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A1151 – December 18, 2011 – 1 Corinthians 3:16-17
Do You Know Who You Are?

In 1 Cor 3 the problem is the Corinthian's are still fleshly. The evidence that they are still fleshly is they had divided into four groups; some were "of Paul," others "of Apollos," still others "of Peter" and others "of Christ." These descriptions mean that they had made out one of these four men to be their master and their loyalties caused quarrelling and strife against one another.

To correct these fleshly divisions Paul gives three back-to-back metaphors. The first one is from agriculture. Paul and Apollos are nothing more than servants through whom the Corinthians believed. Paul arrived first and planted the church, Apollos arrived second and watered the church, but it was God who was causing the growth of the church. Logically then, neither Paul nor Apollos are anything, but God who gives the growth, He is everything.

The second metaphor is from construction. Paul laid the foundation of the church in Corinth. He laid the best foundation that could be laid, Jesus Christ. Those who were believers in Jesus Christ were to think carefully about how they were building upon the foundation. You can build with materials of the Spirit; gold, silver and precious stones or you can build with materials of the flesh; wood, hay and straw. But each one must be careful how he builds because at the judgment seat of Christ each man's work will become evident. If any man's work remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up he will forfeit reward but he himself will be saved

Today we come to the third metaphor, that of a temple. We'll look at the fact that God has always had a temple, what the temple is now during the present age and what part of the temple structure we are. Out of this hopefully we will grasp the primary teaching; the local church is a holy

temple of God and if many members of the local church corrupt it by bringing worldliness into the church then it will become a church in name only and Paul doesn't want this.

Let's go back to the OT and see these temples. This gives us the imagery so we can see ourselves for who we really are. Turn to 1 Kings 8, when Solomon made the temple; let's note some things to get our picture right. Solomon built this building, he brought the ark in and chapter 8 is the dedication of the Temple when the ark was placed in the temple. Verse 9, "There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. 10And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD." What do we mean "cloud filled the house of the Lord." What cloud? The cloud that goes back to what event? Previous to this, when was the cloud most manifest in the history of Israel? At the Exodus from Egypt. Remember, the cloud led them by day, the pillar of fire by night. It was a physical thing; it was a physical manifestation of the presence of God and it went and dwelled in the Tabernacle when it was completed.

So we have the temple Solomon built and they brought the ark into it. According to verse 11, the cloud filled the house "so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD." Verse 12, "Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud. 13I have surely built You a lofty house, a place for You to dwell forever." The dwelling is in the temple. It goes on to describe this. In verse 22, "Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven." Now watch this, this is the wisest man who ever lived till Jesus Christ; Solomon had an intellect that was in the super genius level. He was greater than Leonardo DaVinci; he was a Renaissance man in everything. Here he's describing the nature of God Himself and he's dealing with the problem people sometimes have: how can you say God is dwelling in a point of space when He is omnipresent, present at every point in space? We want to look at this a little just to feed our imagination, our mind's eye, to get set up with the proper Biblical category to understand indwelling. Verse 27, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built! 28Yet" now

watch what he does. “Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You today; ²⁹that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, ‘My name shall be there,’ to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. ³⁰“Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place...” He clearly knows, verse 30, he’s clearly acknowledging that even though the Shekinah glory is dwelling in the house, verse 11, even though God in one sense indwells the temple, he hasn’t denied God’s omnipresence, nor has he denied that the real throne is still in heaven. So there’s a little bit of a tension here when we come to this concept of indwelling. Let’s work this out a little bit.

Indwelling does not mean negating omnipresence. It doesn’t mean that that divine attribute goes away. Nor does it mean that God doesn’t have a special place, a special dwelling in heaven, we’re not denying that either. Well, if it’s not denying those two things, what is it affirming? One of the things it’s affirming in verse 11, verse 12, that some part of God’s glory is localized in the temple. So positively it’s affirming that there’s a location of a meeting place, so to speak, between man and God. Of course, God can meet us anywhere, but there’s a place being designated where God and man would meet in the OT and that’s this temple He indwells.

Before this, before the Solomonic Temple God’s glory indwelled the Tabernacle. Exodus 40:34 is the place you can see where He came to indwell that temporary dwelling. Before that if you go all the way back to Genesis God’s glory indwelled the Garden of Eden, that’s where He met with man. So this idea of God dwelling with man and having a particular meeting place is not a new idea in Scripture. The basic idea of God’s indwelling is that there is a location of communication. That’s fundamental.

The problem is what? Sin. So what happened at the Temple? What happened to open the lines of communication? Blood atonement was made. Remember what they did in Solomon’s Temple? Remember what they did in the Tabernacle? Remember what they did in the garden? There was sacrifice. You had to have blood atonement made to be on speaking terms with God. Then there was another little thing you had to go through down at the

Temple after the blood sacrifice. Between the altar of sacrifice and the entry to the first room of the Temple there was this wash basin and you had to wash off, cleanse your hands and feet of all the gunk before meeting intimately with God. This had a little connotation to it we know as confession. You know, what do we do about the sin we commit after we have received Christ's sacrifice for us? We confess it. 1 John 1:9. So all this is pointing out the holiness of God

God always has a Temple. So what's the Temple now? The OT temple was destroyed. Who or what is the temple now? 1 Cor 3:16, **Do you not know that you are a temple of God?** And therefore there is a serious problem. Why? Because they are still fleshly. Because of sin. Does this ring a bell? It should.

Paul says **Do you not know that you are a temple of God.** This is something they should know. Paul is frustrated. He has received these reports about their worldliness from believers out of Chloe's house and it's downright irritating. And he's going to show he's downright irritated nine more times by asking the same question, **Do you not know?** (cf 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24). So let's turn to the next one in 5:6, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough." You should know that from cooking, now apply that simple idea over to the Church. You can't allow sin to go on and on in the assembly or it will corrupt the whole church. Again in 6:2, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? You dodo-heads, you can't solve simple issues among yourselves and yet you're going to have to judge the whole world. Do you not know these things? 6:3, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" You should know this. Hello. 6:9, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" You know this is basic stuff, you should know this but your living like you don't know this. 6:15, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" They were running off fornicating with prostitutes, making themselves members of prostitutes. And so you see a number of these "do you not know's..." and to signify Paul is frustrated with them. So the point every time he asks this is that here we have an obvious truth that you are not recognizing. What is wrong with you?

In 3:16 the obvious truth they should know is that they **are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in them.** They are a very holy place. Now,

you might be tempted to take this image of the temple and the Spirit's indwelling the temple as individual indwelling, every believer is a **temple of God** whom the Spirit of God indwells. But that's not the right interpretation in this context for two reasons. First, the verb **you are** (*este*) is a plural and **temple of God** (*naos theou*) is singular, so he's calling the local church at Corinth a single **temple of God**. The second reason is because verse 17 says **If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him**. So there clearly a single member of the local church of Corinth can corrupt the local temple and if he does then God will discipline that single man. But the man himself is not the temple of God, he's a member of the temple of God and he is corrupting it. So the grammar and the context argue that the **temple of God** in this context is a local church and not an individual believer. Individual believers may be a temple of God but you can't get that out of this verse.

So this prompts us to study NT passages on the temple of God more carefully and you will discover there are three temples of God in the NT. For the first one turn to Eph 2:19. Paul is talking about the church as a new entity composed of Jews and Gentiles who were once separated by the Law of Moses but have now been brought near to one another by the blood of Christ. And he says to the Gentiles in verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, 21in whom the whole building," that's Jewish and Gentile believers, "being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord," alright that's every Jewish and Gentile believer in every local church in every city that is growing into this holy temple. Then in verse 22 he adds the local church of Ephesus, "in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." So the local church at Ephesus is also a part of this holy temple. So Eph 2:19-22 teaches that all church age believers, both Jew and Gentile, whether in heaven or earth, compose what we might call the universal church. And local churches are part of that universal church.

The second temple in the NT is the local church of which Ephesus was one example but our main passage of 1 Cor 3:16-17 is the central passage. **Do you not know that you plural, we'd say ya'll, the church of Corinth, are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in ya'll?** It's a

corporate dwelling of the Spirit in the local church at Corinth. So 1 Cor 3:16-17 teaches that all church age believers in a local church compose a temple.

Finally the third temple in the NT is the individual believer and for this turn to 1 Cor 6:19. Paul is talking here about the physical body and how the physical body is not a nothing. You know, don't look negatively on the body; we're increasingly seeing this problem in Christian circles. Christians are spurning the body and the logical conclusion, if you have that belief, is to make a strong separation of the body and the spirit to the point that they are unrelated and the body is a nothing and the spirit is everything so I can use my worthless body for whatever pleasure I can get out of it, the body is a pleasure machine. Paul says that the body is not to be counted as a mere nothing and therefore a pleasure machine but is to be used positively for the Lord. He says in verse 19, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" And the "your" here is singular, it's an individual, as well as "temple," which is also singular, so unlike 3:16 where the "you" is plural and temple is singular, we now have the you is singular and the temple is singular. So the teaching is that the individual physical body of the believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit. So therefore, notice the end of the verse 19, "you are not your own." You don't own yourself and therefore you can't do whatever you want, you belong to someone else, you belong to God. Verse 20, "For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." This passage is obviously against non-Christian views of the body that work out logically toward hedonism.

But our point is to show that there are three temples in the NT, the universal temple, the local temple and the individual temple. The universal temple is composed of all church age believers on earth and in heaven. The local temple is composed of all believers on earth in a specific local church. The individual temple is the believer. Alright, so that gives you the big picture.

Now the striking thing about these three temples is they are not at all what Jews and Gentiles perceived of as Temples. They thought of temples as physical buildings. Corinth, being a Graeco-Roman culture, had a Temple of Aphrodite, it was the crown of Corinth towering 2,000 feet above the city on the Acrocorinth; they had the Temple of Apollo in the city and the Temples of Poseidon and Palaimon about 6km away at the site of the Isthmian Games and before they came to Christ they were actively involved in the religious

ceremonies down at these temples, some of them still were, but now they themselves are a temple. The Jewish believers at Corinth also knew of Temple life in Jerusalem and how that's where you go to meet God and all of that but now Paul says, don't you know you're the Temple, there's no need to go to Jerusalem to meet God, God can meet you wherever you're located. So they had a concept of Temples and the gods or God that supposedly dwelled in those Temples but now by implication no gods or God dwells in any of those temples because they themselves are the real temple. The Church is where God meets man.

But what part of the temple are they? The temple had several parts, it had various courts, various portico's, etc...What part of the temple are they? He's using the temple imagery to describe the local church. What word does he use of the temple? There were two Greek words for "temple," *ieron* and *naos*. *Ieron* referred to the whole temple compound; *naos* referred exclusively to the innermost room of the temple; the Most Holy Place. So which word does Paul use of the local church? *Ieron* or *naos*? He uses *naos*. He says we are the inner sanctum, we are the Most Holy Place.

So if we were looking at the imagery of the OT Temple, what dwelled in the Holy of Holies? Shekinah Glory. What was Shekinah Glory? A visible manifestation of the presence of God. Remember, this is the room where the ark was kept, only one piece of furniture was kept in this room. Outside that room you had the Holy Place and it had three pieces of furniture; the seven-branched golden lampstand, the table of showbread and the table of incense. That was a serious room - the priests went in there daily, they added oil to the lampstand, they put bread on the table, they added incense to the altar. Inside the Most Holy Place was the most serious room of all, the high priest entered that room only once a year, it was separated from the Holy Place by a veil and inside was the Ark of the Covenant and enthroned above the cherubim on the lid of the Ark was the Shekinah Glory.

Now once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would go into that Most Holy Place. Before he went in he would go through a series of sacrifices and purification ceremonies. Then the other priests would tie a rope to his leg and off he would go to apply blood to the lid of the ark, this was to make atonement for the nation Israel. Now you say, why did they tie that rope around his leg? Answer, because if he had any sinful impurities when he

entered that room, even if they were unintentional, he would instantly be struck down by God. That's how holy God is. God's holiness is like 250,000 volts of electricity and if you reach out and touch it inadvertently, that's it, it's a tremendous thing that the church has lost sight of. John Calvin said if we knew even 1/10th of the sin which clings to our soul. The carnality in the Church today speaks volumes about how lightly they esteem the holiness of God.

Now you are that Most Holy Place, you Fredericksburg Bible Church. Paul says, **Do you not know that you are the Most Holy Place of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?** In this local church. See why sin in the assembly is such a serious thing? See why starting with fleshly methods of knowing and fleshly methods of speaking are so serious? You are the Most Holy Place of God where He has sent His Spirit to dwell in you. And every time we sin we are sinning inside that Most Holy Place where the Holy Spirit is dwelling. So you better believe it's serious. There's no room to compromise with the world at all, you can't bring the world into the Church, the Church is the Most Holy Place. And it's where God communicates with the world. So if we live like the world then what kind of testimony do we have to the world? We don't have one. As the Church becomes like the world the Church loses it's testimony to the world. You don't reach people in the world for Christ by bringing the world into the Church. You bring them to Christ by giving them Christ.

Now think of the context at Corinth - if you looked around there were pagan temples all over Corinth, they had no answers, they had nothing; Paul says you, you are the temple of God, you are the place where I meet with man. And yet they were bringing the culture into the Church. They were borrowing from the surrounding world system as if the world had answers that the temple of God was in need of.

See, this is actually a very timely text. Now 3:17. **If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him.** What does this mean? It's very strong language. It reminds you of the high priest on the Day of Atonement going into the Most Holy Place to put the blood on the Ark of the Covenant to make atonement and he blows it and getting physically struck down. Now one option is to say that if a man does this he will lose his salvation. But verse 15 already said that if any man's work is burned up, he will forfeit

rewards, but he himself will be saved. Rewards can be lost, salvation can never be lost so that's not a viable option. A second option would be to say that this is simply saying that he will lose rewards, but in this case it is not the rewards that God will destroy but him, the man. So that is not a viable option. A third option is to take **destroy** in the sense of temporal discipline. God might discipline the believer for corrupting the temple of God. This is a viable option. And lastly, it could refer here to sin unto death and be an exact parallel with the high priest who entered the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement unclean and was struck down. Or it could be three leading to four so that there is temporal discipline and if it remains uncorrected then sin unto death, premature physical death. Probably both three and four are true.

In conclusion the imagery for this passage comes from the OT. God desires to have a meeting place with man where He communicates with mankind. In the OT this started in the Garden of Eden, then in the Tabernacle and finally the Solomonic Temple. In the NT there are three temples, the universal church, the local church and the individual believer. These are all linked together as we as individuals are being built together into a local church and we as a local church are being built into the universal church. We are where God meets with man, we are the conduit for the gospel, we are the propagator's of the truth, we are the temple of God, the Most Holy Place on earth and the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in us as a local group of believers and we should realize how important it is and we need to act like it, live separate lives from the world in every way, determining to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. As Jesus said, "Be ye holy as I am holy."

[Back To The Top](#)

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