

The Temple of God

(Pentecost Sunday)

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I have had the opportunity to be in different types of Churches all over the world. Some are small, while others are very large. Some have no electricity, while others are very modern. Some have professional musicians, some do not even have instruments. In all of these differences, there is one thing I have noticed. The presence of God could care less about any of those things. The Holy Spirit does not care whether you sing Hymns or sing modern songs. He does not care which language the sermon is in. You see, wherever God's people gather, in whatever humble or great building, the people are the true temple. I want to be very clear from the start. I am not going to talk about spiritual gifts or manifestations. That will come later in the book. Chapters 12-14 are great chapters to learn about the person and the work of the Spirit in the church. Today, as we come to the text in 1 Corinthians 3, it becomes important to discuss what it means to be the temple of God. Let us read together the passage for today:

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.¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." ²¹ So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

(1 Corinthians 3:16-23)

We are the temple of God. God's Holy Spirit dwells in us. If we really want to make sense of this, we have to understand how radical this statement is. If we are not careful, we can miss a huge blessing. What we need to do is look at God's word and learn just how special it is to be a temple of God.

Today, I want to share 3 thoughts about being the temple of God:

1. We must believe that we are the temple of God.
2. Understand just how blessed we are.
3. Live like the Temple of God.

1. We must believe that we are the temple of God

The biggest problem between man and God was man's sin and God's holiness. Just look at the temple in the Bible. Did you know that before sin entered in the world, the whole earth was a temple? It was as if Adam was a priest, and when he took care of the earth and the animals, he was taking care of the place where the very presence of God dwelled. The entire earth was pure. It was a temple. But sin came in, and God kicked them out. He did not dwell with them in the same way. Then God comes to Moses and instructs him to build a tabernacle, the portable temple. The tabernacle contained the tent of meeting. The tent of meeting was where God's presence dwelled behind a veil, and God would meet Moses or Aaron and his sons. Here the word of God was given, or the rituals of God were performed. This design eventually gets made into a permanent structure in Jerusalem.

By the time of Jesus, temple complex is a huge beautiful structure. To replace this temple with a group of people was shocking. The temple in Jesus' and Paul's time is the perfect illustration of the separation of man from God. There were four barriers between man and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Holy of Holies. First, there was a court for the Gentiles. The Gentiles could not cross into the rest of the temple. The two-foot high wall had warnings on it in Greek. It read, "Foreigners must not enter inside this barrier or into the court around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." This sobering message blocked the way for anyone who was not a Jew and wanted to worship in the temple. Gentiles were not allowed. Inside that barrier, there was the court of women. This is the place where people taught and where they would come and pray. This is also where Jesus flipped over the tables and where Jesus saw the widow give the coin. Israelite women could not get to the presence of God. There the worshipping Israelite men could go inside with their offerings. But they could not enter the holy place. Third, only priests could go inside the holy place. There, he would replenish the oil in the lampstand, offer incense and pray on the altar of incense, and replace the bread on the table. But he could not go into the Holy of Holies, where the very presence of the Holy Spirit was. Only the high priest would go once a year. One man, once a year, could enter in the Holy of Holies. What an amazing separation from God! So there was a barrier for Gentiles, women, men, and everyone but the high priest. But Jesus changed all that. He was the new temple of God. Jesus, God himself, took on human flesh. He was the walking presence of God. When Jesus grabbed a whip and drove the money-changers and animals out of the temple, the Jewish authorities were angry, and we read these words in John 2:18-21:

¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Jesus' body is the true temple. When we place our faith in him, we become one flesh with him. We are his body, and he is our head. Jesus destroyed by his death the barriers between man and God. In Mark 15:37-38, we read:

³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

This is the curtain that only the high priest could go behind once a year. It was 15 feet tall and somehow it ripped from the top. It was God's message to the world. God was saying that because of Jesus death, the barriers between man and God were destroyed, torn in two. Now we are one with Christ and he is the true temple. The connection to Jesus is so powerful and close that when Jesus confronts Paul in Acts 9, he asks him a question. Remember, Paul persecuted the Christians before he became the apostle Paul. So Jesus knocked him to the ground and asked him, ***"Why do you persecute me?"*** Listen to me. Jesus had already died. Jesus was in heaven. But when Paul hurt Jesus' people, it was as if he was hurting Jesus himself. ***"Why do you persecute me?"*** So because Jesus is the temple and all those who believe are united to him through believing, then we are the temple of God and the body of Christ. Think about our text:

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

Do you not know? This is the million-dollar question. This is the kind of question that is meant to make the listener think. God asks these questions often. He said to Adam after he had sinned, ***"Where are you?"*** It is not like God needed the dropped pin for where Adam was on Google maps. He is not asking for his GPS coordinates. God knew exactly where they were. He only asks to make a point. Don't you realize, Adam, that you are a hiding from me? Paul is doing a similar thing in 1 Corinthians 3:16. Paul assumes that his listeners know and have heard that they are the temple of God. The word he uses for *you* in this verse is plural. This means he has in mind that we, together, as a group, are the temple. One interesting fact here is that there are two Greek words that can be translated "temple" in the New Testament. The first means the temple complex. All the courts, all the arches, everything. That word is the word *"ieron"*. But that is not the word Paul uses here. Here, he says that we are the *"naos"* of God. This word is only used to speak of the holy place and the holy of holies. This is the place of where God's presence is. Is that not amazing? You are the *"naos"* very dwelling place of God. In this part of the book, Paul is condemning their divisions. He is wanting to remind them that when they divide the church, they are like men with hammers trying to divide the very temple of God into sections. God will destroy those who destroy his temple.

2. Understand just how blessed we are

Let us look at the work of the Spirit in the Old Testament and see just how blessed we are. In the Old Testament, the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit occur in around 100 verses and passages. About 60 of those 100 are the way the Spirit worked directly with men. The other 40 are about the amazing things that will happen when the Holy Spirit is poured out in the future. There is an unmistakable contrast between what they had and the promises God made. Professor Bruce Ware says that you can make at least three conclusions about the way the Holy Spirit worked with men in the Old Testament. First, the Holy Spirit worked selectively. Only some people had the Holy Spirit. Second, the ministry of the Holy Spirit was task-oriented. He would come help people to fulfil a

calling, job, or role. Third, he would only be with the selected people for a limited time. For example, in the book of Exodus, we learn the story of how God freed Israel from slavery. After that, they went to the desert and received the law. One of the tasks that God asked the Israelites to do was to build and decorate the tabernacle and the objects that would go inside it. The tabernacle was the first temple structure. It was a mobile temple. Moses did not have to recruit craftsmen to build it because God told him his own plan in Exodus 31:2-6.

² “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, ⁴ to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. ⁶ And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you.”

Notice what it says that God called and filled him with the Spirit. God selected him, gave him the Spirit for a task, and that is not said to have lasted any longer than that construction time.

Another example from Moses is the story in Numbers 11:16-17 of God giving some of the Spirit Moses had to 70 Elders:

¹⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. ¹⁷ And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.”

Again, this was selective, linked to a calling and a job and not all the time. One interesting detail is that it says they began to prophesy. It was a small version of what happened in Acts 2, when the first Christians received the Spirit. But that is not our experience. We are temple by faith in Jesus (something I will explain in detail in point 2). We are chosen to be his temples. Though at times we experience his presence helping us in special ways to fulfill our individual calling, he never leaves us even when we are not serving him. And lastly, we are in the presence of God 24/7, and so there is no time limit on it. Our relationship through Christ to God is one of constant contact because of the Holy Spirit. These kinds of stories and verses where we see the Spirit's work with men in the Old Testament make up 60 of the 100 references. What are the other 40? The other 40 times the Holy Spirit appears, have to do with the promise of the future ministry of the Spirit. So it is about what us believers experience from now all the way into eternity. We will look at two of these references.

“But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! ² Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. ³ For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. ⁴ They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. ⁵ This one will say, ‘I am the Lord's, another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, ‘The Lord's,’ and name himself by the name of Israel.” (Isaiah 44:1-5)

God here declares a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit on his people. This outpouring will come with some interesting effects on the people. They will flourish like willows beside streams (v.4). They

will also find their identity in God and not other things. That is, they will have a personal relationship with God and will unashamedly declare that they belong to him (v.5). That is what we should experience. That is you birthright son and daughter of God. You can flourish in the desert. You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. You can walk and talk with the King because you are his temple. That is not all. In Ezekiel 36:22-27, the promise of the Holy Spirit gets even more well defined.

²² “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:22-27)

God’s people in the Old Testament never seem to act like God. They profaned his name by being worse than the unbelievers around them. But God promises to take action for his own glory. Can I just say something? The universe is not about you. It was not created for you. You are a part. You are loved. But do not be confused. The universe is about God. So many of us suffer because it is about us. Here the promises that God makes are for his glory first. Because of his glory, he says that he will do at least 3 things. First, he will make us clean (v.25). Second, he will cause us to be like new. Jesus calls this being born again. They will have new hearts and new spirits. This is a symbol of being new creations. Third, they will have the Holy Spirit in them to enable them to walk in obedience to God’s law. These were promises that caused the people of Israel to desire the coming of the Spirit. But how was the presence of God going to come to every person? How could a Holy God live with unholy people? The answer to this question is Jesus.

3. Live like the Temple of God

Here, I want to challenge us to do a few simple things to experience the Holy Spirit in a greater way as a group. Remember, this passage is about us as a group. First, begin by making every moment together a sincere act of worship. When you give an offering, say a prayer to God as you are placing the offering in the plate. When we sing, do not just mumble the words. Focus your soul and sing. When you hear the sermon, pray for God to speak to you and then be listening. When you leave, do what you hear. Second, please do not be a consumer only. Serve. Find a place where you can serve. Wherever that place is, do it with all your heart. Stop coming to be a consumer at the temple and come to be a worshiper in Spirit and in truth. Third, build God’s temple through Missions and Evangelism. Be a participant in seeing his Temple built here and around the world. Fourth, be careful how you treat God’s people. They are his precious temple. Do not be a divisive person. When you divide God’s people, you are taking a wrecking ball to God’s temple. And Paul warns the Corinthians

clearly that God will destroy those who destroy his temple. You take a wrecking ball to God's Temple, and he will take a wrecking ball to you. Lastly, if you are here today, I want to tell you that you can become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Just turn away from your old life, place your faith in Jesus, and come to him. You will experience new life and the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Discussion questions:

1. Have you ever experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit?
2. How do you think your life would be, if you did not have the Holy Spirit?
3. How did we become the temple of God?
4. How is believing God's word different from just knowing it? What is the difference?
5. Can a person come to church and not worship? How can we fix that?
6. What does it mean to be a consumer in Church? How can we experience God more?
7. How is Missions and Evangelism a way to build God's Temple?