

Intro:

This fall we have been working through a series of messages on the church, mostly focusing on the metaphors used in the New Testament for the church.

Our series so far has covered these topics:

“It’s not your Church”

“It’s a Building”

“It’s a Body: it functions by interdependence [servant-fellowship]”

“It’s a Growing Body: it grows into the head by the ministry of the parts”

“It’s a Flock: it needs shepherding (not merely leadership)”

Today we want to turn to one more metaphor, then next week, I think I want to return to the building metaphor and do a little more with that.

For our metaphor this week, let’s turn to 1 Cor 3.10-17. As I read, see if you can pick out the metaphor.

It's a Temple

it is intended to be a holy dwelling place for the Holy God

Before we get into our passages, we should remind ourselves what the temple was in the Old Testament. Solomon’s temple is described in 2 Chr 3-4 and 1 Ki 6-7:

- Dimensions of the courtyard not given, but the great bronze and the bronze laver were here – this was the place of public worship.
- Porch 10 cubits by 20 cubits (a cubit is about 1 ½ feet)
- Holy place 20 cubits wide, 40 cubits long, 30 cubits high [@ 45 ft, or approx. 4 stories high]
- Holy of holies 20 cubits by 20 cubits

Solomon’s temple would be about the height of some of our condominiums in the neighbourhood, but narrower and not as long. Much of the interior was overlaid with gold.

The temple was the place of worship. God told the wandering Israelites that a fixed place of worship would be chosen in the land, all their worshipping was to be done there, an edict that was frequently ignored, even by men like Solomon.

Nevertheless, the temple was the place where God met with his people. It became the centerpiece of religious and national life. Everyone resorted there.

When the temple was dedicated, the presence of God filled the place (2 Chr 5.11-14).

The national religious worship, with dedicated choirs and musicians took place here. It must have been an impressive sight to worship with these choirs singing, with the elaborate rituals conducted by the priests.

The primary idea of the temple, while providing a dwelling place for God in the land, was the idea of holiness.

- The presence of God in the land made the land holy, distinct from all other nations.
- The restrictions of access in the temple precincts, emphasized the holiness and majesty of God.
- The people were only allowed to assemble in the courtyard, they could not enter the house of God.
- The holy place was the exclusive domain of the priests, only they could enter and minister here, and then only according to strict orders.
- The holy of holies was opened once a year, and entered only by the high priest, on the Day of Atonement.

All of this was designed to emphasize the holiness and majesty of God and call men to fear and reverence Him.

Now consider again our text in 1 Corinthians 3. The term for temple is a very specific term, describing a specific part of the temple. Which part do you think that is? *the holy of holies*

You see, God has done something different with the Church. Instead of a fixed location for worship, God is worshipped by the gathered church, wherever it might gather.

Instead of a holy building, the house of God is now made up of holy people. You are the temple of God.

We are going to consider the ramifications of this metaphor for us as a local church – a local temple of God – today in the 21st century.

Proposition: You are the temple of God; you are called to holiness.

I. The holy temple is under God's protection (1 Cor 3.16-17)

A. The key facts of the passage

1. Temple = – holy of holies

2. You/ye = plural (even in English), so corporate body here

You should not confuse 1 Cor 3 with 1 Cor 6: there the body of the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit (6.19) — wherever God lives is God's temple: indwelling Holy Spirit = individual believer as a temple of HS.

- Demands holiness of life, do not make HS participant in sin
- But ... 1 Cor 3 refers to the local church, a group of people, also a temple of God [not HS]

3. Note: difference between KJV and NAS

- a. "The temple"
b. "A temple"

No article in Gk, so each local church is a temple of God, not the temple of God' – no one location in the NT era.

4. Spirit of God dwells in the local church

- a. It is the presence of the Spirit that makes the church a temple
b. It is the presence of the Spirit that makes the church holy

5. A warning is attached (17)

phtheiro {fthi'-ro} **Meaning:** 1) to corrupt, to destroy 1a) 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 1b) to lead away a Christian church from that state of knowledge and holiness in which it ought to abide 1c) to be destroyed, to perish ...¹

- B. The context tells you who is warned

1. 1 Cor 1-4 about conflict and a party spirit in the church
2. 1 Cor 3, the vv. preceding, about 'wood hay stubble' are especially talking about ministers of the gospel, leaders in the church

¹ Strong's data on the word

3. The destruction in the context was the wicked divisions and unholy spirit between members of the temple of God

Such a spirit of division and divisiveness has no place in the house of the Lord – you are holy, the dwelling place of God.

II. The holy temple is called to identify exclusively with God's holiness and cleanse its premises (2 Cor 6.16)

A. Wider context

1. The principle of separation: avoid the unequal yoke, do not be bound in any way to unbelievers (2 Cor 6.13-18)
 - a. The passage is often used to apply to marriage [but not much else]
 - b. The primary application of the passage is to church membership
 - 1) Paul is under attack in Corinth by false teachers
 - 2) He appeals to the true believers to be open in their fellowship with him, but he reminds them they have nothing in common with unbelievers [implying that this is exactly what these false teachers were]
2. The call is to separation (17-18) and cleansing (7.1)

B. The local church must be especially concerned about the purity of its membership

1. We are the inner sanctum, the holy of holies, the place of God's dwelling [shekinah glory]
2. We as believers are given the responsibility by God for keeping his temple cleansed
 - a. Purge out the old leaven of immoral membership (1 Cor 5)
 - b. Purge out the troublesome preachers of error and of rebellion to the apostles (1 Cor 6)

III. The holy temple is the ground of holy living (Eph 2.19-22)

- A. The mixed metaphors of the new condition (Eph 2.19-22)
 - 1. Jews and Gentiles no more divided, and Gentiles no more strangers, but 'fellowcitizens of the saints' in the 'household of God' (19)
 - a. The household = the Greco-Roman household
 - b. Master, wife and children, slaves, all one household together — an image of a socially cohesive unit, functioning together
 - 2. You are God's building (20)
 - 3. You are built into a holy of holies in the Lord (21)
 - 4. You are being built for a dwelling place of God (22)
- B. The consequences of the new condition (Eph 4-6)
 - 1. Transformed behaviour (4.25-5.20)
 - 2. Transformed relationships (5.21-6.10)
 - a. Marriage
 - b. Parent/child
 - c. Master/slave
 - 3. Transformed consciousness (6.11ff.)

IV. The holy temple is intended to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pt 2.5, 9-15)

- A. The principle: living stones, the dwelling place of God, spiritual sacrifices (5)
- B. Spiritual sacrifices defined (9-15)
 - 1. Walk in the light to show His praise (9)
 - 2. Abstain from fleshly lusts (11)
 - 3. Honesty (12)
 - 4. Submissive to the laws of the land (13-14)
 - 5. Glorifying God (15)

Conclusion:

Proposition: You are the temple of God; you are called to holiness.

These admonitions are collective admonitions, applied individually.

They call for accountability to one another for holiness; they call for consideration for one another against wickedness – to one another or to those without.

You are the temple of God – these passages argue for a personal commitment to church membership for the glory of God in His temple, right here in Victoria, BC.