

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Spirit Indwelling Us Falls Ch. AM 2/11/2024

Whenever we drive past a lot of cars or a large group of people gathering, we wonder – what is that group of people gathering to do? Some may be gathering in line at a store, and we find out that they are catching a sale. Some gather to attend a birthday party or a concert or a game. What is the group going to do?

Secondly, whenever we drive past a house or a building that is being built on an open lot, we wonder – who is going to live in that house, or what business will occupy that building?

In today's study, we ask both questions about the church 1) what are the people gathering to do? Answer: to be the temple of God 2) who is going to live there? Answer: The Holy Spirit

As we gathered this morning, we prayed for the Spirit. The prayer of invocation at the beginning of our service invokes or invites the Spirit to inhabit us as worshippers of God, and to give us God's own presence and God's blessings.

**Christ gave us the gift of His Holy Spirit!**

How can God give His Holy Spirit to sinners, without sinners being in danger? Because Jesus died for our sins and rose again to make us His holy people, and to send us His Holy Spirit so that our Holy God will be present with us cleansed sinners. To use construction language, we are each living stones, and the church that God is constructing is the living church. We continue to be built up. We are converted and then we are growing by reading and hearing the Word of Christ, as the Spirit of Christ enlightens the Word, and we are reaching out to others by proclaiming this gospel in words of hope to other sinners to join us.

**1. We are the holiest place – where the Holy Spirit dwells. (v.16)**

(v.16), *“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”*

When Paul wrote *“do you not know”* Paul was communicating to the church in Corinth that of course they actually did know these basics, but that their actions showed that they needed a reminder! So, Paul wrote this letter as a reminder of basics. A reminder of what? Here Paul was reminding them of 2 essential principles. 1) They were God's temple and 2) God's Spirit dwelled in them. Since they did have this knowledge, then they should be expected to live accordingly.

Being the dwelling place of The Holy Spirit, or the home of the Spirit was foundational or axiomatic for the church. It was well-known, and yet apparently, was easily forgotten.

Just as pagan gods lived in pagan temples, so, too the one true God lived in temples, but not in temples built by human hands. God lived in the temple that God Himself was building – and that temple was actually the Corinthians! God's temple was the people who were initially given life by God in their human births - each created in the image of God individually. Additionally, each of the believers

was given a second birth, was born again, received life from above, a new life Spiritually. And on top of those individual truths, they had a collective truth – they were brought together and made into the church not of various earthly stones but rather of various living stones. Together, they became the place where the Spirit of God took up residence in this world!

Paul taught this same truth when Paul was over in the city of Athens. Paul taught this truth about God to their unbelieving university philosophy professors, in Acts 17:24-25, “*The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything...*”

Historically, we recall that it was God who had commanded King Solomon to build an earthly temple made of wood and stone for the worship of God. But that temple was always temporary. God had a better temple in mind. Here how Stephen taught this truth in his speech in Acts 7:47, “...*it was Solomon who built a house for [God]. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me, says the Lord...*” A moment later we read of the reaction of the people to Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:54, “*Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at [Stephen]. But [Stephen], full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God...*” What was Stephen full of? The Holy Spirit!

So, in our study in 1 Corinthians, when Paul wrote that the people in Corinth were God’s building, and Paul then asked if they were fully absorbing this bedrock truth that they were God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit was dwelling in them, we could say that Paul was speaking of the church as the holiest place on earth. Think of it - what place could be more holy than the place where The Holy Spirit of God was present? Paul would later confirm this understanding in his second letter to the church in Corinth, in chapter 6:16, “...*we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’*” Notice the use of covenant language!

We got the point. What did it mean for the Corinthians that they had The Holy Spirit? Answer: It meant that they must stop their unholy actions and words. Chapters 1-2-3 stand together as one unit of Paul’s concern for them to be reminded of basic truths and be strengthened as a church. Look what Paul had said just 15 verses earlier, in chapter 3, verse 3, “...*while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving only in a human way...*” What it meant that The Holy Spirit dwelled with them, was that they must stop behaving with unholy strife that grieved The Holy Spirit. Or consider what Paul wrote in chapter 1:11, “...*it has been reported to me...that there is quarreling among*

you...” They were filled with the Spirit in the church in Corinth, and yet there was still quarreling there in Corinth! That is why Paul wrote, to address that problem. Paul had also written further, that there was also boasting. The problem of boasting led to the further problem of divisions of certain people following certain persons, and other people following other persons. They were neglecting the unifying teaching of Christ and Him crucified and Him risen again. How did Paul help them? Paul helped them to pause and to take into account who it is that dwelled within the church. Paul asked them to see what Paul saw – the inappropriateness and damage in the Corinthian church when God’s people failed to live holy lives according to The Holy Spirit. This was no small matter. This was huge. Paul got to the heart of the problem. Actions and words against God’s people were actions and words against the Spirit of God! Sins against God’s people were sins against God. That brings us to Paul’s next point.

## **2. God fiercely protects us. (v.17a)**

(v.17a), “*If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him...*”

Destroy? Yes. Paul was writing this letter precisely because the factors that could do damage to God’s church were already present within the church in Corinth. What were those factors? Foolish teaching replacing wisdom teaching. That had to look at the content of what was being taught in Corinth. Additionally, there was the area of motives – such as bad motives for conducting ministry. Ministry in Corinth that was being carried out for personal reasons of self-esteem, status-seeking, or self-interest was also harming the church. These were all things that Paul had listed previously, so he did not again list them or elaborate here in verse 17. Here Paul was summarizing. Here Paul stood upon the lists he had made throughout 3 chapters, and Paul was ready to make his point clearly.

This was an instance of the Holy Spirit exercising God’s holy law. That is, the Spirit protected God’s people in Corinth. And this was strong language, because the Spirit protected them fiercely. What would God do? The word destroy was used. It was a conditional statement. If. If a person, any person, anyone, Paul wrote, took actions that destroyed God’s temple, THEN God would destroy him or her. If a person did damage to the temple, God’s Spirit would do damage to him or her. Again, that sounds like revenge and we wonder whether it was fitting for the Spirit to make such a statement? At first hearing, it is jarring, and it doesn’t sound fitting for God, did it? But Paul was asking them to take a hard look at their actions, and to bring the Holy God Himself into their evaluation, and to think again about the severity of what was happening in the church in Corinth! This response from God was a holy response. This response from God was fitting for the wrongs being conducted. We could put it this way - the destruction of the destroyer was a necessary action for God to take. It was not merely a threat from the Holy Spirit. Rather, it was an explanation of how it works.

God had set up the world in such a way that there were sins and consequences. Sin destroys, and so the consequence was that God would respond by destroying the sinner. But the sinner already knew that. So, the sinner was responsible for setting into motion a chain of events that came back around to the sinner. Sin leads to death for the sinner!

In this case, it was sins against the church. It was sins against the temple of God, where The Spirit makes Himself at home. It was the sin of doing damage to the temple of God, that was God's people. Anyone who led God's people astray from the Word of Christ, astray from the truth of Christ, were doing damage to the temple. Anyone who touched the church, touched God. Anyone who touched the house, touched the resident of that house. The people in Corinth meant to hurt people. There was only one thing that they did not take into account: God Himself. If they had been thinking clearly, they would have not taken actions against God.

Here is a confirming quote from the teaching ministry of Jesus in Matthew 25, when people are giving account to God for failing to help people in the church, "...they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' <sup>45</sup> Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

These words of Jesus confirm what Paul has been pointing out, and we can apply this directly to ourselves - that is, to put a fine point on it - how special we are in God's eyes, as God's blood-bought people, God's field, God's fellow workers, God's subcontractors, God's building, God's temple, God's church. Because the very Spirit of God dwells in us, we are God's home! God always fiercely protects His home turf!

There is no one more gentle than Jesus, and yet listen to our gentle Savior speak the truth about how fiercely God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit go about the work of protecting the children of God, in Matthew 18:5-6, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives Me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." Jesus and Paul agree on the teaching of our second point – God fiercely protects us!

### **3. We are holy! (v.17b)**

*(verse 17b), "For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."*

Holy? Wait, the Bible says we are sinners. This same Paul is the one who wrote in Romans 3:23, "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." How can Paul now write that we are holy, the holy temple of God, in which lives The Holy Spirit?

This brings us to the gospel of grace. What if we sin? God would do anything to protect us right? Would God protect us from the consequences due to us for our own sins? Sins against God? Our own sins against the church? Yes, God sent His Son into the world to take the consequences of our sins upon Himself. He is the cornerstone of the church. Christ paid for our penalty on the cross, and gave us His righteous standing with God.

As Paul wrote in chapter 1:8, God “...will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Each of us have committed spiritual crimes, yet our sins against God and His people have been cleansed. We have done wrongs against others, and as we are given conviction, repentance, and faith in Christ, we are made right again. We have all been involved in arguments, and we have all contributed to divisions, and we have all spoken against living stones in the temple of God, and for all of these wrongs we ought to be destroyed. But God’s holy wrath was brought down instead on Christ Jesus, even unto death, so that we need not be destroyed.

Rather than us being cast into the sea with a millstone around our necks, our Savior took our place, and he was cast into the abyss of death, by a cross. Praise God that Christ rose again, making our wearing of a millstone unnecessary and inappropriate. Rather, we get to wear the white robe of Christ’s perfect behavior.

Listen for God’s protection of us, which we did not deserve, as we read in Revelation 7, when someone asked about us, upon our arrival into heaven, ““Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.15 “Therefore they are before the throne of God,

*and serve Him day and night in His temple;*

*and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence.*

*16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;*

*the sun shall not strike them,*

*nor any scorching heat.*

*17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,*

*and He will guide them to springs of living water,*

*and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

We are holy by faith in Christ Jesus!

### **Conclusion:**

The Spirit of God will not stop working until His church, His home, is built up in holiness and safety for all of His people.

It is interesting that the common impression of the world and the culture is that a holy man or a holy woman is boring. How little people know who think that

holiness is dull. When one meets real thing, it is irresistible.

Holy Leaders. Paul is addressing all Christians, but let's think for a moment about the leaders of the church, whom Paul is also addressing in this letter.

Every leader is merely a sinner saved by grace.

Every leader, every pastor, elder, deacon, and committee member, is only a sinner whose sins would ruin things, and warrant the God to tear down and destroy him. But leaders are retained in place in the church, only because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again, ascended and having poured out His Spirit upon us, in order that we may serve God by serving His church.

Leaders do not serve in human wisdom, and not in the wisdom of the world, not in secular wisdom, but in the wisdom of the Spirit of God, illumined by the Word of Christ, powered by the gospel of grace in their own lives first, and then flowing over to the lives of others.

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