

STUDY 14

A Dwelling Place of God in the Spirit

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THE WONDER OF THE CHURCH

Our study title comes from Paul's statement that the church grows into 'a holy temple in the Lord' (Eph. 2:21) and that Gentiles are 'being built together into a dwelling place¹ for God by the Spirit' (Eph. 2:22).

Paul was a preacher to Gentiles and understood the mystery of their inclusion among God's people. The man who had fiercely defended the traditions of Israel and the sanctity of the temple now understood and proclaimed that God dwelt in a house made without hands, and that it was none other than the gathering of all those who were sanctified through faith in Jesus Christ. This miracle had begun with Israel on the day of Pentecost.

PENTECOST

A multinational assembly of Jews was gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost day when the Spirit of God came to the apostles. He enabled them to declare the wonderful works of God in raising up the Messiah whom Israel had killed. The same Spirit convicted many that these things were so. They were baptised into the name of Jesus and received the gift of the Spirit. In this way, a community was born, made up of newborn people. We may say that this was the coming of the glory of the Lord on his newly formed temple.

Many came to know what sin, righteousness and judgement were (John 16:8). Like the repentant thief who was crucified with Jesus, those who heard the word knew they had been judged and found to be in the wrong, knew that Jesus was truly King and that they were fully forgiven. Peter said believers would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.² This is the gift of God himself dwelling in his people, formed now, not as an

¹ The LXX uses *katoiketerion*, 'dwelling place', of the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 8:13) and also, of heaven (1 Kings 8:39, 43, 49).

² '... the one great gift which [God] gives to his church is his Spirit... In the church, all other "gifts" (usually *charisma*...) are the results of this one gift (Rom. 12:3ff.; 1 Cor. 12:1ff.; cf. also 2 Pet. 1:3)'. H. Vorländer, 'Gift', in Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2,

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aggregate of individuals, but as a body; that is, by God's gift, alive. The members of this new temple worshipped God truly and provided for one another. To use Peter's word from his first letter, they had come to a 'living stone', Jesus Christ, and were themselves 'living stones', now being built up as a 'spiritual house' for true worship (1 Pet. 1:4–5).

This mark of God's presence and the accompanying certainty they had of a coming inheritance (they were willing to share their earthly inheritance) were clearly identified by the watching community. No one dared join themselves to this assembly (Acts 5:13). Then again, when Simon the sorcerer was baptised, he was soon identified as not real by his attempt to have proprietorial rights over the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:21).

But the church did not, and does not, live by the memory of Pentecost. Rather, when Paul tells us we are 'a dwelling place of God by the Spirit', he would have in mind the dynamic setting of his preaching the gospel to Jews and Gentiles and seeing them come to faith in Christ, and being joined together in a remarkable assembly of people amongst whom hostility had been destroyed.

As those who have, ourselves, been brought to life and been joined to his people, what does it mean that we are a dwelling place for God? How has this come about? What manner of life do we now have and how may we give leadership in it? Then again, what does all this mean for the world?

THE PATH OF THE CROSS THROUGH OUR HYPOCRISY

At the time of Christ's coming, Israel had turned the worship of the Lord into a charade. The place Jesus called 'my Father's house' (John 2:16) was being used for profit by those who thought they owned the temple.³ It had become a national icon rather than 'a house of prayer for all nations' (Isa. 56:7; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46) and 'the place of the soles of [God's] feet' among the nations (cf. Ezek. 43:7). Zeal for this house consumed Jesus and he demonstrated what his Father thought of their behaviour.⁴

When asked for a sign of his authority to undertake this work, he pointed to himself, albeit in a way that would only be understood later. His body was the temple of God. He was the 'place' where they should listen and worship (John 2:18–22).

In the light of this ignorance as to what it meant that God lived among his people, it is remarkable that Jesus prophesied that the time was coming, and had arrived, when people would worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23). The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about 'your Father' would be implemented and a true people would be raised up who would not need a temple 'made with hands',⁵ either at Samaria or Jerusalem, even though the latter was a witness to God's salvation.

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 42.

³ Craig L. Blomberg quotes C. K. Barrett saying Jesus is not complaining about overpricing. Rather, Israel had made the temple 'a nationalist stronghold', making people change their money to Jewish money and protecting Jewish interests (at lecture in Adelaide, August, 2000).

⁴ There is no indication that he 'cleansed' the temple, in the sense of making any lasting difference. That awaited the work of the Spirit.

⁵ Mark 14:58; cf. Acts 17:24.

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For this true worship to come about, Jesus pointed to himself and to the gift God would give, ‘a spring of water welling up to eternal life’ (John 4:14). Later, Jesus called thirsty people to come to him. From their hearts would ‘flow rivers of living water’, referring to the Spirit whom believers would receive. All this, Jesus said, awaited his being glorified (John 7:37–39).

Through his death, and rising again, Jesus forged a way for his people, past the hypocrisy of mere formalism, to a worship in spirit and truth.

Isaiah said Israel in his day honoured God with their lips while their hearts were far away (Isa. 29:13). They had forgotten the truth of God’s presence among them. The problem of hypocrisy is always with us. We can even become accustomed to it and think it to be normal. John le Carre, in his novel, *A Small Town in Germany*, has one of his characters confide:

I am a hypocrite. I’m a great believer in hypocrisy. It’s the nearest we ever get to virtue. It’s a statement of what we ought to be. Like religion, like art, like the law, like marriage. I serve the appearance of things. It is the worst of systems; it is better than the others. That is my profession and that is my philosophy.

Clearly, our being a dwelling place of God is not a formal or merely theological category to have in mind, but a work of God himself, forming persons and a community that are alive to him and led by the Spirit who has been poured out upon them. We will look at the various operations of the Holy Spirit, in particular the references in Ephesians that fill out what it means that the church is God’s dwelling place.

MARKED AND SECURED AND FILLED FOR GOD’S FUTURE

Paul says believers are ‘sealed with the promised Holy Spirit’ (ESV), or ‘the Holy Spirit of promise’ (NASB) (Eph. 1:13–14; also 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:21–22). Two ideas are conveyed by something being sealed and both are present here. The Spirit *identifies* those whom God receives as his own. He gives them his Spirit as the sign that these persons are truly his sons and daughters. He also *secures* them. Nothing is permitted to tamper with what God has owned as his own.

Sealing by the Spirit is linked with the Spirit being a guarantee or pledge or down-payment of the inheritance we have coming to us. The Spirit identifies believers as people of God, and secures them as such by imparting a foretaste of the coming redemption, a life that is already eternal.⁶ An important part of this anticipation of the future is the revelation of our being God’s dwelling place:

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and

⁶ Paul uses the fact of Christians being sealed by the Spirit to show the Corinthians the unlikelihood of his being insincere in his relationships with them. All manner of mischief is created when believers or whole churches are deceived as to their identity as the sealed people of God. They can be tortured with accusation, manipulated by power-hungry people, taken off into false doctrine, denied the truth that could come to them through proper use of authority, and many other such things.

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God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away' (Rev. 21:2–4, NASB).

God has created a people who live in the present but are not determined by it or confined to it. They are progressing to their inheritance.

Paul says that this hope needs enlivening in our minds (Eph. 1:17–23). Everything has been changed by the Spirit's coming. The power of God towards us, in raising Christ and seating him at his right hand, needs to be realised. The new place we have as Christ's body—as the fullness of the one who is the fullness of all things must be known. If Christ is doing something in the creation, he is doing it in and through his body. He is creation's fullness and, as his body, we are that fullness. Clearly, this has to do with our being the dwelling of God by the Spirit.

Eugene Peterson renders Ephesians 1:23 as, 'The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence'.⁷ While the church is not Christ and Christ is not the church, there is no such entity as the church that is not the body of Christ, and not his action in filling all things.

Paul has a similar thought in Colossians. The fullness of Godhead was in Christ bodily (2:9). But then, the believers are 'filled in him' (2:10, ESV). Peter O'Brien says, 'from the fullness of deity that dwells in the exalted Christ follows the infilling of the Colossian Christians . . . it is in union with Christ alone that they possess this fullness already'.⁸ O'Brien continues to ask what this infilling is. He denies that it could mean filled with deity, but that the infilling is by God. He says the language of fullness suggests 'joy and peace' (Rom. 15:13), 'the fruit of righteousness' or 'every need' (Phil. 1:11; 4:19) or 'the knowledge of his will' (Col. 1:9).

Paul's prayer is that believers may be filled 'in the direction of' (*eis*) the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19). Certainly, there is no higher life to which a person could aspire, or that could be promised by any heresy that put it back on ourselves to rise up to a higher level.

J. B. Lightfoot says: ' . . . the Church, as ideally regarded, is called the πλήρωμα [*plērōma*] of Christ because all His graces and energies are communicated to her' (as in Eph. 1:23).⁹

N. T. Wright says, 'God intends to flood the lives of men and women, and ultimately . . . the whole creation, with his own love, power and richness, and that he has already begun to put his plan into effect through Christ and by his Spirit'.¹⁰

Geoffrey Bingham says: "'Fullness of life" is characteristic of all members of the ecclesia. When we think that "fullness" is a special factor which happens only on special occasions then we are virtually relegating ourselves to "non-fullness"'.¹¹

⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs*, Christian Art Publ., Vereeniging, 1996, p. 477.

⁸ Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC 44, Word, Milton Keynes, 1987, p. 113.

⁹ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1965, p. 183.

¹⁰ N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986, p. 103.

¹¹ Geoffrey Bingham, *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2003, p. 42.

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The coming of the Spirit means much for the Church itself, but then, God's people do not live for themselves but for the purpose and future of God for the whole creation. The old covenant temple was a place of instruction and a place of meeting, but also a place of witness to the world. In a like manner, under the new covenant, and by the Spirit's coming on the people of Christ, God has placed his feet on the earth, as if to say, 'These are the people I have made, among whom I live and whom I care for. They know what is happening. Listen to them! They know the truth' (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15).¹²

MADE ONE FOR GOD'S DWELLING PLACE

Paul says we are being built *together* as a dwelling place for God 'by the Spirit', or 'in the Spirit' (Eph. 2:22). Given the section that this statement concludes, the word 'together' is important. We may speak of our bodies being the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and a local church being a temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16), but here it is the whole gathering of God's people who are the dwelling place of God in the Spirit. This relates to the earlier comment that, through Christ, Jews and Gentiles have access to the Father 'in one Spirit' (Eph. 2:18).

In the first instance, the work of Christ is in view in this paragraph. *He* brought Gentiles (and Jews—3:12) near to the Father by his blood. *He* is the peace between Jew and Gentile because he has broken down the wall of hostility between them in his flesh. *He* has created one new humanity 'in himself'. *He* announces this peace to Jews and Gentiles, by the preaching of the gospel (Eph. 2:17; cf. Isa. 52:7; 57:19). The result of this is that Jews and Gentiles are now 'a holy temple in the Lord', that is, in Christ.

The fact of Jew and Gentile being one is expanded elsewhere to include all social differences (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). This is not said to be a model to be implemented but a work of Christ that is announced to us.¹³ Believers are one, not just because of Christ's charisma or genius but because he has destroyed hostility within persons, the hostility they, or we, have to God and for one another. In so doing, he has restored the image of God in us, not just as an individual phenomenon (which it never was), but as a social phenomenon.

Sociality, or ecclesial life, does not come naturally to sinners. In dying to God we also died to one another in any real sense. It has taken all the cross and resurrection, all of Christ at the right hand of the Father, all of the Spirit in reviving and indwelling persons, to destroy the destroying hostility between persons and create the uncontesting sociality that is the mark of the Church.¹⁴

This work of Christ by which we are 'brought near' is said to be 'access . . . to the Father', and 'in one Spirit'. As in Ephesians 1, the work of God in Christ *for* us is

¹² 'For just as a pillar supports a roof or as a foundation sustains a building, so this society of believers has been divinely appointed to sustain and uphold in the world the truth which God had revealed to man' (Charles R. Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul*, Westminster Pr., Philadelphia, 1923, p. 46, cited in Thomas C. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, John Knox, Louisville, 1989, p. 44).

¹³ The household of God being the work of Christ is not a matter for presumption. There are appropriate ways of behaving in the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15) and judgement begins at the household of God (1 Pet. 4:17).

¹⁴ We hasten to add that this sociality is certainly contested, but from powers that do not acknowledge Christ or the Spirit.

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effected by the work of the Spirit *in* us. It is this work of the Spirit that constitutes us as ‘members of the household of God’.¹⁵

The Spirit empowers us to live in the peace which Christ has made by his cry of ‘Father’, giving each believer the same access to the Father. It is the peace of justification by faith that is made good in us by the love of God being poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1, 5). What God has created is not ‘holy space’ but a whole temple that cries, ‘Father!’ We are actually ‘being built together . . . by the Spirit’ as a worshipping people.

We may say that this is ‘a work in progress’: ‘you *are being built*’ (Eph. 2:22; also 4:15f.) suggests this, as does the prayer concerning ‘the hope to which he has called you’ and our being ‘his glorious inheritance’ (Eph. 1:18; also 2:7). However, the fact of our being the dwelling of God, or his temple, is also a present reality and has practical consequences.

Paul assumed the believers at Corinth would know they were the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16), but they had been behaving more like people of the world. Paul said they should know that they have no other foundation than Christ and should refuse a ‘merely human’ approach of setting one leader against another (1 Cor. 3:4). Workers are ‘God’s fellow workers’ (3:9) but then, God gives ‘the increase’ and the building is his. If the church is God’s holy temple, treating it as something profane would be an attempt to ‘destroy’ it and this would lead to God destroying that person.¹⁶ A division in the church assumes a division in Christ (1 Cor. 1:10–13; cf. 3:8) and this is unthinkable. Paul also wrote to Timothy to tell him how we should conduct ourselves in the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15).

So, we have in mind the present physical existence of the church, constituted as such by the Spirit, not merely as an institution, but nonetheless a physical reality and, as Lincoln says, the ‘focus for God’s presence in the world’.¹⁷ The church is already the ‘pillar and buttress of truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15, ESV) as it stands in the world.

The practical and social effects of unity are wonderful to have, and therefore, not surprisingly, we may make strenuous efforts to bring them about of ourselves. However, the unity of the church is God’s doing and he has made it so for his own dwelling. As we would expect, it can only be sustained as one by his own immediate presence and ministry to it.

Other references to the Spirit in Ephesians open up various aspects of what it means that God dwells among us by the Spirit.

STRENGTHENED FOR LOVE

Paul’s earlier prayer (or the beginning of the prayer to which he twice returns) mentioned our needing a spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17). He continues now to ask for the Spirit to strengthen our inner being to know the things of Christ

¹⁵ Markus Barth says, ‘A distant or dead God could not make a building holy. Even less could the assembled multitudes perform such a miracle with their loud chanting’ (*Ephesians 1–3*, Anchor Bible, vol. 34, Doubleday and Co., New York, 1974, p. 273).

¹⁶ In the Graeco–Roman world, desecration of temples was generally regarded as a capital offence.

¹⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42, Word, Dallas, 1990, p. 162.

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and to be grounded in love (Eph. 3:16). This strengthening comes according to the riches of his glory, and this is particularly significant if we understand the coming of the Spirit as the coming of glory to God's temple. God has come to strengthen his people in their inner being, so that they will be enabled to know his presence among them.

Geoffrey Bingham writes:

The 'full knowledge' is the thing to which man must come, that is why it is to be highly prized . . . Full knowledge is not simply propositional, it is also experiential, existential, complete. It requires illumination of the heart (i.e. the inner man, the 'core being', where will, emotions and intellect operate) for knowledge pertains to one's total being.¹⁸

Again as in the earlier prayer, the object of our being strengthened is that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. By nature of the case, this would mean being filled with love for God and neighbour.

Noel Due writes:

The works of love do not make the church one, but are the manifestation of the oneness that it has been granted as a gift by the Triune God. So great is the love of God for his people that he not only dwells among them, but *within* them, so that the unity for which they have been created might truly be effected according to the might of his power that works inside of them. For the church that he has thus formed, it is important that love flows unhindered, for this is the matrix of their worship.¹⁹

This life of love is the way of knowing God's presence among his people. It is also the way of God's redemption being represented to hostile man, by the witness of proclamation and its sociality. Jesus prayed that his disciples and those who believed through their word would be one—with a view to the world believing in his being sent by the Father. This entailed giving to them the glory given to him (John 17:20–23). He had and would make his Father's name known, including through the cross and now by his intercession, so that the love he received from the Father would be in us (John 17:26; also 1 John 4:12).

GIFTED TO SHARE IN THE UNITY

The unity of God's community/temple is the unity of the Spirit or, of the Spirit who makes oneness. It is also our being one body and Christ being Head (Eph. 4:3–4; 15–16).²⁰ How does this oneness function?

First of all, there is need for humility and gentleness and other graces 'to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:2–3). This is because of our having one hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and particularly, for our purpose at the moment, 'one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all'. The object of all our living is not that we be anything of ourselves or for ourselves, not even united—for its own sake—but that we be the people whom the Father fills by giving of and from himself.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Bingham, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, NCPI, Blackwood, n. d., p. 19.

¹⁹ Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You*, Mentor, Fearn, 2005, p. 204.

²⁰ Colossians 3:14f. emphasises love as the bond of unity, and peace as ruling in our hearts.

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This unity is enabled by Christ's gifts to his people—that is, to every member (Eph. 4:7, 12, 16; cf. 1 Cor. 12:7). This service by all is equipped by those with gifts to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, but with a view to us all coming to the 'unity of the faith' (Eph. 4:13) and all being equipped (Eph. 4:12) to work together and build the body up in love.²¹ All this is not called a gifting of the Spirit as it is in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, 11, but it is the provision of Christ for maintaining the unity of the Spirit. In other words, it is how the Spirit is imparting and maintaining the unity of the body. The service of all requires the equipping by those who speak the word of God to the community. It is by the word of the gospel that the Church lives, and by this that it is one.

Calvin says:

Though every one of us is said to be the temple of God and is so described, yet all must be united together in one, and joined together by mutual love, so that one temple may be made of us all. Since it is true that each one is a temple in which God dwells by His Spirit, so all ought to be so fitted together, that they may form the structure of one universal temple. This happens when every one, content with his own lot, keeps himself within the limits of his own duty, but when all at the same time bring whatever gifts they have, into the common service.²²

LED AND FILLED TO LIVE AS THE NEW HUMANITY

The fact of our being God's temple or dwelling place by the Spirit, is wholly dependent on God himself being present to make good what he has purposed. It is just as clear that this dwelling of God is a very domestic matter, involving us in gracious and serving relationships. This is particularly in mind in the latter part of Ephesians where Paul is concerned about how we 'walk'. This, also, is a matter of God's dwelling among us by the Spirit.

Paul says we are not to grieve the Spirit (4:30). Bearing in mind that 'grieving the Spirit' is what Israel did, its opposite (taken from the context of Isa. 63:10) must be to be 'carried' by the Lord, and to remember that he has led us through deep troubles (vv. 9, 13). In Ephesians, Paul has in mind that we are on our way to an inheritance, and that we are richly provided for. To be angry, dishonest, loose tongued or malicious along the way to such a goal would be to grieve the Spirit.

He also tells us to be filled with the Spirit (5:18). Believers who don't remember that God is dwelling in them by the Spirit may seek joy in another way! Critics of Pentecost day said the apostles were filled with wine. This may be an expression of their scorn, and a misrepresentation of the apostles' behaviour, but it certainly tells us that they were not inhibited!

²¹ The phrasing of Eph. 4:16 in Greek emphasises the necessity of every part of the body being in action. The word generally translated 'proper' or 'properly' (except the NIV which glosses the point) is the same word translated as 'measured' or 'apportioned' in v. 7. In other words, what is proper is what Christ has apportioned to each one.

²² John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St Peter*, trs W. B. Johnston, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 12, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1989 (1963), pp. 258f.

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The range of life to which this command is linked by its grammar is fascinating.²³ Our speech to one another and our worship to God, our thankfulness and mutual submission in life are all a manifestation of the fact that God has come to dwell among us. Being filled with the Spirit, which is a continuous requirement, is worked out as we read these commands and obey them.

ARMED AND ENABLED IN PRAYER FOR THE BATTLE

We have seen that being the dwelling of God has made us the place from which God acts and the place where he may be found. The Spirit is given to believers, and he convicts the world of sin (John 16:7–9; with 15:26f.). The church receives the glory given to Christ so they may be united, and the world knows God has sent Christ and that his people are loved as is the Son (John 17:22–26).

This places us in the line of fire of the evil powers who hate God, and places us strategically to hold out the word of God to the world. So Paul tells us to wield (only) the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17). We believe that the Bible is the word of God, but then, it is not under our control because it is contained within covers. What God has said, and what he says as his church announces the good news, remains the Spirit's sword. Israel at Sinai heard the sound of words but saw no form on Sinai (Deut. 4:12). The fact that God speaks is the mystery of his presence among us, and in us, to the world. This is not said to diminish the Scriptures as God's inscripturated word; rather, it establishes it.

Then again, we must be enabled by the Spirit for our prayers. The Spirit is within us to pray when we do know what to ask for. Perhaps he also has in mind that only prayers of love are true and that his love comes by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:30).

The Lord said his Father's house was to be a place of prayer for all nations. Here is the place where there is access to grace and to the Father. Here is the place where it is known that God has an inheritance for his people. Here is the place where striving has ceased. Here is the place where the future is already being created and where love is the only valid mode of action. What prayers arise in such a fellowship! What confidence there is to pour out our hearts to God. What a welcome there is for those who are wearied with the futility of life in this world. Nothing should interfere with the freedom of the church to be such a place, because the Lord gave himself up for us to create such a dwelling place.

CONCLUSION

Paul argues that because we are the temple of God—that is, God walks among us and is our God and we are his people—we should have nothing to do with idols (2 Cor.

²³ The one imperative, 'be filled with the Spirit', is followed by a string of participles: 'addressing one another', 'singing and making melody', 'giving thanks' and 'submitting to one another'. The latter participle, 'submitting', flows on into the section on relationships without another imperative or participle, literally 'wives to your husbands'. By implication, all the actions and all the relationships mentioned are an expression of being filled with the Spirit.

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6:16–7:1). The passage seems to be an interruption in its setting and, some think, even uncharacteristic of Paul. However, there are no external grounds for disallowing it, and it does comport with statements made in 1 Corinthians about being distinct from the modes of action of unbelievers. The statements should not be taken prudishly or, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, we would have to go out of the world altogether (1 Cor. 5:10). Taken simply as it is, it is a powerful call to recognise the wonder of our being the church and to not let lawlessness, darkness, Satan or unbelievers shape the life and worship of this temple of God.

Everyone in the first century understood the jealous care taken of temples—pagan or Jewish. Sacrilege was a capital offence. Paul himself had consented to the death penalty for Stephen for what he regarded as a sin against the Jerusalem temple. How much greater, then, is the call to cherish what God has done in forming us as his dwelling place!

There is no text book the world can write which would tell us how to live in the light of the age to come. There is no ethic that can describe how to live with a holy God who forgives. There is no political theory that can explain how to serve a world that hates us. We don't know how to lay one brick in this temple apart from preaching the gospel. We don't know what to do next apart from what the Spirit says to the churches. And we don't know how to keep going apart from prayer. But we are God's temple. He is among us, and do we need more than that?