by being faithful to the Word of God and teaching it properly***
- C. This points back to the verses 13-15 and the “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble” teaching that we saw there***
- D. The church is a place of sacredness – Webster says of the word “sacred” – “The sense is removed or separated from that which is common, vulgar, polluted, or open”***

E. "If any man" – this, again, points to the pastor/teacher as the man of God teaching the Word of God to the people of God – just like the Old Testament priests did

F. "Defile"

1. This word is the same as the word "destroy" later in the verse
2. It is translated "defile" the first time it is used in order to give the sense of the background of the word
3. In the "Outline of Biblical Usage" (found at <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G5351&t=KJV>) it is defined this way:

To corrupt, to destroy

- a) In the opinion of the Jews, the temple was corrupted or "destroyed" when anyone defiled or in the slightest degree damaged anything in it, or if its guardians neglected their duties
 - b) To lead away a Christian church from that state of knowledge and holiness in which it ought to abide (this is its usage in First Corinthians)
 - c) To be destroyed, to perish
 - d) In an ethical sense, to corrupt, deprave
4. "The phrase seems to be used here according to the Jewish idea that the temple was destroyed or corrupted by the slightest defilement or damage, or by neglect on the part of its guardians."

(Vincent)

5. Defiling, corrupting, or destroying didn't necessarily mean that what was being taught in the church was evil or godless – it meant that it was either distracting from the purpose of the church or was adding nothing of value

G. "The Temple of God"

1. The article "the" is used here (as opposed to verse 16) – the reason is to show the continuity of the church of God throughout all of the church age, as a unit, as a whole
2. This would again show the importance of understanding the sacredness of the people of God as the "church," as well as the local body of believers assembled together for the right reason – the "edifying of the body of Christ"

[Ephesians 4:12](#)

(12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

H. "Him shall God destroy"

1. "Him" is pointing to "any man" – the pastor/teacher of the church (the "ecclesia")
2. "Destroy"
 - a) Same word as "defile" – here demonstrating the idea behind the "defilement" – it destroys the work of the Lord
 - b) "The condition is the first class ['defile'] and

is assumed to be true. Then the punishment is certain and equally effective. The church-wrecker God will wreck. What does Paul mean by “will destroy? ... Certainly he does not mean annihilation of the man’s soul... There is warning enough here to make every pastor pause before he tears a church to pieces in order to vindicate himself.” (Robertson)

I. God considers the church His “bride,” and He will protect it, no matter what – it is a place, and a people, of sacredness, and we, as pastor/teachers need to treat it as such

III. A PLACE OF SANCTIFICATION – VS. 17B

“For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are”

A. A place where the body of Christ learns to become holy, and, as an assembly of believers, we are considered to be holy as “the temple of God”

B. “The temple of God is holy”

1. Again, the article “the” is used here with “temple” – pointing to the unity of the church
2. “Is holy”
 - a) Present, indicative tense – it isn’t a question of “if it is,” or that “it should be” – if the church is what it’s supposed to be then it will, by its very nature, be holy
 - b) The word for “holy” here (ἅγιος) is one from a root word that means chaste, or pure – the place where God dwells is a place of purity, a place without blemish

C. "Which temple ye are"

1. The word "temple" in some versions is in italics, indicating it was supplied by the translators for clarity but that it is not in the Greek manuscripts
2. The emphasis here is not on the issue of the "temple" as much as on the issue of "holy" – "The double relative *which* refers to the epithet *holy*; 'of which holy character or class ye are.'" (Vincent)
3. The church is to be holy – to be sanctified – to be set apart for Divine use. When we gather as a body of believers in an assembly (what we call a "worship service"), we are to be holy ourselves, individually, gathering in a place that is designated as "holy" by the Lord Himself

Exodus 3:5

(5) And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.

Psalms 93:5

(5) Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

Psalms 99:9

(9) Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God *is* holy.

Psalms 138:2

(2) I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

Conclusion: What do we consider church to be today? The Temple of God was always a place of safety, it was always a place of sacredness, and it was always a place for sanctification. As the church today (the assembly of the children of God) is in the place of the Temple of the past, it should represent the same things. Look at the church, in general today – does it represent these simple truths? If not, then there needs to be a change.