

"YOU ARE GOD'S TEMPLE"

I. Introduction

- A. Serious adherents of a religion have great zeal when it comes to guarding the purity of their temple.
 - 1. One example of this comes from the second century BC, when the Syrian king who ruled over Judea desecrated the Jerusalem temple by sacrificing pigs on the altar.
 - 2. This resulted in the Maccabean revolt, in which the Jews successfully overthrew the Syrians and regained control of their nation for a brief period.
- B. God is zealous about guarding the sanctity of his true temple.
 - 1. This made clear in the strict regulations about temple access that are set forth in the law of Moses.
 - 2. There is also the example of Jesus' zeal for God's house, which he displayed when he drove the moneychangers out of the temple.
 - 3. As we study this portion of 1 Corinthians 3 today, we will see that God continues to be zealous in guarding his temple, even though the temple is no longer a literal structure.

II. Our Holiness

- A. Our passage begins with Paul asserting that the people of God are the temple of God, indwelt by the Spirit of God.
 - 1. We should note that the term "you" in verse 16 is in the plural.

2. This tells us that the point that Paul is making here is not that each individual believer is a temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
 3. That is true, and Paul will have something to say about it later in this letter.
 4. But in this passage, the point being made is that the church as a corporate entity is the temple of God.
 5. Paul speaks of the church in a similar way in Ephesians 2, where he describes Christians as those who are growing “into a holy temple in the Lord” and who are “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:21, 22 ESV)
 6. The apostle Peter does the same thing in his first epistle when he says, “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 2:5 ESV)
 7. This way of speaking about the church calls special attention to the people of God as we are assembled for worship.
 8. The Greek term for church literally means “assembly.”
 9. Our assembling together is a key aspect of our identity.
 10. If you are going to erect a structure out of various materials, you cannot do so without assembling the materials.
 11. In the same way, God builds his church into his temple by calling us to meet with him in holy assembly.
 12. This is why public worship is so fundamental to the Christian life.
- B. The fact that Paul speaks of the church as God’s temple is especially noteworthy when we remember that the physical temple in Jerusalem was at the heart of Jewish piety and that it was still standing when this letter

was written.

1. Paul is saying that the Jewish temple has been superseded by those who trust in Jesus Christ.
 2. Though Paul was a Jew, and a Pharisee at that, after his conversion he saw that the reality to which the physical temple had pointed had come in Christ.
 3. This is not an idea that Paul invented.
 4. Jesus himself taught it during his earthly ministry.
 5. We see this in John 2, where Jesus was asked by the Jews for a sign to prove that he had the authority to cleanse the temple.
 6. Jesus answered them by saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."
 7. While the Jews thought that Jesus was referring to the Jerusalem temple when he said that, John tells us otherwise by adding this comment: "But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this."
- C. What does it mean for Christ and his church to be the true temple of God?
1. The answer to this question comes as we consider what the temple is in the Bible.
 2. The temple is the place where God makes his presence dwell in a special sense.
 3. Though God is present everywhere, the temple is the place where God has made a way for fallen man to be restored to him, to worship him, and to enjoy fellowship with him.

4. Under the old administration of the covenant of grace, this was made known through the types and ceremonies associated with Israel's physical sanctuary, first in the tabernacle and then in the temple.
 5. Under the new administration of the covenant of grace, the gospel declares that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of those things, and that through faith in him we have access into God's presence.
- D. In the Old Testament, defilement of the sanctuary was punished either by death or by excision from the covenant people.
1. While those penalties are not in effect in our era of redemptive history, the reality to which they pointed remains just as true.
 2. This is made clear in the first half of verse 17, where Paul says, "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him."
 3. Notice how this differs from verse 15, where Paul said that true believers who employ worldly methods to carry out the church's ministry will still be saved, though their work will not endure.
 4. Here in verse 17, Paul is talking about those whose teaching is so far off base that, were it not for God's preserving power, it would result in the church's destruction.
 5. Such people are being warned that God will destroy them if they fail to repent.
- E. While the types and ceremonies of the old covenant are no longer in effect, the reality to which they pointed certainly is.
1. For this reason, just as everything connected with the old covenant temple was holy to God, so also are we holy to God.
 2. As Paul says in the second half of verse 17, "For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

3. To be holy is to be set apart from the world to belong to God.
4. The church's holiness is threatened by division.
5. The world is marked by all sorts of division, as we know all too well.
6. But the church is to be the place where redeemed people of all types and from all kinds of backgrounds are united around the truth of God.

III. Our Wisdom

- A. This brings us to verse 18, where Paul returns once again to a prominent theme in this epistle, the contrast between the wisdom of this age and the wisdom of God.
 1. As we have noted several times already in our study of this letter, there were a number of people in the church in Corinth who were attracted to the things that the world counts as wisdom.
 2. They were more interested in being wise in the estimation of the world than in being wise before God.
 3. This is something against which God's people always need to be on guard.
 4. We face constant pressure to embrace the things that the world deems to be wise and to affirm the things that the world counts as righteous.
 5. But the Bible tells us that true wisdom is found in rejecting the world's wisdom and submitting to the things that have been revealed by God.
 6. The world will call you a fool when you do that, but God will count you as wise.

7. This principle is at the heart of the gospel.
 8. As Charles Hodge explains, "We must be empty in order to be filled. We must renounce our own righteousness, in order to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We must renounce our own strength, in order to be made strong. We must renounce our own wisdom, in order to be truly wise. This is a universal law. And it is perfectly reasonable. We are only required to recognize that to be true, which is true. We would not be required to renounce our own righteousness, strength, or wisdom, if they were really what they assume to be. It is simply because they are in fact worthless, that we are called upon so to regard them." [69]
- B. Verses 19 and 20 contain citations of two Old Testament passages.
1. The first is Job 5:13, where Eliphaz says to Job, "He catches the wise in their craftiness."
 2. While Eliphaz was misusing this principle by applying it to Job, the principle itself is true.
 3. Those who employ human wisdom to come up with crafty schemes to advance their own interests will in the end be found out and judged by God.
 4. The second passage that Paul cites is Psalm 94:11, where it says, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."
 5. While the people of this world think that they know so much, the Lord knows something that they don't know.
 6. He knows that the end of all worldly wisdom is utter futility.
 7. As we are reminded again and again by the Preacher in Ecclesiastes, "For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." (Eccl. 1:18)

8. The only wisdom that will endure is the wisdom of God, the wisdom that is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

IV. Our Inheritance

- A. We turn now to the last three verses in our text, verses 21 through 23.
 1. Here Paul returns to the problem of factionalism in the church in Corinth.
 2. By dividing into groups that were aligned with their favored minister, these Christians were boasting in men.
 3. They were counting themselves as blessed because of their connection with a mere human being.
 4. Paul explains that in doing this, they were selling themselves short.
 5. They were claiming Paul or Apollos or Peter as their guy, when in reality they can claim all of them.
 6. Ministers are not given to the church in order to gather cliques around themselves.
 7. They are given as servants to the church.
 8. They are given for the sake of the church's edification.
 9. Christians aren't obliged to accept anything that ministers teach until those ministers demonstrate that their teaching is drawn from God's Word.
 10. In the words of John Calvin, "all who discharge the office of the ministry, are *ours*, from the highest to the lowest, so that we are at liberty to withhold our assent to their doctrine, until they show that it is from Christ."

- B. Having said that all ministers are ours, Paul continues with this idea and carries it even farther, saying that the world, life, death, the present, and the future — all of these things belong to us.
1. There are two aspects to what Paul is saying here.
 2. First, he is reminding us that the church is the heir of the world.
 3. By virtue of our union with Christ, we have God's promise that we will inherit the earth.
 4. As Paul says in Romans 4:13, the promise to Abraham and his offspring was that he would be heir of the world.
 5. Similarly, Romans 8:17 says that we are fellow heirs with Christ.
- C. The other aspect to this assertion that all things are ours is that everything in this world is being put in the service of our salvation.
1. God rules over everything that takes place in this world.
 2. And he rules over it in such a way that it is all made to serve the interests of the building up of the church.
 3. This is true for the church on the corporate level, and it is also true for each and every individual Christian.
 4. What a thing that is to ponder!
 5. Everything in the realm of politics, everything pertaining to the Wuhan coronavirus, everything happening in our families, every joy, every success, every affliction, every uncertainty, every loss, every tear, everything in the entire world — it is all for your supreme good.
- D. After making that astounding assertion, Paul then says, "and you are Christ's."

1. Here we are reminded of where our identity as Christians is found.
 2. People have always had to reckon with the question of identity.
 3. And in our day, there is a significant amount of confusion over this question.
 4. Proponents of identity politics claim that people are defined by their race, by their ethnicity, by their sex, or by the gender identity or sexual orientation that they claim for themselves.
 5. As Christians, our identity is not rooted in any of those things.
 6. Neither is it located in the struggles that we experience with sin and temptation.
 7. Instead, our identity is grounded upon the glorious reality of being "in Christ."
 8. We find our identity by renouncing our claim on our lives and saying, "I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."
 9. There is nothing in all creation that is more precious than being able to say that.
 10. As Pastor Jonathan Landry Cruse reminds us, "Nothing but an identity founded in Christ is sustainable through all the changes of life and will satisfy even into eternity." [*The Christian's True Identity*, 15]
- E. Our text ends with Paul making one last assertion: "and Christ is God's."
1. What does Paul mean by this?
 2. We know that he cannot be saying that Jesus is subordinate to God in his essential nature.

3. That would make Jesus to be less than fully God, which would make him incapable of being our Savior.
4. Instead, Paul is talking about Christ's subjection to God in his human nature and in his office as our Mediator.
5. The reason why Paul makes mention of this in this context is because he wants us to understand that we have to remain in Christ, the one true head of the church, if we want to be reconciled to God.
6. Those who subject themselves to other heads, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, are departing from Christ.

V. Conclusion

- A. The key idea that this passage impresses upon us is that the church is precious to God.
 1. He has made us into his dwelling place.
 2. He has given us his wisdom.
 3. He is governing all things for our sake.
- B. The fact that God bestows such blessings upon his church should make us exceedingly grateful.
 1. It should cause us to avail ourselves of the inestimable privilege of being part of the church as it assembles for worship.
 2. And it should motivate us to devote our lives to the building up of the church, the true temple of God.