

## THE CHURCH as GOD'S TEMPLE

It is especially with *temple* imagery that *Paul* designates the Triune God via the Holy Spirit as the *renewed presence* of God among his people. This imagery occurs four times in **Paul**, three times in keeping with its Old Testament precedents (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**; **2 Corinthians 6:16**; **Ephesians 2:22**), where God *dwells* in the midst of the people by means of tabernacle and *temple*, and once in keeping with the promised *new covenant* (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**), where the "*temple*" is now the body of the believer, "who is in you, whom you received from God)"

*Paul* specifically ties the Holy Spirit to *temple* imagery in the context of the Holy Spirit's **presence** in the midst of the people of God. Here is how the living God is now present with his people, expressed most clearly in **Ephesians 2:22**: the church is being raised up to become a holy temple in the Lord, built up together as the "dwelling place for God by his Spirit."

Now there is a new *temple* and a *new covenant*. By fulfilling both the *renewed temple* and *new covenant* motifs, the Triune God through the Holy Spirit becomes the way God himself is now present on planet earth. It should be noted that in the Gospels of Matthew and John, Christ Jesus was the physical **presence** of God here on earth. In **Matthew 1:23**, for example, Zechariah is told that Jesus' name will be "Immanuel," that is, "God with us." In **Matthew 12:6** Jesus, referring to himself, says that "something greater than the *temple* is here." And the Gospel of Matthew in **28:20** concludes with the Risen Lord telling his disciples, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." In **John 1:14** the "Word" is said to "have tabernacled among us," so that "we beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only Son of the Father," who himself was full of the Father's attributes of "grace and truth [faithfulness]."

Jesus came to build his church (**Matthew 16:18**). His church would replace the *temple* and tabernacle of the Old Testament. We see *Paul* develop this clearly in Corinthians. *Paul's* use of the *temple* imagery begins in **1 Corinthians 3:9** ("you [the church in Corinth] are God's building"). Their foundation (Christ crucified) had been laid by the apostle, but at the time of *Paul's* letter the superstructure was being erected with materials incompatible with that foundation (wood and straw referring to their current fascination with wisdom and rhetoric). They must build with enduring materials (gold, silver, costly stones = the gospel of the Crucified One), imagery taken from the building of Solomon's *temple* (**1 Chronicles 29:2 and 2 Chronicles 3:6**). Then in **1 Corinthians 3:16** Paul asks rhetorically, "Do you know what kind of building you are?, God's *temple* at Corinth!" As a gathered community, they formed the one *temple* of the living God, God's alternative to Corinth's countless pagan *temples*; and what made them God's alternative was the **presence** of the Spirit in their midst. And that **presence** in them and among them (according to our Lord and Savior in **John 14:15-**

individually so that they might walk in his ways. Paul therefore urges the Ephesians not to repeat Israel's failure. They are not, through various sins of discord that destroy the "unity of the Spirit" (**Ephesians 4:3**) to grieve God who is present among them by his Holy Spirit.

A good review of what deceives people is found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. The threefold way out of any of these deceptions and into a positive relationship with God and the Body of Christ is found in **1 Corinthians 6:11**. Please notice the wonderful path of his saints: being "washed, then sanctified and then justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Let's consider the beauty and consequences of God calling us **together** (**Ephesians 2:19-22**). **Together**, we are fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. **Together**, we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is **joined together** and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. An in him, you too are **being built together** to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. What a wonderful calling ... let's continue in him by growing in Godly knowledge, Godly understanding and Godly wisdom so we can grasp more deeply what it means to be **joined together and built together** to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

### **IMPLICATIONS / QUESTIONS TO PONDER FOR US THIS COMING WEEK:**

- 1) Do we need to retool our thinking to fit with Paul's thinking and terms?
- 2) Are there ways that we *grieve* the Holy Spirit in thought, word or deed?
- 3) How are we as God's people today *renewed* in the spirit of our mind?

**NOTE:** Source Materials from Pauline Epistles Class 2007.