

February 23, 2014  
Epiphany 7

*"You Are the Temple of the Holy Spirit"*

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## **1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-23**

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**D**on't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. <sup>18</sup> Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; <sup>20</sup> and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." <sup>21</sup> So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future-- all are yours, <sup>23</sup> and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

The other day I was reading about Solomon's temple in the Old Testament book of Chronicles. Imagine a building that was overlaid on the inside with pure gold. Altars and utensils and decorations were made of solid gold. The massive stones were carefully cut in advance and put into place so no sound of pounding hammers and chisels was heard as the temple was built. The wood came from the mountains of Lebanon, the valuable and famous cedars of Lebanon. After Solomon finished praying at the dedication of the temple, it says "Fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple."

The Apostle Paul told the Christians in Corinth that they were God's temple and the Holy Spirit lived in them. They were more glorious than the temples to heathen Greek gods that filled the city of Corinth. They were even more glorious than the Old Testament temple built by King Solomon with all of its gold and silver and bronze and expensive stones.

Today I have the privilege to be here in your midst and assure you that you are also God's temple and the Holy Spirit lives in you. The Lord wants his glory to fill your life. He wants his glory to shine through you as we worship together here and now, and also as we go to represent the Lord in our community this coming week.

I need some help on this sermon for this morning. Would you please consider helping me by just taking a few seconds to say to yourself, "I am the temple of the Holy Spirit."

### **The temple of the Holy Spirit is beautiful**

The temple of the Holy Spirit is far more beautiful in the eyes of God than even Solomon's temple in all its glory. There is no doubt that Paul has the congregation of Corinth in mind when he said, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in you?" We are God's temple on a person level and also on a corporate level as we gather together for worship.

Let's talk first about the how you function as a temple of the Lord on a personal level. In Corinthians 6 we are told, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body." In 1 Peter 2 we are told that our lives are built on Jesus the living stone.

Stones are beautiful. They came in all sizes and shapes. Think of what went into making a stone such as this. God made stones when he created the land and sea on the third day of creation. Then he polished these stones with wind, rain, and rushing water and even slow moving glaciers. The stone mason gathers these stones and then puts them into walls for the yard, or walls for a home or beautiful fire places. We are not bricks laid on Jesus Christ as the foundation. Bricks are all the same size and shape and color. We are living stones carefully created by our God, then placed on Christ the living stone, and strategically placed to give glory to our God and to other people who are living stones in his church. Each living stone in Jesus' church is a holy place where the Holy Spirit dwells and takes up residence. When sin wants to enter into this beautiful temple we say, "No way, get out of here, get out of my life. I am built on Christ. The Holy Spirit is in me. I cannot defile and desecrate and denigrate and degrade this beautiful place.

You are also a living temple to the Lord on a corporate level. When you gather with other believers in the body of Christ such as we are doing here today, the Holy Spirit comes to us in a special way. Jesus said where two are three are gathered together, there am in the midst of them. Jesus is with us personally, but he is also with us in a special way when we come together for worship. The same is also true of the Holy Spirit who is with us in special way. We are his temple. We sang about that in our opening hymn.

Just as you don't want bad stuff to come into your personal life and defile the temple of the Lord, you also don't want bad stuff to come into that special temple you are as you gather with other believers. "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for God's temple is sacred and you are his temple." God's temple is sacred. You will recall how careful the priests of the Old Testament had to be when they served the Lord in the tabernacle and later the temple. When the two sons of Aaron did not mix the right formula for incense, the Lord struck them down for not honoring and respecting the temple as they should. When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he told Moses to take his shoes off because the ground on which he was standing was holy ground. This place where God comes to us as we gather in worship is a sacred place because of the people who are here who make up the temple of the Lord.

I know some people who always take their shoes off when they go into their home. When you visit them in their home, you see the shoes lined up at the door, and it is only courteous for you to also take off your shoes. I have never been in a Japanese home, but I have heard it is customary to take off shoes and even offer your guest slippers to wear in the house. Why do people take off their shoes? Why did we take off our shoes and boots after working on the family farm? It is quite obvious. We did not want to drag dirt into the house.

When you come into this place with your fellow Christians you don't want to bring something into this place of worship that makes it dirty or soils it or as Paul says, "destroys it" because it is a holy place. The Lord our God is extremely jealous and protective of his temple, his people, you and me. He says we are sacred. The word here for sacred is the important Greek word *hagios*. It is used to describe the Holy Spirit, the holy Scriptures and the Holy Child born to Mary. Jesus calls his Father holy in John 17. Our God calls us holy only because we are pure and holy in his sight through Jesus. As we gather around each other as the temple of the Holy Spirit, we are very aware that our personal lives this past week have been far from holy. We have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, his holiness and his perfection. Yet we are holy in God's eyes through Jesus.

What will God do to these people who want to defile and destroy the beautiful temple of the Holy Spirit? Paul says, "God will destroy him." We think of Jesus' strong words about those who offend the little ones who believe in him. He said it would better for them to have a millstone hung around their necks and be drowned in the depths of the sea. The beautiful temple of the Lord in Corinth, the beautiful living stones built on Christ, were being turned off by all the petty infighting and pride and jealous being exhibited by Christians who were coming to worship. Paul had to write

to these people about the silly infighting and quarreling that was going on among these people.

## **The temple of the Holy Spirit must not be defiled**

Paul calls on all the believers to do a double check into how they treated others in their congregation. "Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise." The people in Corinth thought they were so smart as they talked smack about their great philosophers as if they were some modern day rock stars. When some of these heathens and pagans became believers they seemed to have a problem giving up that way of thinking. They would brag about following Paul or Peter or Apollos just as they had once done with their great philosophers of this age.

Satan knows he can severely damage the temple of the Holy Spirit if he can get people to fight each other over things that make no sense whatsoever. Listen to what the Lord says about this foolishness and pride that comes into the hearts of people that pits them against each other. "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness.'" And again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.'" These last words are from Psalm 94 where the psalmist says, "How long will the wicked, O Lord, how long will he wicked by jubilant? They pour out arrogant words and the evil doers are full of boasting."

This past week two men were finally sentenced to prison for beating up another man after a Dodgers and Giants baseball game. That man is still in need of 24 hour care. His life has been destroyed because two people in their arrogance and pride beat him up because he was opposed to their team and not wearing the colors of their team. When people start beating each up in the church because of pride and strong feelings in certain areas, the beautiful temple of the Holy Spirit suffers. People may even turn their back on Jesus and lose their faith.

Instead of boasting and taking pride in something unimportant such as following some rock star preacher, Paul says, "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future- all are yours, and your of Christ, and Christ is of God." Look at who you are. You are the temple of God. You are the place where the Holy Spirit dwells. You have treasures in Christ that make all the gold in Solomon's temple appear to dust by comparison. You know Jesus is preparing a place for you. You know that he has a plan for your life to use you to bring him glory when you come to worship and when you step out into your community. If any dirt ever comes into this beautiful temple of the Holy Spirit whether it be false teaching or foolish pride, let's all be the first to step up and get rid it. Remember you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Join me in saying, "We are the temple of the Holy Spirit." Amen.