

## Chapter Ten

*“The temple of God and the temple of  
the Holy Spirit are not the same.”*

### **“THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST: ITS TEMPLE METAPHOR”**

The Apostle Paul’s use of metaphors to teach truths related to the Church of Jesus Christ is of obvious importance to the child of God. After all, it is God’s plan for Christians to be Church members, and to engage and involve themselves in congregational ministry, to glorify God, to magnify the Savior, and to both provide and receive blessings. It is primarily Paul’s use of metaphors that help us to understand better how some of these opportunities and blessings are made available to us.

One body of Christ metaphor shows how the Church of Jesus Christ is in some ways similar to the functioning of a healthy human body. In ways we understand in our modern era more than they understood in the first century, the interconnected systems, as well as organs of the human body, are of profound importance to healthy function. Of course, that instruction is almost completely lost on those who insist the body the Apostle Paul referred to when he made mention of the body of Christ is an invisible and disassociated one.

Another body of Christ metaphor, wonderfully explained in Charles Hunt’s *The Body Of Christ: Separating Myth From Metaphor*, reveals the relationship of Christ to the Church to be a functional relationship rather than an organic relationship, like the headship of a husband to a wife rather than the relationship of a head atop the neck of a body.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles L. Hunt, *The Body Of Christ: Metaphor Not Myth*, (Monrovia, CA: ClassicalBaptist.Press, 2024), [https://www.classicalbaptist.press/\\_files/ugd/946b8f\\_b5b9ed8a318e4689827c6c2ba54038eb.pdf](https://www.classicalbaptist.press/_files/ugd/946b8f_b5b9ed8a318e4689827c6c2ba54038eb.pdf)

We turn in this chapter to a second of the apostle's metaphors, yet another example of the Protestant approach to misunderstanding the Church, by which they force a strange and incredible meaning that results in a terrible loss of instruction for God's people. That metaphor is the temple, with one Greek word, ἱερόν, literally referring to a building, structure.<sup>2</sup> Another term used by the Greeks was ναός, a synonym of ἱερόν, referring to a place or structure specifically set apart for a deity.<sup>3</sup> So fixed in the Jewish and early Christian mind was the Temple in Jerusalem, and so rooted in pagan Gentile thought were their various temples of their pagan gods, that it is inexplicable to envision a temple being nonphysical even when used as a metaphor.<sup>4</sup> With both Greek words, a temple is a building, a special building, a sacred building, but a building nevertheless.

There are five temples referred to in the New Testament, with Herod's Temple being the one that is referred to an overwhelming number of times, especially in the Gospels and the book of Acts. In John 2.19 and 21 the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "But he spake of the temple of his body." Then, in Acts 19.27, we have recorded a comment made in the city of Ephesus about the temple of the pagan goddess Diana. That brings the temple count to three: the Temple of Herod, the temple of Christ's physical body, and the temple of Diana at Ephesus. That would be 85 verses referring to physical temples, one verse referring to the temple of Diana, two verses in which our Lord referred to His physical body, and 82 verses having to do with the literal Temple in Jerusalem.

John's Revelation contains numerous references to a temple in heaven, thirteen references to be exact, though each of those is a reference to a literal structure in heaven referred to by the apostle following the Rapture

---

<sup>2</sup> Bauer, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 470.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 665-666.

<sup>4</sup> See Gerhard Kittel, Editor, *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), *Vol III*, pages 232-247 and *Vol IV*, pages 880-890.

of Church Age believers.<sup>5</sup> However, it is in the epistles of the New Testament, where the two Greek words translated temple are used, ἱερόν and ναός, that we turn our attention. The word ναός is used as a metaphor to provide a clearer understanding to Christians about important truths related to the Church of Jesus Christ.

Consider six verses, each of which has a reference to a temple. In each instance, look for an indication of the kind of temple that is referred to, after which we will consider three main points.

First Corinthians 3.16: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”

Notice the phrase “ye are the temple of God,” as well as “the Spirit of God dwelleth in you,” with the words ye and you being plural. Ever wonder why Paul did not include himself by writing “we are the temple of God” or “the Spirit of God dwelleth in us”?

First Corinthians 3.17: “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.”

Here Paul warned against defiling the temple of God, ending with a declaration that “the temple of God... ye are.” Again, why did Paul not write “the temple of God... we are”?

First Corinthians 6.19: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

Here we read that “your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.” Is there a difference between the temple of God and the temple of the Holy Ghost? Is Paul distinguishing the Persons of the Trinity when he writes the temple of God and the temple of the Holy Ghost? Are these two different temples? I am so persuaded.

Second Corinthians 6.16: “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living

---

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 3.12; 7.15; 11.1-2, 19; 14.15, 17; 15.5-6, 8; 16.1, 17; 21.22

God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them,  
and walk in *them*; and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.”

In yet another letter Paul declared to the Corinthians, “ye are the temple of the living God,” before referring to Leviticus 26.11-12, where God spoke of His intent to dwell amid His people.

Ephesians 2.21: “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”

This is a somewhat different phrase, “an holy temple in the Lord,” though it should be pointed out that “fitly framed together” translates the verb form of a word describing the process of building a physical structure.<sup>6</sup>

Now for three main points, which are conclusions related to this metaphor of the Church of Jesus Christ as a temple:

### **First, THERE IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

There is a clear distinction in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian congregation between the temple of God (First Corinthians 3.16) and the temple of the Holy Ghost (First Corinthians 6.19). They are *not* the same temple. First Corinthians 3.11-16 refers to the congregation, and First Corinthians 6.19 refers to a believer’s physical body.

Take note of First Corinthians 6.18-20 and Paul’s phrase “the temple of the Holy Ghost.”

- 18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.
- 19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?
- 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

---

<sup>6</sup> Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1980), page 527.

Verses 9-20 of this chapter deal with sins committed by individuals. The word body when it is used in this chapter is not a metaphor for anything but refers to a Christian's physical body. That understood, verse 18 addresses the sin of fornication and the fact that such a sex sin is committed by a perpetrator against his body. In verse 19 Paul revealed to his readers, who were demonstrably ignorant about the sanctity of the Christian's body, that each Christian's physical body is "the temple of the Holy Ghost" who indwells each child of God. Verse 20 concludes, because of that, and because believers are bought with a price, they ought to "glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

To clarify, First Corinthians 6.9-20 does not make use of the term body as a metaphor for the Church of Jesus Christ but shows that each Christian's body is the actual temple of the Holy Spirit because of His indwelling presence.

### **Next, THERE IS THE TEMPLE OF GOD**

The temple of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit are *not* the same. Consider First Corinthians 3.6-17:

- 6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.
- 7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.
- 8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.
- 9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye *are* God's building.
- 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.
- 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

- 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.
- 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.
- 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.
- 16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?
- 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.

Brief comments on each of these verses:

- 3.6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

Here at the beginning of the passage, the apostle introduced a garden metaphor, likening the Corinthian Church to a garden that he planted, that Apollos watered in ministry, but that God grew.

- 3.7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

As a growing garden, in Paul's metaphor, he that plants and he that waters are not particularly important since it is God Who gives the increase. Thus, an overemphasis on the Gospel minister rather than on God is inappropriate.

- 3.8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

Notice both the unity Paul calls attention to between "he that plants" and "he that waters," as well as introducing the promise of each Gospel minister who labors in the garden being rewarded according to his labor. We are still dealing with the Church of Jesus Christ as a garden metaphor at this point.

- 3.9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye *are* God's building.

Three distinct ideas are declared in this brief verse. *First*, there is the dependency of the Gospel ministers as laborers with God. *Next*, the entire

Corinthian Church is God's husbandry ("ye are God's husbandry"), with this gardening metaphor. *Finally*, Paul changed the metaphor from the Church of Jesus Christ is a garden to the Church of Jesus Christ is a building ("God's building").

3.10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

Paul, by God's grace, functioned as a wise master builder, laying the foundation upon which others would labor to build. Then he issued a warning, cautioning every man about how he would build on that foundation Paul laid. Thus, the metaphor had been completely changed from the Church as a growing garden to the Church of Jesus Christ as a building being built. What do you think Paul refers to, an entity that is invisible or visible? Does he comment about disassembled stones and boards here and there, or does he describe visible order and construction underway?

3.11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The only foundation upon which this building metaphor, this Church of Jesus Christ, can appropriately be laid is Jesus Christ.

3.12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.

Continuing the building metaphor, Paul introduced two completely different kinds of categories of building materials for the construction of a building. Gold, silver, and precious stones are valuable materials used in the construction of what kind of building? Yes, a place of worship, a temple. And what kind of structure is fabricated from such cheap materials as wood, hay, and stubble? A hovel, a shabby place for the poor to dwell in.

3.13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

Here Paul introduced the thought of future judgment, likening it to “fire that will try every man’s work of what sort it is.” How does the material representing every man’s work hold up when you pass it through the fire?

3.14 If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

If you build the building with material that holds up to the fire of judgment, you will be rewarded.

3.15 If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

If the material is consumed by the fire of judgment, because it is of inferior quality, then he will suffer loss. And what will be lost? “... he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” It is correctly understood to mean no rewards will be given because of the inferior quality of the materials used to build the building. The metaphor is referring, of course, to the Church of Jesus Christ, those referred to certainly being saved by God’s grace but entering heaven unrewarded due to the inferior quality of their contribution to the growth of the building. However, be mindful that the kind of building that is being built in this metaphor is a temple.

3.16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

Addressing the obvious ignorance of the unspiritual Corinthian Church members, Paul pointed out two pertinent facts for their edification: *First*, their congregation is the temple of God (“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?”). *As well*, the Spirit of God dwells in their congregation, thereby making their Church (and every other Church) a temple of God. What a revelation for that dysfunctional congregation. “Our church is the temple of God!” “The Spirit of God dwells in our congregation!”

3.17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.

Four things here: *First*, the words “defile” and “destroy” translate the same Greek word, suggesting that God will chasten you if you harm a Church congregation, not that God will annihilate someone for harming a

congregation. *Second*, the law of sowing and reaping applies to those who harm Churches and their members. *Third*, the temple of God is, because of God's presence, holy. And *finally*, Paul reiterates that the Corinthian congregation, the Church of Jesus Christ, is the temple of God.

### **Finally, A CONCLUSION DRAWN FROM THE TEMPLE OF GOD METAPHOR**

Paul knew that the Corinthian Church was a very troubled congregation, with immature members who were ignorant about many things and not very spiritual. For those reasons, Paul found it useful to minister grace to them to alert them to the nature of their congregation and its sanctity, and to make them aware of the rewards connected to their involvement in their congregation.

On the nature of their congregation, the first epistle to the Corinthians establishes the existence of two temples they had previously been unaware: the temple of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit, the two temples not being the same.

The temple of the Holy Spirit is each Christian's physical body, First Corinthians 6.19, so indicated by Paul as a means of convincing them that they had no right as believers to engage in the practice of sexual sins, which would defile the Christian's body, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The temple of God, on the other hand, refers to the entire congregation (never to a physical building). The Church of Jesus Christ is likened to a building, according to Paul's metaphor in First Corinthians 3.6-17, and is progressively revealed in that passage to be a special building, the temple of God, but never what we understand to be a Church assembly hall.

Therefore, the quality of each member's participation and contribution to the growth of the Church should reflect the building it is. The imagery of gold, silver and precious stones is likened to the careful and devoted service of a craftsman engaged in the construction of a temple. The imagery of wood, hay, and stubble is the building materials of a shanty and reflects a halfhearted and lackadaisical approach to Christian ministry in and through

the Church that greatly undervalues the importance to God of the Church of Jesus Christ.

On the sanctity of their congregation, Paul's metaphor comparing the Church of Jesus Christ to the temple of God establishes the Church of Jesus Christ as set apart for God's use. The Church of Jesus Christ is not, therefore, a human contrivance that serves a pragmatic purpose for the convenience of Christians. It was brought into existence by the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, given a charge (the Great Commission), provided with authority (Matthew 18.15-20), and established on principle truth (Matthew 16.13-19). Add to these vital realities the presence of the one true and living God amid the Church.

What is a temple, after all, but a place where God dwells? The sanctity of the Church and the sacredness of the congregation (despite its appearances in the sight of men) are established by God's presence. Just as no Jewish person would dare violate the sanctity of the Temple of Herod in Jerusalem, so no informed and spiritual Christian should dare to violate the sanctity of the temple of God in Corinth, or in Ephesus, or Philippi, or in Jerusalem, or in Antioch. And for those who do not know better, Paul issues a warning in First Corinthians 3.17:

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.”

On the rewards connected to their involvement in their congregation, Paul declared a truth that most Protestants simply cannot wrap their minds around because of their misinterpretation and undervaluing of the congregation's identity as the Church of Jesus Christ. Allow me to explain: Judgment is an important theme in the New Testament, with as many as 74 verses making specific mention of judgment. However, it is in Romans 14.10, when rebuking Christians for their judgmental attitudes toward other believers, that Paul first mentions the Judgment Seat of Christ. He thereby established that individual Christians will be judged by the Savior, not to determine their eternal destiny (which is a matter settled once and for all by faith in Christ), but to serve as the basis for rewards given by the Savior to believers:

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

The matter of a Christian’s judgment is raised again in First Corinthians 4.1-5:

- 1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.
- 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.
- 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.
- 4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.
- 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

Note that Paul referred to the Judgment Seat of Christ once more to the Corinthians in Second Corinthians 5.10:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.”

While such a notable theologian as J. Dwight Pentecost recognized that First Corinthians 3.11-16 spoke to the matter of the Judgment Seat of Christ, he did so in rather typical fashion, misunderstanding the nature of the temple of God metaphor that Paul used in that passage.<sup>7</sup> Rolland McCune’s grasp of the meaning of the text is accurate.<sup>8</sup> First Corinthians 3.11-16 established the context of the Christian’s ministry and service that will be evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That context is the congregation, the Church of Jesus Christ, and the quality (not quantity) of one’s investment into the

---

<sup>7</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), pages 205, 412.

<sup>8</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology Of Biblical Christianity, Volume Three: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things*, (Detroit: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), page 413.

ministry of building that metaphorical building described by Paul as the temple of God.

The notion that a Christian's random and unauthorized ministry activity outside his congregation will be found acceptable by the Savior is unfounded in Scripture. It matters not how sincerely the Christian is motivated because Christ created a specific entity called the Church of Jesus Christ.

It is in *that* Church that He wants His people to be accountable and involved in ministry. The Lord Jesus Christ will someday sit in judgment upon the works and service of Christians in and through the Church of Jesus Christ, the temple of God. Thus, it is your ministry in and through your Church that will be scrutinized by the Lord Jesus Christ on the bema seat of judgment.

God has always desired the means whereby He can dwell amid His people. He communed with Adam in the cool of the evening in the Garden of Eden, if I correctly understand the implication of Genesis 3.8, until, of course, Adam's sin made that impossible. When the children of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt and camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, God instructed Moses to erect a tabernacle "that I may dwell among them."<sup>9</sup> Of course, when the Temple was subsequently constructed and dedicated by Solomon in Jerusalem, the glory of God came down and "the glory of the LORD... filled the house of God."<sup>10</sup> The Temple was God's place of dwelling for centuries until the glory of God departed in response to the unbridled wickedness of the people, and the Temple was later destroyed by the Babylonians.<sup>11</sup>

Centuries passed with no apparent provision for God to dwell amid His people. Then His Son Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and dwelt among men for thirty-three and a half years. But He was then rejected and crucified. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not," John 1.11. However, during the three and one-half years of His earthly ministry that preceded His

---

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 25.8; 29.45-46

<sup>10</sup> 2 Chronicles 5.14

<sup>11</sup> Ezekiel 10.18-22; 11.22-25; 24.21-27

crucifixion, He established His Church.<sup>12</sup> The founding of the Church is important because God devised two means by which He would dwell among His people during this era in which we live.

On the one hand, there is the indwelling Spirit of God, given to every believer in Jesus Christ, thereby making him – by the Spirit’s presence – the temple of the Holy Spirit. The other means by which God dwells among His people is the fact that each Church of Jesus Christ is a temple, and a temple is by definition a place where God dwells. God does dwell amid the congregation, showing that the Church is important to God, and by His presence makes the Church holy.

Therefore, is a Christian’s membership in a Church optional, according to God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit? And when you consider that your participation in your Church will be judged by the Savior at the Judgment Seat of Christ based upon the qualities represented in the metaphor by gold, silver, and precious stones, how optional is your involvement in your Church’s ministry?

---

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 10.1-4; 1 Corinthians 12.28