

“God’s Temple”
1 Corinthians 3:16-17

16 *Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?*

17 *If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

While it might be hard to believe, as a child I often found myself either in trouble or in the Emergency Room or both. By the time I was 13, I’d broken (on different occasions) my legs, my arms, my ribs, my back, and my bottom teeth. Added to this, I lost count of the number of stitches I bore. Why? The most reasonable answer seems to be that I grew up with undiagnosed ADHD in the era when Evel Knievel was popular!

Added to all this was a general penchant for getting in trouble. For example, when I was ten, I found a flat piece of lead at the boat-works near my house and decided to use it as a discus in my front yard. We lived in Florida and all the windows were jalousies. My aim was a bit off and, as if I were trying, I threw my discus and on the first shot was able to drop it through all three pains of glass.

After that, and every other event I heard the same words, either a) **WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!!!** or b) an almost teary, “What were you *thinking?*”

My response was always the same: “Um...I don’t know?”

What else could I or anyone say? The words are more of an accusation than a question. If you really want the person to understand what they’ve done, the better question is, instead, “*What were you NOT thinking.*”

Using my discus miscalculation as an example, the answer to the question, “What were you NOT thinking?” might have been something like: “Ummm...I wasn’t thinking about the fact that I was relatively inexperienced at the discus...I wasn’t thinking about the fact that the front yard isn’t the best place for Olympic hopefuls to practice...etc., etc.”

You see, this question, “What were you not thinking?” is similar to the way Paul begins our passage today. He opens by saying, “*Do you not know...?*”

As a side-note, Paul uses this phrase in the rest of his letters only *one* time.¹ In this one letter to the Corinthians, he uses it *10* times! Why?

No doubt because the trouble-makers in Corinth boasted in their spiritual maturity and wisdom. To that end, Paul’s question is a bit biting and even sarcastic. It’s almost as if he’s saying, “You who are so wise and boastful of your knowledge, ‘Do you not know...?’” In other words, what he tells them in this passage and others like it, he expects them to know.

What are the things here that he expects them to know?

We’ll look at three things:

- I. Review (vv. 10-15)
- II. God’s temple (v.16)
- III. Paul’s warning (v. 17)

I. Review (10-15).

- A. This passage is addressed to those who lead or do ministry in the church with an emphasis on how and with what we build—NOT personal piety.
 1. Remember the foundation of the church is the person and work of Jesus. Paul delineates between two types of builders and on the Day of the Lord...
 - a. Those who build with that which is imperishable—the gospel—will see their work survive.
 - b. Those who build with that which is perishable—human wisdom, etc.—will see their work destroyed, though they will be saved as through fire.
 2. The bottom-line is that if, in your ignorance, you genuinely desire to build the church by using something other than the gospel, while you’re wasting your time, your salvation is not in doubt.
- B. Paul then transitions from a general warning about being careful how you build the church to a very specific and dire warning for those who proactively seek to divide or destroy the Church.
 1. Before we consider the warning, we need to consider Paul’s first question (v. 16).

II. The Church is God’s Temple (v. 16).

- A. First, in order to understand what Paul means by utilizing this imagery of the Temple we’ve got to go back to the Old Testament and consider the place and purpose of God’s temple there.
 1. The Temple was constructed, originally, by Solomon in order to accomplish several things.
 - a. It was the dwelling place of God on earth.
 - b. It was the place in which those called to the priesthood offered sacrifices in order to atone for the sins of the people.

¹ Romans 6:16

- c. It was brilliantly lit, filled with incense, and contained the bread of the presence—reminding Israel of the fact that God was their sustainer and provider.
 - d. Added to all this, believe it or not, it was only a shadow of the reality that was to come—Jesus.
 - B. The Temple and all it represented found its fulfillment and reality in the person and work of Jesus.
 - 1. The Temple was the dwelling place of God on earth.
 - a. “In [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...” (Col. 1:19).
 - 2. Jesus was not only the final priest, but the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world.
 - 3. While the Temple was full of light, Jesus claimed, “I am the light of the world.”
 - 4. While the Temple contained the “bread of life,” Jesus claimed, “I am the bread of life.”
 - 5. At the Cross, when Jesus cried, “It is finished,” the veil in the Temple separating the inner from the outer sanctuaries was torn in two.
 - a. In other words, the function of the old, physical Temple ended for all time with His death.
 - C. After His resurrection and ascension into heaven, He sent His promised Spirit to dwell in and among His Church—making the church, by the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place of God on earth.
 - 1. This is why Paul can say to the Corinthians, “Don’t you know that you [plural; that is, the church] are God’s temple?”
 - a. There are a few things to keep in mind here:
 - i. The “you” here is plural. In other words, what Paul is saying here has nothing to do with the way you treat your body. Should you be a good steward of your body? Certainly. However, that’s not Paul’s point here.
 - ii. The other thing to keep in mind here is that while Paul makes this statement regarding the *church* as God’s Temple, the old Temple is still standing and active.
 - (a) In other words, Paul isn’t writing after the old Temple has been destroyed and trying to comfort the church by saying something like, “You are God’s dwelling place until we can rebuild.” He’s saying, “Even though the old Temple is still standing, it is no longer the special dwelling place of God on earth—you are!”
 - (b) Because the church is now God’s Temple, the place where He has chosen to manifest His presence, Paul gives a very unambiguous warning to those who would divide or tear down this temple.
- III. Paul’s Warning (v. 17).
 - A. “If anyone destroys God’s Temple, God will destroy him.”
 - 1. Remember the audience here—it’s **church people!**
 - a. While this warning would certainly apply to those outside the church who would seek to destroy it, Paul writes these words to those within.
 - ii. Remember Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29-30—“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”
 - iii. The greatest threat to the integrity of God’s church comes from the inside—from those who would destroy.
 - B. How might one destroy the church?
 - 1. In almost every case you can think of, the root of division is found in the self-righteousness and arrogance of those who value their own opinions and preferences rather than the unity and witness of the church.
 - 2. Running a close second are those who utilize gossip and slander rather than utilizing the process of confrontation laid out by Jesus in Matthew 18.²
 - C. Paul says to those who utilize these methods or any other to destroy the church, God will destroy you.
 - 1. The great irony here is that those who are the most arrogant and self-righteous regarding issues over which they are dividing, should, in fact, be the most worried about their salvation.
 - a. In other words, God will not cast out any who are truly saved. Those who would be destroyed were never genuine believers in the first place.
 - D. A positive note, the more a church begins to see itself for what it is—the very dwelling place of God—the more effective it will be at seeing people come to know Jesus. Why?
 - 1. Because all the things that those outside the church seek from “broken cisterns”—hope, joy, love, life, community, peace, and a myriad of other things—would be available here, not as shadow, but as reality.

² “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-18 ESV).