

THE CHURCH AS THE TEMPLE OF GOD
IN CORINTHIANS

by

Amy Beange

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Abstract

The Church as the Temple of God in Corinthians

For the Degree Master of Arts

By Amy Beange

2003

This thesis investigates Paul's thoughts on the Church – as the new temple of God the Church made the physical temple irrelevant. The passages under consideration are: 1Cor 3:16, 17; 1 Cor 5:1-8; 1 Cor 6:12-20; 1 Cor 10:14-22 and 2 Cor 6:14-7:1.

In 1 Cor 3:16, 17 Paul first uses the metaphor of the church as the temple. The Holy Spirit now dwells in God's people rather than in a structure therefore the Corinthians must be holy as befits their status as God's temple.

First Corinthians 5:1-8 gives a concrete example of what it means for the congregation to be God's holy temple, the exclusion of a sinner. Exclusion/cleansing of sin can be linked to Pentateuchal practise. Paul also refers to Christ as the Passover sacrifice – the Corinthians are to cleanse themselves of sin because of Christ and this can be linked to certain instances of temple cleansing before Passover in the Hebrew Bible.

First Corinthians 6:19-20 applies the temple metaphor to individuals, commenting on the need for holiness since the believer is one with Christ.

First Corinthians 10:14-22 addresses the issue of idolatry as practised in by eating meals in a deity's temple. Again, unity with Christ precludes participation.

Second Corinthians 6:14-7:1 further addresses the issue of holiness, applying it to the idea of separation from evil – “what agreement has Christ with Beliar? . . . Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” If God lives in people, they must maintain holy lives.

To Rebecca Amelia and Beatrice Lila

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Part one of this chapter briefly outlines the Old Testament background of the temple, reviews the relevant literature concerning the use of temple metaphors, comments on metaphor usage in general, outlines the delimitations and method of the current study and briefly summarizes the following chapters.

Part two of this chapter briefly looks at the usage of temple metaphors in the New Testament: in the gospels, in other Pauline passages, and in non-Pauline passages. It also looks at temple metaphor usage in the writings of Qumran. The next five chapters are each devoted to one Corinthian passage as outlined below.

PART ONE

Background

The writers of the New Testament were Jewish. They worshipped the living God, the LORD, creator and sustainer of life, king and judge of the righteous and the unrighteous. Though it was true that “the heaven of heavens cannot contain you” (1 Ki 8:27), he chose to make his earthly dwelling place in the midst of his chosen people, the Jews, in their capital city of Jerusalem, on mount Zion, in the temple. The temple/tabernacle was the place for meeting God (Exod 25:22). There the sacrifices and offerings for atonement and thanksgiving were given, there prayers were offered and there was the place to which all Jews strove to make a pilgrimage. The temple contained

the Most Holy Place, where the LORD dwelt in darkness and smoke, the place only entered once a year on the day of atonement. The temple showed the people that the LORD was with them, that they had his blessing, even when they were oppressed. The building of the temple during the reign of Solomon was cause for great rejoicing. The Israelites had endured a wandering and strife-filled existence since the Exodus. Now they had been given rest from their enemies and the kingdom had been established (1 Ki 5:4). The destruction of the temple when the southern kingdom of Judah was exiled to Babylonia was cause for heart-rending sorrow and bewilderment, for if the temple was destroyed, where was the LORD? After the exile the temple was rebuilt and once again its dedication cause for rejoicing (Ezra 6:16).

The first followers of Christ were Jewish, as was Paul. How did the Jerusalem temple figure into their theology? Was there a change in its status? Paul refers to believers as the temple (of God – 1 Cor 3:16, 17; of the Holy Spirit – 1 Cor 6:19; of the living God 2 Cor 6:16). Is his usage of this metaphor casual, as though he noticed some similarities between the Jerusalem temple and the Christian community and drew a comparison? Or is his theology driving his usage? This study examines how, why and to what extent Paul uses the metaphor of church as temple in his letters to the Corinthians in order to begin to answer these questions.

Literature Review

Little writing has been done on the subject of the Church as temple. The metaphor of choice in the twentieth century to describe the church is the “body of Christ.” The metaphor of temple is explicit in scripture and theologies dutifully mention

it, but only briefly or not at all.¹ Perhaps this is so due to the lack of experience in western culture with temples. In a scientific era, the idea of sacred space has been written off as a component of pre-critical thinking, irrelevant in the modern era. However, post-modernism has seen a shift from a strictly rationalistic worldview to one that acknowledges the spiritual aspect of humanity and so the idea of sacred space is not dismissed as easily as it once was.

Another reason for the lack of work may be the difficulty of constructing a theology that encompasses both Old and New Testaments. This difficulty may have led to specialization in one or the other at the expense of the one, organic story. Other metaphors for the Church – “flock,” “body,” “bride” – can be described without reference to the Old Testament, but “temple” is hard pressed not to refer to it.

Bertil Gärtner devotes a book to a comparison of the temple symbolism used by the Qumran community and the writers of the New Testament.² He notes many similarities and feels that the Qumran community’s usage influenced Paul’s handling of the concept. With regards to 2 Cor 6:16, which says “we are the temple of the living God,” he writes “the image of the temple appears to have been used here as it was used in Qumran, to show that the ‘presence,’ *Shekinah*, of God had been removed from the official Jerusalem temple to the ‘new’ people of God, the Christian Church.”³

¹ See footnote 141.

² Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1965).

³ Ibid., 50.

R. J. McKelvey investigates the image of church as temple.⁴ He first examines the concept of temple in the ancient Near East and then looks at the different ways in which the divine presence was understood by Israel after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Babylonians. This is followed by a discussion of the view of God's temple in the New Testament.

According to McKelvey,

the essence of biblical and post-biblical thinking on the eschatological age is the conviction that God will graciously condescend to dwell in the midst of his people in a new and unparalleled way . . . The New Testament declares that God has fulfilled his word of promise made by the prophets and erected a new and more glorious temple . . . [the temple] supersedes and not merely consummates the previous modes of the divine indwelling. God no longer dwells in a house with his people: he dwells in them; they are his temple.⁵

The relevancy of the Jerusalem temple for the New Testament is affirmed in the writings of Margaret Barker. In *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament*, she argues that a fuller understanding of temple theology will enrich a person's understanding of the New Testament.⁶ She does this by demonstrating how the symbols of the temple affected early Christianity. For example the LORD is pictured as dwelling in the temple between the cherubim and "shining forth" in Psalm 80:1. Similarly, 1 Tim 6:16 pictures the LORD as "dwelling in unapproachable light." Surprisingly, she does not address the concept of the believers as the temple of God, which is a significant departure from Jewish religion.

⁴ R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: the Church in the New Testament*, (Oxford: University Press, 1969).

⁵ Ibid., 179-180.

⁶ Margaret Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), xii.

I. Howard Marshall has written an article examining how the religious activities of Judaism effected the practises of the first Christians who were themselves, Jewish. Concerning the temple of God he writes, “in some parts of the NT Jesus himself is regarded as the temple, the locus of the presence of God among his people.”⁷ Marshall then looks at texts from the epistles and states “Paul takes them to apply to the New Israel (i.e. the Church) and to refer to the Church as the place of God’s presence rather than the temple.”⁸ He concludes his article saying “the concept of the temple is part of the theology of the church . . . the thought of the temple serves to underline the fact that the church is the people of God, joined to him and to one another in fellowship.”⁹

Robert G. Zimmer outlines the concept of temple in the OT, the writings of Qumran and in the NT, the latter emphasizing the inclusion of Gentiles in the faith (Eph 2:21, 22; 1 Pet 2:4ff.) and the building up/growing of the temple. He concludes that the temple plays an important role in the history of God’s people since it is his dwelling place “whether that temple be the wilderness tabernacle, Solomon’s magnificent edifice, or the church of the living God”¹⁰

James Dunn describes the church as “a temple constituted by the immediate indwelling of God” and that Paul was “deliberately breaking with the typical

⁷ I. Howard Marshall, “Church and Temple in the New Testament” *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (1989): 212.

⁸ Ibid., 213.

⁹ Ibid., 222

¹⁰ Robert G. Zimmer, “The Temple of God,” *JETS* 18 (Wint 1975), 46.

understanding of a religious community dependent on cult centre, office of priest, and act of ritual sacrifice”¹¹

Brian Rosner sees a link between 1 Cor 3:16,17 and 1 Cor 5:4,5. In chapter three Paul says the community is God’s temple that must be holy. In chapter five the sinner must be excluded from the congregation. Exclusion and holiness are related in the Old Testament (Deut 7:26; 13:14-18; 23:1-8). Therefore, the sinner must be excluded to maintain holiness in the community of God, which is his temple.¹² Rosner also links the expulsion of the sinner in chapter five to corporate responsibility in the church – also a mark of the congregation of the Old Testament.¹³

According to the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, the temple often symbolizes God’s people both in the Old Testament (Isa 51:16; Ezek 40:1-43:12; Ps 79:1; 114:2; Jer 24; Ezek 9:6; 43:10; Dan 8:13; 11:31) and the New (Rev 11:1; Mt 24:11; Mk 13:1; Lk 21:5; 1 Pet 2:4-5). The Gospel of John “in particular emphasizes the function of the community, Jesus’ body, as the temple that bears God’s presence.”¹⁴ For Paul it is the redeemed community that is the temple and it therefore must be separate from the unholy (1 Cor 3:16, 17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21).

The *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* notes that, “Paul the apostle acknowledg[ed] an ongoing significance for the Jerusalem Temple (Acts 21:26-30; 22:17; 24:18; 25:8; 26:21)” and that “it was perhaps inevitable that when Paul spoke of

¹¹ James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 547-548.

¹² Brian Rosner, “Temple and Holiness in 1 Corinthians,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991): 137-145.

¹³ Brian Rosner, “‘OUKI MALLON EPENQHZATE’ Corporate Responsibility in 1 Corinthians 5” *NTS* 38 (1992): 470-473.

¹⁴ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downer Grove: Intervarsity, 1998), s.v. “Temple.”

God's new work in Christ, he would appropriate temple imagery in some way."¹⁵ He did this because of his Jewish background and because of the commonality of temples in the Greco-Roman world. It seems to suggest that Paul chose temple imagery in order to preserve spiritual unity in Corinth that was threatened by divisions (1 Cor 1:10-13), just as the concept of one God/one temple of Israel helped preserve its unity and identity.

Scott Hafemann has written an article about the fulfillment of the new covenant in Corinthians in which he writes, "the people of the new covenant have already become the eschatological temple of God's presence by virtue of the presence of the Spirit."¹⁶ The Spirit enables access to God by transforming believers, making them able to "respond to him (God) positively with both the desire and ability to keep his covenant stipulations."¹⁷

Use of Metaphor

Francis Lyall notes that the use of metaphors has great potential to increase a reader's understanding but runs the risk of lessening a statement's impact if the metaphor refers to something not entirely familiar to the audience. For example, the armour passage in Ephesians:

"The whole armor of God . . . breastplate . . . shield . . . helmet . . . sword" (Eph 6:13-17). The passage still communicates, but now in a romantic way, and its impact is thereby lessened. It is pleasing to think of oneself as a knight, with all the overtones of chivalry. The reality of which Paul spoke was different. Battle by sword in armor was nasty. The "flaming darts of the evil one" that are to be

¹⁵ G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. g. Reid, eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), s.v. "Temple," by P. W. Comfort.

¹⁶ Scott Hafemann, "The "Temple of the Spirit" as the Inaugural Fulfillment of the New Covenant Within the Corinthian Correspondence" *Ex Auditu* 12 (1996): 40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

dealt with by the shield of faith (Eph 6:16) are, in modern terms, attacks by napalm.”¹⁸

Similarly, the use of temple imagery is no doubt not quite grasped by twenty-first century, western minds. Perhaps this is why the metaphor the “body of Christ” has received so much attention in modern commentaries and theologies. Theologians and laypeople alike have bodies; it is a figure to which they can easily relate.

A metaphor is defined as a comparison between items without using the words “like” or “as”. The description “you are my rock” describes the “you” as having characteristics of a rock such as stability. In the writings of Paul he calls the Christian community “the temple of God” (1Cor 3:16). The physical temple was the dwelling place of God and the community is the dwelling place of God. However, it is my opinion that Paul does not simply use the concept of temple as an illustration of certain characteristics of the Christian community. He does not call the community the temple of God because both are considered holy, for example. His use is metaphorical but it is more than that. He solemnly intones “you are the temple of God,” not meaning they are simply *like* the temple of God, but that they actually *are* the temple of God, unlike the preceding example where the “you” in the phrase “you are my rock” is compared to a rock but is not called an actual rock. Paul’s metaphor, then, is actualized. In the examination of the passages, this study first devotes space to the description of the metaphor as simply a comparison between two entities but then it comments on the actualization of the metaphor.

This actualization has an important implication. God has only one temple. If the church is the temple of God then the temple of the Jews is no longer relevant. God’s

¹⁸ Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles*, (Grand Rapids:

presence has moved from the one physical temple into the persons of faith in Christ. If he is within people, those people have no need for a temple since the temple only served to emphasize the separation between God and humanity. In the temple the Presence dwelt behind the veil, accessible by only one person on one day of the year and he with fear and trembling. The Church has therefore replaced the physical temple.

Delimitations and Method

In the interest of space, this study is limited to the usage of temple metaphor in the letters to the Corinthians. The texts examined are 1 Cor 3:16-17; 5:1-8; 6:19-20, 10:14-22, and 2 Cor 6:14-7:1. A debate concerning the authorship of these texts is beyond the scope of this study so for the sake of brevity we will assume Pauline authorship. Therefore, this work will make statements as “Paul says such-and-such...” rather than “The author of this text says such-and-such...”. It is also taken as a given that Paul assumes the Church replaces the physical temple.

The method of this study is both historical and exegetical. Although not elaborated here, exegesis is performed on the passages to determine themes and details relevant to the study.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter two examines 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Paul calls the church the temple of God because the Holy Spirit indwells them. In times past the presence of God was in the physical temple. But now through Christ there was no separation between God and his people. Now he could dwell with them directly therefore there was no need for the physical temple. Since they are the temple Paul admonishes the Corinthian church to

unity since salvation, the end of separation between God and humanity, is through Christ alone. He also commands them to be holy since the temple is to be developed in a worthy manner and will be judged at the Day of the Lord.

Chapter three examines 1 Corinthians 5:1-8. This passage does not use the word temple. Rather, I believe, it describes a practical example of what it means for the congregation to be the temple of God. In it Paul emphasizes the holiness of the congregation. The pattern of exclusion that was the rule of temple worship in the Pentateuch is evident in Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church in its dealing with a sinner. Paul develops the example by using the image of the Passover. The church is to be cleansed of sin since Christ has been sacrificed just as in the past the temple was cleansed before the sacrifice of the Passover lamb

Chapter four examines 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. In this text Paul applies the metaphor of temple to the believers as individuals rather than as a corporate entity. Again, the issue of holiness is prominent, this time in relation to the unity that believers share with Christ and the incompatibility of sexual immorality with faith.

Chapter five examines 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. This is another passage that does not expressly call the believers the temple but addresses the relationship between worshippers and their deity. Paul addresses the concept of the sacred meal and the union with the deity that such a meal implies. There can be no participation in idolatry since the believers are united with God alone.

Chapter six examines 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. The metaphor of temple is applied to the believers corporately and speaks to the separation from evil that is required of the temple of the living God and supports this concept of separation with quotes from the Old

Chapter six examines 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. The metaphor of temple is applied to the believers corporately and speaks to the separation from evil that is required of the temple of the living God and supports this concept of separation with quotes from the Old Testament. The ultimate reason for this separation is the indwelling of the Spirit of God of the temple, which the believers are. An examination is made of the status of this text since its integrity and authenticity is in question.

Chapter seven concludes the study, drawing the various themes together.

PART TWO

Temple in Qumran Writings

There is use of the people as temple metaphor in extra-biblical texts. The writings of the community at Qumran are significant in this regard. This group of people believed that the "Jerusalem temple was defiled by the Hasmonean priests and was therefore unfit for pure worship."¹⁹ Building another temple was out of the question and so "the concept of the temple was transferred to the people of Qumran and the worship 'spiritualised.'"²⁰ According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, this transference occurred so that the sectarians would not "share in its pollution and defilement" but rather could have a place "where atonement was paid and where God was worshipped in cultic purity and holiness."²¹ The community looked forward to the day when "the ultimate eschatological

¹⁹ Derwood C. Smith, "Cultic Language in Ephesians 2:19-22: A Test Case," *Restoration Quarterly* (1989): 208.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Cultic Language in Qumran and in the NT," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976)165.

Testament, which pictured the community as *replacing* the physical temple since they had found atonement through the sacrifice of Christ, making them worthy of the indwelling of God.

Temple in the New Testament

The metaphor of church as temple occurs in a number of New Testament passages. Ephesians 2:19-22 describes the believers as “members of the household of God . . . built on the foundation . . . Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building . . . grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” The text around this passage talks about how the Gentiles were “strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12). But now, Christ’s sacrifice serves to “reconcile them both (Jews and Gentiles) to God” (2:16). This passage pictures the believers in singular terms. They are “the household of God,” “the whole building,” “a holy temple,” and “a dwelling place.” This emphasis on unity is echoed in 1 Cor 3 where Paul pleads for unity amongst the church in Corinth. The Ephesians passage also describes the temple as “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit,” having Christ as its sole foundation, both concepts also being found in 1 Cor 3.

In 1 Tim 3:15 the author says “I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The word “temple” is not used here but the word “house” should be taken as equivalent since in both the Old and New Testaments, “house of God” was a common expression for the temple. A prime example is Isaiah 6:1-6, a record of the vision the prophet had of the LORD, in which God is described as “sitting on a throne

. . . and the train of his robe filled the temple.” When the seraphim praise the LORD “the post of the door were shaken . . . and the house was filled with smoke.” Psalm 122 contains the joyful exclamation “I was glad when they said to me ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD.’” In John 2:16 Christ drove the moneychangers and vendors from the temple crying out “Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”

1 Peter 2:5 also uses the term “house” instead of “temple”. It describes the believers as “living stones . . . being built up a spiritual house”. Further confirming the temple imagery here, they are also “a holy priesthood, [able] to offer up spiritual sacrifices.” Previous verses describe the believers as having “purified your souls in obeying the truth” (1:22) and talk of their holiness: they are to “[lay] aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” (2:1). Holiness is a crucial factor concerning the temple. Without it the LORD would not indwell. For the believers, Christ’s sacrifice cleanses them from sin and makes them able to please God, therefore it is necessary to continue in that holiness, to be a worthy temple for the LORD.

CHAPTER TWO

1 Corinthians 3: Unity, Indwelling and Holiness in God's Temple

Introduction

First Corinthians 3:16,17 is the first passage in the Corinthian correspondence to explicitly describe the church as the temple of God. It caps off a discussion of the problems plaguing the life of the Corinthian church. The solution for their difficulties is a renewal of knowledge concerning who they really are in Christ.

This chapter first examines the context of the passage in question and then investigates three points of comparison between the temple and the church – unity, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and holiness. There follows a brief discussion of other items in the passage that point to the importance of the metaphor of the church as temple and the concluding remarks.

1 Corinthians 3:16,17

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

Context

In the first paragraphs of the letter Paul talks to the church about unity. They were divided, “each of [them saying] ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of

Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.'" Paul reminds them that the message is the gospel of Christ (1:18,21) and that the message is to be preached for God's glory alone (1:29, 31). The message is spiritually discerned (2:6-16) and Paul rebukes them for being divided, for being carnal rather than spiritual (3:1-4).

Paul reminds them that there is one foundation of the church, which is Christ (3:11) and that the believers are fellow workers (3:9). They are not in competition, rather, they are to recognize that though they work, it is God who "gives the increase" (3:7). Furthermore, since Christ is the foundation, those who build the church must do so in a worthy manner, since their work will be judged (3:13). The ultimate reason for good work is because the Holy Spirit indwells (3:16) them, making them the temple of God, which is holy (3:17). Paul admonishes them to acknowledge the wisdom of God (3:18-20) and not to boast in men (3:21-23) but to realize they are Christ's.

There are three concepts in this passage that are points of comparison between the temple and the church – unity, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and holiness.

Unity

As mentioned above, the Corinthian church, for whatever reason, was divided, the people allying themselves with various leaders. The basis of Paul's plea for unity is that salvation is through Christ alone. In chapter one he asks, "was Paul crucified for you?" (1:13). He then goes on to say "we preach Christ crucified . . . the power . . . and wisdom of God" (1:23, 24). The singularity of the message is affirmed again in 2:2, where Paul says "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Paul points out that his preaching was not "with excellence of speech or

wisdom” nor “with persuasive words” (2:1,4) in order that the power of the Holy Spirit might be evident. There is to be no mistaking that the message is the power and wisdom of God. Humans are only the vessels and those who are divisive are rebuked as carnal (3:1-4). In the passage containing the reference to the temple Paul declares himself and Apollos as mere ministers. God’s followers work together to build the church but it is “God who gives the increase” (3:7).

In 1 Cor 3 Paul uses three metaphors for the followers of God.²³ First, there is an agricultural picture in which the leaders, Paul and Apollos, are the ones that plant and water God’s field, the Corinthians, and God is the one that causes them to grow. Then he switches to an architectural picture in which Paul, as a master-builder, has laid the foundation which is Jesus Christ, and others build on that foundation with various materials. In both pictures there is unity of purpose and focus. Paul describes the believers as “fellow workers” which underscores his earlier contention that he and Apollos have different roles but are ministers of the same gospel. Though having different roles they are one.

In verse sixteen, Paul takes the metaphor of a building and makes it specific – “you are the temple of God.”²⁴ In the Jewish religion there was only one God as witnessed by the *shema*: “Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deut 6:4). Though he was everywhere at all times, he chose a specific place on earth in which to dwell and in which he would meet with people (Exod 25:8; 29:42-46). This place was at first the tabernacle and later the temple. There was only one temple. Concerning the

²³ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, (John Knox Press: Louisville, 1989), 51-58; Anthony C. Thisleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2000), 315, 316.

²⁴ Gordon D. Fee., *The First Epistle to The Corinthians*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987).

land of Canaan that the people of Israel were to inherit, God said “you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images for you shall worship no other god” (Exod 34:13, 14). When the tribes of Israel that settled east of the Jordan river built an altar it was considered a sign of rebellion against the Lord since it was in addition to the altar of the Lord at the tabernacle (Josh 22:10-34). Places of worship for other gods and places other than the one prescribed for the LORD were considered evil.

In the time of the Corinthian letters this singularity would have set the Jews apart since they lived in the midst of a pagan society in which gods and their temples were numerous.²⁵ The Corinthian church was a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish Christians would have taken monotheistic beliefs and practices in stride but “Paul was faced with a major task of reshaping the thinking of his Corinthian [Gentile] converts into . . . the emergent Christian movement in which one God alone was to be worshipped.”²⁶

It is noteworthy then that Paul called the believers the “temple of God” not the “temples of God.” Just as there was one God, there was only one temple in which his presence dwelt and each believer was just as much God’s temple as the others. There was no distinction between believers, no ranking by which certain believers had access to God unavailable to others. This is made clear in other writings such as Colossians 3:11: “there is neither Greek nor Jew . . . slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” and

²⁵ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1995), 12-18, notes that Corinth was originally a Greek city, its religion containing numerous deities. It was sacked by Rome and later rebuilt as a Roman colony but the Greek religious influence remained. Corinth was famous for its temple of Aphrodite. It also had temples to Apollo (prophecy), Askelepios (healing), Hera (marriage), Tyche (fate or luck), and Demeter and Dionysius (fertility).

²⁶ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 4.

Galatians 3:28, “you are all one in Christ.” Later in first Corinthians Paul pictures this oneness as a body: “the body is one and has many members . . . for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (12:12, 13).

Another aspect of unity comes from eschatology of which the Jews had a keen sense, especially by the time of this correspondence. The end time was addressed in the writings of the Old Testament²⁷ and was a defining characteristic of the pieces of apocalyptic writing popular in the centuries surrounding the life of Christ.²⁸ The nation of Israel had been exiled by the Babylonians, its temple destroyed, seemingly having been forsaken by the LORD. Although eventually returning and rebuilding the temple the people lived under the control of others ever since. This was taken to be the punishment foretold by Isaiah (40:2). However, the punishment was to be followed by comfort. An expectation of the coming judgment, the Day of the LORD, in which the nation of Israel would be vindicated and its enemies destroyed was the constant hope of all post-exilic followers of the LORD.²⁹ Paul, being Jewish, was aware of this Day.

²⁷ John J. Collins, “Eschatology,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 256-57, writes that an OT eschatological motif is the “End of Days” (*aharit ha-yamim*), probably meaning “in the course of time” or “in future days”. It occurs in Genesis 49:1 (Jacob’s blessing on his sons) and in Numbers 24:14 (Balaam’s oracle). “Both passages . . . originally referred to the future in an unspecified but limited sense, but were interpreted in the post-exilic period . . . to refer to a final, definitive phase of history.” In the Prophets the end refers “to a more specific, decisive event, the day of judgment.” Amos pictures the end as judgment of Israel and the day of the LORD as “darkness and not light” (5:18). Isaiah pictures the day as one of cosmic judgment (Isa. 2:10-22; 13:9-13). Daniel views the day as “entail[ing] the exaltation of the Lord and deliverance for the faithful . . . Deliverance in Daniel entails resurrection of the dead” (12:1-3). The book of Daniel also contains calculations for the time of the end (9:24-27; 7:25; 8:14; 12:1-12).

²⁸ Ibid. For example, in the Dead Sea Scrolls “*Aharit ha-yamim*” occurs more than thirty times (the Florilegium, 4Q174; the Catena, 4Q177, the Melchizedek scroll, 11Q13 etc.). The End of Days in the DSS is “a time of testing, and it is a time of at least incipient salvation.” The Florilegium states “it is a time of testing that co[m]mes . . . as it is written in the Book of Daniel, the prophet . . .” It also refers “to the temple that the Lord will establish with his hands at the End of Days, in contrast to the “temple of men (which serves in the interim) and to the Branch of David who will arise with the Interpreter of the Law at the End of Days.”

²⁹ E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 285. “According to [Ps. Sol. 17 of Qumran] the Davidic Messiah will enter Jerusalem, banish the Gentiles and

Though as a Christian he may have pictured it somewhat differently, it was still an important concept.³⁰ In 1 Cor 3:12-15 he talks of the materials used in constructing God's building. "Each one's work," he says, "will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is."³¹ It is proper to identify the Day mentioned here with the day of judgment as Paul uses the image of fire, which is a characteristic of judgment (Isa 31:9; 66:24; Dan 7:9 ff.; Obad 17,18; Mal 3:1 ff.; 4:1).³²

Unity was a hallmark of the Jewish faith – one God, one temple, one judgment – likewise for the Christian. Jesus Christ was the *raison d'être* for the believers in Corinth. It was he and his work that had to be the focus of all efforts and allegiance. By working together with a common goal and foundation the believers were God's singular temple. As the temple their works would be judged by how well the temple was built.

also Jewish sinners...and establish the new Israel, with the tribes reassembled, as an ideal kingdom...According to the War Rule [of Qumran] the sectarians...will first destroy the sinful Israelites and then the Gentiles with God Himself striking the decisive blows." Nehemiah reviews Israel's history, recounting God's covenant with them and their breaking of it, their exile as punishment and their return. However in 9:36,37 the poem speaks of how the people are not fully restored since they are still under the rule of others and "are in great distress." The story then still requires a conclusion. Isaiah 66:22-24 speaks of a new heaven and earth created by God and that "all flesh" will worship God, and that those who transgress the Lord will be punished. Ezekiel 39-40 speaks of the enemies of Israel attacking and being destroyed according to God's judgment and of Israel being restored and of the existence of a new city and temple. Joel 3 speaks of the day of the LORD in which God judges the nations and blesses his people. E.P. Sanders, 279, says "Judaism was not primarily a religion of individual salvation. An abiding concern was that God should maintain his covenant with the Jewish *people* and that the *nation* be preserved."

³⁰ For Paul, the Day does not involve judgment based on whether one is a descendant of Abraham who keeps the law, but it is judgment based on whether a person has the faith of Abraham, whether he or she is a Jew or Gentile (Romans 4:11,12). See James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 504-532 for a detailed examination.

³¹ See Anthony C. Thisleton, *First Epistle*, 313, for a description of the impact the image of fire would have had for the Corinthians.

³² F.L. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977) 185-187. "The building to be proved exists only figuratively, and that consequently the fire which is to put it to the proof can only be also a figurative fire. The term therefore can only denote here the incorruptible judgment pronounced by the omniscience and consuming holiness of the Judge who appears. His Spirit will thoroughly explore the fruit due to the ministry of every preacher."

Indwelling

The second characteristic of the temple, God's presence, is closely linked to the third, that of holiness. During the many instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai God commanded the people of Israel to "make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among [you]" (Ex 25:8). Later Solomon called the temple he built "a place for [the LORD] to dwell in forever" (1 Ki 8:13). At the dedication of the tabernacle and later the temple the glory of the Lord so filled the structures that no one else could enter (Exod 40:34, 35; 1 Ki 8:10,11). The presence of God in the temple among his people was part of his covenant with them, established when he brought them out of the land of Egypt: "I will take [them] as my people. And I will be [their] God. I will dwell among the children of Israel . . . and they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them." (Exod 6:7; 29:46).

What set the God of Israel apart from the multiple gods of the surrounding nations was his living, active presence. In Exodus 6, the LORD tells Moses of his intentions to rescue his people and to "take [them] as My people, and I will be [their] God. Then [they] shall know that I am the LORD [their] God" (6:7). Confirming his intentions are the ten plagues, judgments against the gods of Egypt, which proved their impotence (12:12)³³ and against Pharaoh for the hardness of his heart. First Samuel 4-6 gives a dramatic account of the power of the LORD over against the other gods when the LORD plagues the Philistines and topples the very image of their god Dagon after they capture the ark. The book of Isaiah speaks often of the futility of idol worship³⁴ and of the active

³³ See Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 78-80, for an elaboration on the plagues as judgments on the gods.

³⁴ Isaiah 40:18-20; 41:21-24; 44:9-20; 45:20; 46:1, 2, 6, 7.

and powerful presence of the LORD.³⁵

The LORD's presence was withdrawn from the temple prior to the exile. In the period following, the expectations for the coming new age included belief in "fresh manifestations of the revivifying Spirit"³⁶ in which the people receiving the Spirit were cleansed of sin and given power for righteous living. The LORD will "give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes" (Ezek 11:19, 20); He will "put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes" (36:27); He will cause the dry bones of those cut off to live and will "open your graves . . . and [bring] you up . . . [and] I will put My Spirit in you" (Ezek 37: 13, 14).

The manifestations of the Spirit were often likened to water being poured out: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh . . . I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28, 29), "I shall have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel" (Ezek 39:29), "Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high" (Isa 32:15), "I will pour My Spirit on your descendants," (Isa 44:3).

Echoing Hebrew Bible passages describing the Holy Spirit being poured out like water is Romans 5:5: "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" and Titus 3:5, 6: "He saved us, through . . . the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us." The "pouring out" of the Spirit and the "dwelling of the Spirit" in the believers have the same effect. In Gal 3:10-14 the blessing of Abraham is equated

³⁵ Isaiah 2:10-19; 13:11-13; 14:1,2; 34:1-4; 37:30-36; 44:1-8.

³⁶ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 417-418. See also Ezekiel 11:19; 36:25-27; 37:1-14; Isaiah 32:15; 44:3

with justification and with the reception of the Spirit. Justification made believers right with God while the Spirit “provided the motivating and enabling power by which they were to live.”³⁷ In Acts 2:4 the believers were filled with the Spirit and were enabled to “speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Peter describes this event as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy that God would “pour out My Spirit on all flesh . . . and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17, 18). The pouring out of the Spirit means enabling for the believers.

In the Hebrew Bible the LORD is a living, involved presence, in contrast to the dead idols of the surrounding polytheistic cultures, and his dwelling place is the temple. Now, “in contrast to the mute idols that surround them, [the believers] are themselves the sanctuary of the living God by his Spirit”³⁸ in the pagan city of Corinth. Therefore they are to have a holy standard of living and in the case of 1 Cor 3:16, 17 they are not to build the temple of God carelessly but are to build in accordance with what they received from Christ (3:11).

Holiness

The covenant also involved the giving of the law. The law did not function as a way for people to earn God’s favour – if it did then salvation would be a work of man not of God. Rather,

the function of the law is that of defining and measuring sin and transgression...[Its function] is classically illustrated in the account of the grief and penitence of King Josiah when he heard the newly rediscovered book of the law read (2 Kgs.22.3-

³⁷ Ibid., 414.

³⁸ Fee, *Epistle*, 18.

23.25).³⁹

God also warned Israel of the consequences of disobedience. Deuteronomy 28 says “if you do not obey the voice of the LORD . . . all these curses will come upon you...Cursed shall you be in the city, and . . . in the country . . . The LORD will send on you cursing . . . until you are destroyed . . . because of the wickedness of your doings.”

God also told Israel of the blessings on obedience: “Blessed shall you be in the city and . . . in the country . . . the LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself . . . the LORD will grant you plenty . . . the LORD will open to you His good treasure” (Deut 28:1-14).

This blessing and cursing is well documented in the book of Judges. Israel would rebel against the LORD, the LORD would punish, they would repent, the LORD would send a judge to deliver them from their enemies and they would enjoy peace until their next rebellion (Judges 2:11-23).

There was, however, a problem with this covenant and that was Israel’s inability to keep it. This was something the LORD knew of from the beginning: “they will forsake me and break my covenant which I have made with them. They will turn to other gods and serve them . . . for I know the inclination of their behaviour . . . [and their] rebellion” (Deut 31:16, 20, 21, 27). The reason for Israel’s inevitable breaking of the covenant was because the law was only written on tablets of stone and not upon their hearts meaning they did not have the transformed nature necessary to be pleasing to God.⁴⁰ In Deut 29:2-4 Moses tells Israel that though they

³⁹ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 134.

⁴⁰ Scott Hafemann, “The ‘Temple of the Spirit’ as the Inaugural Fulfillment of the New Covenant within the Corinthian Correspondence” *Ex Auditu* 12 (1996): 31-33.

have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh . . . the great trials . . . the signs, and those great wonders . . . Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.

Their continual rebellion eventually led to the removal of God's presence from the temple as recorded in Ezekiel 10, which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the exile of Judah to Babylon (2 Ki 25; 2 Chron 36:15-21).

Although God's presence was removed, the LORD had not abandoned his people in a final sense. Numerous passages concerning the exile speak of the Lord's continuing love and of a remnant's return to the land of promise (Isa 10;20-23; 27:13; 35:8-10; 43:1-15). Not only that but a new covenant was promised which spoke of better things than the old: God's presence would be within his people, *not in a physical building* (Ezek 36:27; 37:14), and the people's nature would be transformed enabling them to obey God (Ezek 36:26, 27).

Paul applied this new covenant to the followers of Christ in 2 Cor 3:5-6 saying "God . . . made us . . . ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The term "letter" "represents the Mosaic law, which demands obedience without supplying the ability to obey and which therefore can only condemn and kill."⁴¹ By contrast "Spirit" represents an internal power for obedience: it produces a change of nature.⁴² Paul describes this change in his letter to the Romans. The believer "dies to sin," the "old man" being crucified "that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (6:6). Paul

⁴¹ Paul R. Thorsell, "The Spirit in the Present Age: Preliminary Fulfillment of the Predicted New Covenant According to Paul," *JETS* 41 (1998): 404. See footnote 20 in the article for a list of commentators supporting this interpretation.

⁴² Ibid.

describes the believers as being able to choose to be righteous: “you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, . . . do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but . . . as instruments of righteousness to God” (6:11-13).

It was a well-understood dictum “in pagan religions of Paul’s day that temples reflected the nature and name of the god or goddess.”⁴³ If the LORD is the true and righteous god, the implication is that the believers must also be righteous or else be guilty of sacrilege. By sinning against one another by their divisions they profane the LORD’s sanctuary.

Paul repeatedly tells the believers that God dwells in them: 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16. This indwelling comes from the teachings of Christ himself who promised that he went away so that the Holy Spirit might come (Jn 16:7). Christ could only be with his followers in a limited fashion since he was in a physical body. But once he returned to heaven the Holy Spirit would descend on Christ’s followers, indwelling them and teaching them (Jn 16:13-15).

In the Old Testament the LORD dwelt in the physical temple and this was the place where people met with God for the offering of sacrifices to atone for their sins. But since “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Heb 10:4) the atonement was only symbolic and temporary – the sacrifices had to be offered repeatedly, showing the people both the cost of sin and their state of unholiness.⁴⁴ The

⁴³ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 316.

⁴⁴ P.E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 392,393, writes that animals were unqualified to substitute for humans because they lack volition and rationality – only another human was able to be an effective sacrificial substitute. See also David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, (London: Cambridge, 1982), 144-146. See B.A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*, (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 115, who writes that animal sacrifices were efficacious – “God accepts the blood of the sacrifices in lieu of human blood.” Levine

temple itself reinforced this symbolic atonement with its degrees of access. Only the priests, those set apart by God, could enter the Holy Place. The Most Holy Place in which the Presence dwelt was shielded by the veil (Exod 40:2,21). It was entered only once a year (Lev 16:2, 34; Heb 9:7) and only by the High Priest who did not linger.⁴⁵

The physical temple graphically demonstrated the barriers between God and humanity. But with the sacrifice of Christ, which achieved actual, lasting atonement, the way was cleared between these two parties. Romans 3:24, 25 says that those with faith in Christ have been “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood.” Later the letter reads “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1). First Corinthians opens with an affirmation of their right relationship with God: “to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” All these passages point to the holiness possessed by the believers, the holiness required for the indwelling of the Spirit and the reason Paul can call them the temple of God.

The holiness of the temple is underscored by the warning that Paul gives in 3:17: *εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθείρει, φθειρεῖ τοῦτον ὁ θεός* (“If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him). Louw and Nida define *φθείρω* “to ruin or destroy something with the implication of causing something to be corrupt and thus cease to exist.”⁴⁶ The usage of *φθείρω* in other New Testament passages sheds some light on

quotes Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi) who says “Blood represents life and it can therefore expiate for life” (115).

⁴⁵ Lev 16:12-15 – The priest simply put incense on the altar before the mercy seat and sprinkled bull blood and goat blood on and before the mercy seat.

⁴⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), section 20.39

what it means here. Second Corinthians says that “he who comes [who] preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached” (11:4) serves to “corrupt” (φθάρῃ) the minds of the believers. Second Peter speaks of those having “forsaken the right way and gone astray” (2:15) as those who “will utterly perish in their own corruption” (2:12). Jude describes certain people who “have crept in unnoticed . . . ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:4). Each of these passages describes false teachers, those whose incorrect doctrine leads people away from the truth and thus “destroys” the church. The word is used of the harlot of Revelation 19:2 who leads the world in idolatry and corruption.⁴⁷ Qumran texts help clarify. Φθειρώ usually translates שחח which “is found on a number of occasions in the Qumran texts, in connexion with the epithet ‘men of destruction’, השחח אני, who try to destroy the community, but fail and are themselves condemned to eternal destruction (IQS iv. 12 and ix. 16).”⁴⁸ It seems proper to think of the destruction of 3:17 as applying to those who substitute another gospel for “the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor 11:3), those who would interpret the faith in a way that leads to a “transformation of [the church], which would leave no church, no meeting-point between God and man, at all.”⁴⁹

In the verses prior to 1 Cor 3:16, 17, Paul speaks of workers who build on the foundation of Christ with worthy and unworthy materials. Paul does not say what the two types of materials specifically are. He describes them as “gold, silver, precious

⁴⁷ Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 422.

⁴⁸ Bertil Gartner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), 59.

⁴⁹ Balz and Schneider, *Dictionary*, 422.

stones, wood, hay, straw” (3:12) but does not elaborate – rather his focus is on what endures the fire of testing and what does not. That which survives is whatever is “compatible with the foundation, the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁵⁰ Earlier, Paul discussed the divisions plaguing the Corinthian church with groups of believers allying themselves with different leaders – Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ. Paul described such behaviour as the “*sophia* of the world” (1:20) and contrasted it with the “wisdom of God (1:21), which is Christ crucified (1:23). Therefore, what does not survive testing is that which follows the *sophia* of the world.”⁵¹ Worthy materials will survive and will be rewarded. Unworthy materials will be destroyed. Paul describes the person using the latter type saying “he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (3:15). This person has not faithfully carried out his or her responsibility to build the church in a way that pleases God and enters the next life with nothing to show for his or her life’s work.

The destruction in verse 17 must be understood in a stronger sense than the loss in verse 15. The person in verse 15 retains his salvation – he has remained on the foundation of Christ but has used unworthy building materials, the kind that will not stand the test of fire at the final judgment. The person in verse 17 has “destroyed” the temple. C.K. Barrett notes that although God’s temple cannot be destroyed, “it must be remembered, however, that Paul is thinking of . . . a local church; and . . . local churches have, under various pressures, gone out of existence.”⁵² Such a person has not simply stored up works that are of no eternal value but has done serious damage to the Church.

⁵⁰ Fee, *Epistle*, 140.

⁵¹ Fee, *Epistle*, 140; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 54.

⁵² C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1968), 91.

The phrase places the two φθείρω together, highlighting the progression. God meets the destruction done by the person with destruction of that person.⁵³ Such usage is found in two other passages of scripture. Revelation 11:18 uses the derivative διαφθείρω (destroy, utterly deprave): “διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντα τὴν γῆν” ([the Lord will] destroy all that destroy the earth). Joshua 7:25 uses a synonym ὀλοθρεύω. This situation involves Achan when his disobedience of keeping goods destined for destruction is found out. Joshua asks: “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” Achan trespassed the holiness of the LORD by his disobedience and the entire nation suffered because of it. The consequence to Achan for his sin was stoning. The use of φθείρω in the Corinthians passage ought to be understood as a warning. It is one thing to build the temple of God using materials that do not add anything of value to the church. It is quite another to destroy it. The people are the temple and therefore are holy according to this letter. Such holiness must not be treated carelessly but watchfully maintained.

Holiness was required under the old covenant and the law described what holiness involved. However, the people were unable to comply with the demands of the law because of their untransformed nature. Their continual disobedience eventually led to the removal of God’s presence from the temple and the exile of the people from the land. Under the new covenant the Spirit cleanses believers and gives them the power to obey God, making them fit dwelling places for Him. Since they are His temple, the believers

⁵³ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 8, notes “In antiquity, in order to protect temples that were repositories of great wealth from plunders of various sorts, two stratagems were used – . . . temple police . . . [and] a curse of the deity was leveled against anyone who violated the sanctuary . . . Against this background Paul could issue the warning associated with the Christian temple: “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him” (3:17a).

are to act accordingly by forsaking worldly wisdom that focuses on human ways of doing things and staying true to their foundation, Jesus Christ. In this way the temple, the Church is “structurally sound” and will “pass inspection” in the day of judgment.

Other Indications for the Importance of the Metaphor

The replacement of the physical temple with the believers is evident from Paul’s manner of address. Several times throughout the letters he uses the expression οὐκ οἶδατε; (“do you not know?” 1 Cor 3:16; 6:15,16,19; 9:13,24). The question implies that what follows is something the addressees know or perhaps should know⁵⁴ and may serve as a mild rebuke for their slowness of understanding. The first use is in 3:16 – “Do you not know that you are the temple of God?” Paul does not present the statement as some new doctrine, rather he treats it as self-evident. A switch in person further emphasizes the statement. In the description concerning the unity and consequences of the work of the temple Paul uses the third person: “*he* who plants and *he* who waters are one, and . . . will receive *his* own reward according to *his* own labour” (3:8). But when he describes the people as the temple he uses the second person, honing in on the believers in Corinth specifically: “you are God’s building” (3:9), “*you* are the temple of God” (3:16), and “the temple of God is holy, which temple *you* are” (3:17).

Conclusion

The physical temple of the Jews served its purpose for centuries and was the tangible, visible sign of the favour of the LORD. Yet Paul had no qualms about setting it

⁵⁴ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 316, says “The principle at issue is axiomatic for the Christian and should not have escaped attention as a cardinal element in the community’s thinking.”

aside. Nor did he treat this setting aside as something unusual, but rather as something that logically flowed from the gospel he preached.

God chose to reveal himself to his people through the physical temple. There was one way to the one God. The temple was holy and therefore a suitable place for the earthly presence of God, however limited actual access to him might be.

The LORD spoke of a time to come when hearts would be transformed and he would dwell within people instead of a building. Paul recognized the fulfilment of the LORD's word in the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was no longer any need for sacrifices for symbolic atonement since the ultimate sacrifice had been offered for true atonement. This drawing of attention to the message of the cross figures at the very beginning of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "But we preach Christ crucified" (1:23).

Christ transformed the believers – they were made holy and as such were fitting residences for the presence of God. The limited access afforded by the temple was no longer necessary since Christ had redeemed them. Consequently, being divided concerning issues of personal favouritism in leadership was particularly inappropriate as was building the temple of believers in a haphazard, even destructible way.

A metaphor is a comparison between objects. The phrase "the sky was angry" compares the heavens with a person's expression of upset, suggesting threatening weather. There is no one-to-one correspondence since the sky is inanimate and does not experience emotions. The metaphor is illustrative and does not precisely describe reality. When Paul calls the Corinthians believers the "temple" he is comparing them to a physical building in which a deity resides, a highly appropriate metaphor considering the Corinthian's familiarity with temple, living in a pagan society as they did. Like all

metaphors, this description was, in a sense, not a completely accurate description of reality since the people were not buildings of wood or stone. However, in a sense the description was more than a metaphor in that the people were actually the dwelling place of the LORD. In all previous understanding the LORD dwelt in a building, though he was not contained by any physical structure. But now, with the gift of the Spirit, people became the dwelling place of the LORD. People being the temple can be understood as a realized metaphor or even as having transcended the metaphor. Paul does not say the believers are the temple of God meaning they are like the temple of God (and therefore also somewhat *unlike* the temple). Rather he is making a statement of fact – “you *are* the temple of God.”

CHAPTER THREE

1 Corinthians 5: 1-8: Cleansing the Temple of God

Introduction

This chapter first discusses why this passage, although not expressly mentioning the temple, is included for study. After the translation there follows a discussion of OT regulations concerning exclusion of certain people from worship at the tabernacle/temple and how they relate to the passage in question. This is followed by a discussion of the concept of corporate responsibility as a reason for exclusion from both the OT congregation and from the church, and of the need for grief over the sinful state of the community. Paul's use of Passover motifs is also discussed.

First Corinthians 3:16, 17 is the first passage in the Corinthians correspondence to explicitly describe the church as the temple of God. The reference occurs early on and so creates a framework for understanding the rest of the letter. Modern readers of the New Testament often read it in a very disjointed fashion, picking and choosing passages according to the dictates of study guides or personal favouritism. Seldom do we read a letter as long as First Corinthians from start to finish, but that was how it was done in the early church. Such a letter would have been read aloud in the hearing of the whole congregation. In this way, the letter is understood as a whole and not fragmented. Thus, an image used in the beginning, resonates through to the end.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Brian S. Rosner, "Temple and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 5," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1 (1991): 142, 143. Rosner writes, "The introductory thanksgiving (1:4-9), as is customary in Paul's letters, presents the main themes of the entire epistle. [For example] the theme of spiritual gifts (addressed in chs. 12-14) is

Although 1 Corinthians 5 does not expressly use the metaphor of temple, it gives a practical example of what it means for the believers in Corinth to be the temple of God. In this passage Paul registers his astonishment at the Corinthian church for having a member cohabiting with his stepmother, and for being arrogant rather than mourning about it. Paul commands the church to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved” (5:5). He goes on to speak about the Passover. Just as leaven, a symbol for sin, was removed from the house before the Passover was celebrated, so the church must remove sin from itself, since Christ was sacrificed for it.

1 Corinthians 5:1-8

“I have heard there is fornication among you, and fornication of such a kind that is not among the Gentiles, that a man has his father’s wife. And you are puffed up with pride and have not rather mourned, that he who did this deed might be removed from your midst. For I indeed, absent in the body but present in the spirit, have already judged as though present, him who has done this. In the name of our Lord Jesus when you are gathered together with my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus, hand over such a person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven in order that you may be a new lump of dough, just as you are unleavened bread. For Christ our Passover was slain. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, not with the leaven of wickedness and maliciousness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Exclusion from the Tabernacle/Temple/Church

Paul has earlier called the believers the temple of God, and that temple is holy. What is the significance of excluding the sinner from the temple? Clues can be found in the Old Testament passages concerning exclusion from the assembly of the LORD.

The congregation of the children of Israel was not referred to as God's temple. They were his people: God told Moses "I have surely seen the oppression of My people" (Exod 3:7) and he conveyed through Moses that "if you will indeed obey My voice . . . then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people" (Exod 19:5). As God's people they were consecrated, they were holy. Hence they were to live in accordance with their holy status. They were given God's law, the Ten Commandments (Exod 20) and by obeying them they would be blessed (Deut 6:24). Upon entering the land of promise they were required to destroy the heathen: they were not to intermarry with them or make covenants with them and they were to "destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire" (Deut 7:5).

As God's people they had the privilege of enjoying his visible presence: the tabernacle and later the temple was God's sanctuary "that I may dwell among them" (Exod 25:8; 1 Ki 6:13). But only those who met certain criteria could participate in the assembly of the LORD. These regulations are outlined in Deuteronomy 23.

Similarly, the Corinthians were God's people and had a holy status. Just as the assembly of God in the Old Testament was regulated so too were there restrictions governing who was allowed to worship in the congregation of believers in Corinth.

Examination of the regulations concerning the congregation of the people of Israel reveals valuable parallels for the situation in Corinth. Deuteronomy 23 details those who are to be excluded from the assembly of the LORD: an emasculated man is excluded as also is an illegitimate person, an Ammonite or a Moabite or their descendants. These types of people are not mentioned in the Corinthians passage. However, it has been noted that the last verse of Deuteronomy 22 deals with something very familiar. It states, “a man shall not take his father’s wife, nor uncover his father’s bed.” The man in question in 1 Corinthians 5 is just such a man: he is one who “has his father’s wife” (1 Cor 5:1).⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 22 deals with regulations governing sexual relations and is treated separately from the issue of those excluded from the congregation. However, according to both the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint this text, the last verse of chapter 22, is the first verse of chapter 23. According to William Horbury “The admission regulations of Deuteronomy 23:2-9 (1-8) were linked in rabbinic exegesis with 23:1 (22:30)”⁵⁷ as evidenced by Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

Paul seems to be alluding to the Deuteronomy passage by using euphemistic rather than explicit language, saying “a man has his father’s wife” instead of saying something like “a man commits fornication with his father’s wife.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ “Father’s wife” is understood as the man’s step- rather than biological mother. This sin is condemned in Leviticus 18:7, 8 (LXX). “The verb “to have” when used in sexual or marital contexts, is a euphemism for an enduring sexual relationship, not just...a “one-night stand”” according to Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 200.

⁵⁷ William Horbury, “Extirpation and Excommunication,” *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985): 25.

⁵⁸ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 81 – “Paul’s . . . description . . . echoes the scriptural prohibition of such relationships: “Cursed be anyone who lies with his father’s wife” (Deut. 27: 20; cf. Lev 18:8; 20:11).”

This type of sexual sin was ground for excluding the man from the assembly of the LORD. The regulations were in accordance with the fact that “the holiness of God demands perfection in those who would approach his presence.”⁵⁹ In the case of the New Testament believers “this perfection is found in Christ, who provides the means of access to God for all people, regardless of their imperfections.”⁶⁰ Having been perfected through Christ, the believers are not to live however they please but are to deal with sin – in this case they must go so far as to exclude a fellow believer from their assembly. If the followers of God in the Old Testament excluded sinners from the congregation that worshipped *at* the temple of God, how much more shall those who *are* the temple of God exclude those who are arrogant in their sin (cf. 1 Cor 5:2)?⁶¹

The importance of the purity of the temple is evident by the passages that speak of its defilement. In describing the wickedness of Jerusalem, along with oppressive rulers and disobedience to the LORD, Zephaniah says “Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law” (Zeph 3:4). The LORD’s response is to “pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy” (3:8).

Malachi 1:7ff says that the LORD has been defiled because of contemptible sacrifices offered on the temple altar. The LORD tells the priests that he will “send a

⁵⁹ Duane L. Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 6B, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 537.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Anthony C. Thistelton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 395-400 supports the view that the purpose of the exclusion for the Corinthian sinner is done with a view toward his ultimate salvation, i.e., he will be allowed to return to the congregation if he repents, whereas the OT injunction is of a permanent nature. Furthermore, the exclusion is for the benefit of the community as well as the man, just as the OT injunctions for dealing with sin have a corporate dimension, which will be discussed below.

curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings” if they will not “give glory to My name” (2:2).

First Samuel 2:12-17, 22 describes the sons of Eli, the priest, who did not follow the proper procedure for offering sacrifices at the tabernacle but took the best of the sacrifices for themselves. They also committed fornication with the women who assembled at the tabernacle.⁶² The LORD sends a man of God to Eli with the message “Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honour your sons more than Me? Therefore . . . I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father’s house . . . And all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age.” (1 Sa 2:29, 31, 33).

The LORD says to Jeremiah that the people of Judah have “turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them” (Jer 11:10). They “have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name to pollute it” (7:30) and they believe in “lying words” which tell them that as long as the temple exists the people will not be harmed, no matter what their actions. The LORD tells them that he allowed the sanctuary at Shiloh to be overrun and the ark captured because of sin (7:12, cf. 1 Sa 4:11) and he will do the same thing to the temple because of their wickedness (7:14).

Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw that an “image of jealousy” was set in the inner court of the temple (Ezek 8:3). Images of idols were carved into the walls of the temple (8:10), elders of Israel were offering incense to idols there (8:11, 12), women were “engaged in ritual lamentation for the dead vegetation deity Tammuz”⁶³ (8:14) and

⁶² The DSS and the LXX omit the verses containing this statement.

men were worshipping the sun there also (8:16). God refers to these actions as abominations and declares that he “also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them” (8:18).

A final example of the defiling of the temple comes from Isaiah 1:10 which has a textual connection with 1 Cor 5:7 (“clean out the old leaven”). The LORD asks his people “When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?” (1:12). He calls their sacrifices futile, their incense an abomination, and their assemblies iniquitous (1:13). He then commands them to “make yourselves clean” (1:16) or else “you shall be devoured by the sword” (1:20). Paul uses *εκκαθαίρω* and the LXX of Isaiah 1:16 uses the related word *καθαροῖ* (which translates *יָצִי*). However, Paul’s use of this particular word is part of his metaphor of the church containing “leaven of wickedness and maliciousness” of which it needs to be rid and so the linkage to the Isaiah passage is not overwhelming.

Another link may be the response required of the respective parties whom the two passages address. Paul uses *αἶρω* to describe the action the Corinthians need to take in regards to the sinner (“he who did this deed might be removed”) while the LXX of Isaiah 1:16 uses the related word *ἀφαιρέω* to describe what the people of Judah need to do (“Put away the evil of your doings”). The meanings of these two words have a certain overlap as well as a similar form but again the linkage is not overwhelming.

Another parallel of Old Testament actions for maintaining the holiness of the congregation can be discerned in the idea of corporate responsibility. There are numerous OT examples in which sin is not dealt with as an individual's problem, but as

⁶³ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 55.

the responsibility of the entire nation. In Exod 16:27, 28 it says “some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather (manna), but they found none.” Instead of the LORD rebuking those individuals he lumps the whole nation together: “How long do you (plural) refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?”

Numbers 16:1-33 relates the story of the rebellion against Moses led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram. The rebels offer profane incense, and “the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment’” (16:21). Moses responds by asking, “O God . . . shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?” (16:22). In this example the guilt of sin is accounted to the whole group not just the actual people who rebelled.

Deuteronomy 19:11-13 deals with premeditated murder. The guilty party is to be delivered to the avenger for execution so that “you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood *from Israel*, that it may go well with you” (italics mine). Similarly, in Deut 21:1-9 sacrifices for atonement are offered in the case of an unsolved murder so that the LORD will “not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.” In both cases “criminal guilt pollutes the community, and therefore the community must be cleansed of that guilt.”⁶⁴

Joshua 7:1-12 details the disaster that befalls Israel on account of one man’s sin. When Achan keeps some of the “accursed things” of Jericho “the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel” (7:1). As a result, the first attack by Israel on the

⁶⁴ P. D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 161; P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 280, notes that “the elders prayed for forgiveness, indicating that in spite of innocence, the community must still shoulder responsibility for the crime. The forgiveness is sought for the whole people (*Israel* is mentioned twice in the prayer for forgiveness), not simply for the city nearest the crime.”

city of Ai leads to a resounding defeat. When Joshua asks the LORD about it the LORD replies

“Israel has sinned, and *they* have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded *them*. For *they* have even taken some of the accursed things . . . and *they* have also put it among their own stuff . . . Therefore *they* have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with *you* (pl.) anymore unless *you* (pl.) destroy the accursed from among you” (7:11, 12; italics mine).⁶⁵

One man’s sin implicates the whole congregation. Likewise, when Achan and his family are destroyed the anger of the LORD is turned away from the nation and Israel is enabled to lead a successful attack on Ai.

When the eastern tribes build an altar to the LORD they are confronted by the rest of the tribes who declare “it shall be, if you rebel today against the LORD, that tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel” (Josh 22:18).⁶⁶ Second Samuel says that a famine during the time of David was “because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites” (21:1) and it was halted only when some of Saul’s descendents had been sacrificed to make atonement (21:3, 5-6, 14). First Kings 14:7-16 speaks of King Jeroboam who did evil. The LORD’s response to him was that he would “give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin.” First Chronicles recounts how David took a census of Israel. The LORD was displeased with this “so the LORD sent a plague upon Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell” (21:14). Second Chronicles 24:18 says that the king and leaders of Judah

⁶⁵ M. H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 120, notes that “the description of the offense is based on the healthy principle of solidarity. One man is the offender but the entire people are viewed as having committed the trespass, and the Lord’s anger blazes against them. The individual functions within the larger context of the community of which he is a part. Achan robbed the whole nation of the purity and holiness which it ought to possess before God.”

⁶⁶ See Brian S. Rosner, “‘ΟΥΕΙ ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΕΠΕΝΘΗΖΑΤΕ’ Corporate Responsibility in 1 Corinthians,” *NTS* 38 (1992): 470, 471 for these examples and others.

“left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served wooden images and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of their trespass.”

These passages demonstrate the corporate responsibility of the nation of Israel. Any unholiness must be regarded as the problem of all. A similar attitude of corporate identity is reflected in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. He does not send a letter to the sinner telling him to change his behaviour, nor does he write a letter to the elders only. Rather, he addresses the matter publicly in a letter that would have been read in the hearing of the entire congregation. In the letter, Paul uses the second person plural nine times in thirteen verses. He rebukes them as a group in verses two and six and he commands the discipline of the man be carried out when they “are gathered together” (5:4). By removing him from the fellowship they “purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump” (5:7). The metaphor is singular – they are a *lump* of dough, not *lumps* of dough. Even the sacrifice of Christ is pictured as occurring on behalf of the whole – “Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us” (5:7).⁶⁷ At any rate, Paul’s commands concerning the sinner are not directed at the sinner himself but at the church as a whole. They are to discipline the sinner when they are gathered together as a whole.

The church has a corporate nature then, but Paul does not stop with the command simply to disfellowship the sinner. He goes further, indicating that since the sin of the man is their responsibility they should be grief-stricken.⁶⁸ Paul’s description of their behaviour in response to the sinning member indicates corporate *responsibility* – “you are

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 210, says “the community should have mourned . . . for themselves, either because of the shame that the misdeed brought on the community or because of their corporate responsibility for the errant behavior (cf. 12:26).”

puffed up, and have not rather mourned” (5:2). If they merely had to “get rid” of the man, Paul would not have told them they should also be distressed. Perhaps the Corinthians feel that the spiritual is more important than the physical, so what is done in the body is of no consequence. Or perhaps they think their freedom in Christ (cf. 6:12) and access to higher “wisdom” makes the action all right.⁶⁹ At any rate, they are treating the sin lightly and Paul rebukes them. Paul uses the word πενθέω which in other Pauline usage carries the meaning of sorrowing for sin that is not necessarily one’s own⁷⁰ – “I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented [of what] they practised” (2 Cor 12:21). In the Septuagint πενθέω (מחאבל) is used six times with reference to sin: Ezra 10:6; Neh 1:4; 1 Esdras 8:72, 9:2; Dan 10:2 and Neh 8:9. The first five passages refer to grief over corporate sin and the last refers to grief over personal sin but in a corporate context.⁷¹

Ezra 10:6 says “then Ezra . . . ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.” He was mourning because of the intermarriages of the people of Israel, though he himself had not committed any sin. So are the Corinthians to behave – “just as Ezra mourned (πενθέω) over the sins of the community, so Paul enjoined the Corinthians to mourn (πενθέω) over the sin of the incestuous man,”⁷² though they themselves had not participated in the sin.

⁶⁹ C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A&C Black, 1968), 122; Jerome Murphy O’Connor, *1 Corinthians*, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc.), 40.

⁷⁰ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 157.

⁷¹ Rosner, *Corporate Responsibility*, 472. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 82, notes that Paul writes about the corporate nature of the church later in the letter at 1 Cor 12:26 – “If one member suffers all suffer together with it.” In 5:2 that corporate nature is assumed.

⁷² Ibid., 472-473.

There was only one temple in Israel and the people were regarded as one entity. The sin of an individual was regarded as the sin of the whole. All were responsible and all ought to mourn.

In the New Testament the congregation was also treated as one. The sin of one was the responsibility of all and an attitude of grief on the part of all over that sin was appropriate, even necessary. There are numerous passages that speak of the believers as if they function as a unit. Paul's letter to the Galatians speaks of how believers are to take responsibility when another believer sins (6:1). In Ephesians 4:25, Paul describes the people as "members of one another" and in Philippians 2:4 he commands them to look out for each other. The people of the Old Testament were removed from God. He dwelt in the temple, apart, but they still strove for purity. How much more should those of the New Testament, the Corinthians, purify themselves, seeing as they themselves were God's temple?

A further link between the expulsion of chapter five and the description of the believers as the temple in chapter three can be seen in the "destruction" of the sinner described in both. The destruction in chapter three is that of a believer who does not build God's temple with appropriate materials. Such a person does not lose salvation but only survives judgment "by the skin of the teeth," having no works endure to the afterlife. Likewise, chapter five talks of a believer. Paul commands this one to be expelled from the fellowship, saying, "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh." But this destruction is also not to be understood as a loss of salvation. Rather, it is for the man's benefit, so that "the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." According to Fee, the grammatical emphasis is on the spirit being saved not on the destruction of the

flesh and so the destruction is part of the remedial process prescribed for the sinner and cannot then be understood to mean the man's death.⁷³

The maintenance of the holiness of the believers must be the reason for the expulsion of the sinner in this chapter. The believers are the temple and the temple is holy as per 3:16, 17. In the Old Testament the temple was a physical building whose holiness was strictly protected. Great care was taken to ensure the purity of those who ministered within but more than that there were regulations concerning the "common" people, the assembly or congregation of the children of Israel. Only those who met the regulations were allowed to worship at the temple; likewise with the believers in Corinth. They themselves were the temple of God and so action had to be taken when flagrant sin was committed to maintain the temple's holiness.

Paul expands his reasoning for the expulsion of the sinner by referring to the Passover. The Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread had been established more than a millennia earlier as a prelude to the Exodus. Smearing the blood of a lamb on their doorposts caused the LORD to pass over the houses of the people of Israel when he went throughout Egypt, killing the firstborn. The accompanying meal consisted of the lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread and during the feast all leaven was removed from the participants' homes. There is no explanation for why leaven is to be removed; the people

⁷³ Fee, *First Epistle*, 210. Thistelton, *First Epistle*, 396, describes that which is to be destroyed as the "self-glorying or self-outworking of the offender and perhaps also the community." Leon Morris, *I Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1985), 86, supports the view that the destruction does have physical consequences as does Simon J. Kistemaker, *I Corinthians*, 161 and C.K. Barrett, *First Epistle*, 127. Barth Campbell, "Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor 5:5: An Exercise in Rhetorical Criticism of the NT," *JETS* 36 (September 1993), 331-342, argues that both "flesh" and "spirit" refer not to the sinner but to the church. "Flesh" refers to the sinful element in the church and "spirit" is "the corporate life of the church lived in union with God through the Holy Spirit." In my opinion however, this last explanation does not seem to follow Paul's usual usage of the terms "flesh" and "spirit" – I am unaware of any other texts in which these terms are used to refer to the church.

are merely told that whoever eats leaven during the feast “that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel” (Exod 12:19).⁷⁴ Leaven in this case should not be understood as yeast is understood today, being a separate ingredient added to dough. The people at the time of the Exodus caused their bread to rise using bits of dough from the previous baking and a small piece was enough for a whole batch.⁷⁵

Under the old covenant, priests offered blood sacrifices to atone for their own sin and for that of the people. But the symbolic nature of those sacrifices is evidenced by their repetition. Day by day, year by year, they were offered, demonstrating God’s holiness, humanity’s sinfulness, and that “the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing” (Heb 9:8). The book of Hebrews acknowledges that, “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (10:4). Paul calls Christ “our Passover [that] was sacrificed for us” (5:7). Just as with the shedding of the blood of an unblemished lamb ensured that the LORD would not kill the firstborn at the Exodus, so the shedding of the blood of a sinless human, Christ, provided salvation for those who would believe. Paul likens the believers in Corinth to a lump of dough that is unleavened because “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (5:7). They are saved, made holy, through Christ’s sacrifice therefore they must act accordingly: they must “purge out the old leaven” (5:7), they must rid the congregation of the sinner.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Christ used leaven as a symbol for corruption (Luke 12:1).

⁷⁵ J.P. Hyatt, *Exodus*, (Greenwood: Attic Press, 1971), 139.

⁷⁶ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 83, notes that “when Paul says to clean out the old leaven, he is not telling the individuals at Corinth to clean up their individual lives; rather, he is repeating in symbolic language the instruction of verses 2-5 to purify the community by expelling the offender.”

Paul's use of the Passover image strengthens his temple imagery because of a connection between the two in the OT. Second Chronicles 29, 30 relates the story of Hezekiah, a king who "did what was right in the sight of the LORD" (29:2) after a long line of ungodly kings. One of Hezekiah's first tasks was to repair and cleanse the temple and to reinstitute proper worship. After its sanctification Hezekiah "sent to all Israel and Judah . . . that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel" (30:1). The two kings who reigned after Hezekiah "did evil in the sight of the LORD" (33:2, 22) and the temple was again neglected. Josiah, the third king "did what was right in the sight of the LORD" (34:2), and when he was twenty-six he ordered the repair and restoration of the temple. During the cleanup the book of the law was discovered, perhaps informing the king of the Passover celebration that had undoubtedly been neglected in the history of idolatrous Judah. After the temple was cleansed, Josiah assembled the people and they kept the Passover.

When the Babylonians invaded Judah, they removed the valuables from the temple and burned it, and then took the people captive to Babylon. After the exile, when the people returned to Jerusalem, they set about rebuilding the temple, and after offering sacrifices of dedication and for sin, "the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover" (Ezra 6:19).⁷⁷

There is thus a connection between the celebration of the Passover and the cleansing of the temple. The latter was a prerequisite to the former in the OT era. For the Corinthians the order is reversed. They have already been made holy by the sacrifice of Christ, the Passover Lamb. Therefore, they need to act in accordance with their holy status by cleansing themselves.

⁷⁷ Rosner, "Temple and Holiness," 144, 145.

Conclusion

Paul has called the Corinthian church the temple of God. If they are the temple they must act accordingly – “The command to cleanse themselves of wickedness in their midst is to call the Corinthians to be in practice what they are in their new Christian existence: Those sanctified in relationship to God through Christ ought to live holy lives.”⁷⁸ They accomplish this by excluding a particular sinner from their congregation. This action has precedence in the OT era of the physical tabernacle, in the exclusion from the congregation as noted in the Pentateuch.

They must not only exclude him, but they must sorrow for his sin. Since they collectively are the temple they are held accountable. If they are accountable they must act like it, by mourning that such sin has defiled the temple, and not by ignoring or even glorying in it.

The temple must also cleanse itself for the sake of Christ, the Passover Lamb sacrificed to make them the temple of God in the first place. Recall that by his sacrifice, Christ enabled God to dwell within people instead of a physical building.

His sacrifice made them holy but holiness is also to be understood as an ongoing process. The temple must continue to purify itself so as to be in a state that is commensurate with Christ’s action on their behalf. Again, cleansing of the temple in this instance has precedence in the OT era of the physical temple.

By commanding them to live in such a way – bearing responsibility for sin with an appropriate attitude and cleansing themselves of sin – and by supporting his commands by using the image of the Passover’s sacrificial Lamb, Paul speaks as though

⁷⁸ B. Campbell, “Flesh and Spirit,” 337.

the physical temple no longer matters. All its procedures have been applied to the believers, the new temple of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 – The Bond Between Christ and the Believers

Introduction

This chapter first investigates the kind of immorality of which this passage speaks, outlines the problem of involvement with prostitutes, and discusses Paul's countering arguments against the Corinthian's behaviour. Sections are devoted to the nature of the believers' relationship with Christ, how that union precludes relationships with prostitutes, the issue of ownership of the believers' bodies, and the nature of the relationship between believers and the Holy Spirit – they are his temple.

First Corinthians 6:19-20 is the second passage in the letter that explicitly calls believers the temple of God. Here, though, instead of referring to the corporate Church, the metaphor is applied to believers as individuals. It concludes a discussion of the state that the believer's physical body must maintain, as regards sexual immorality. The believer is "joined to the Lord" becoming "one spirit with him" (6:17) and so cannot commit sexual immorality since it would involve Christ in the act. The believer's body has a part in the plan of redemption – it will be raised just as Christ's body was raised, so what is done in the body is of lasting significance. Sexual sins are committed against the believer's own body (6:18) and are therefore a sin of particular significance since the believer's body does not belong to him or her – it "is the temple of the Holy Spirit" and "not your own" (6:19), having been "bought at a price" (6:20). Since God owns the believer's body the believer must act in a way that glorifies that owner, God.

1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”

Context

Earlier Paul has addressed the immorality of the man cohabiting with his stepmother. He commanded the man be put out of the fellowship. Such a person cannot remain because, as the temple of God (as they are called in 3:16, 17), the believers cannot tolerate such sin in their midst. The Corinthian church was made up of Gentiles mostly. They did not follow the ethics of the Jews but rather came to saving faith in a pagan, immoral society, where the visiting of prostitutes was not unusual, not only in a secular context but also as part of religious practises.⁷⁹ Given the occasional nature of Paul’s letters, his discussion of relations with prostitutes must indicate some church members were continuing their old behaviour patterns of actually visiting prostitutes, or they were arguing for the right to continue to do so. Consequently, it seems evident that although believers in Jesus, the Corinthians struggled with issues of basic morality.

⁷⁹ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 13, referring to H. D. Saffrey, “Aphrodite a Corinthe. Reflexions sur une idée recue,” *RB* 92 (1985), 359-374, says that Saffrey “stresses that it is uncertain whether or not sacred prostitution was practiced even in classical Corinth. But Saffrey admits that Corinth clearly had a reputation for having many prostitutes (p.373).” Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 13, notes however that there were at least three temples of Aphrodite in Corinth, one of which was an object of pilgrimage. Aphrodite was considered the patron goddess of prostitutes and her image appeared on coins minted during Paul’s time “in part as a form of advertisement. And given the connection of Aphrodite with prostitution, it is probable that [there was] the practice of sexual activity in some temple precincts in the city, perhaps even in Aphrodite’s temples.” J. Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, (Wilmington: Glazier, 1983), 56 notes that “Corinth had a certain reputation in sexual matters. Aristophanes (c. 450-385 B.C.) coined the verb *korinthiazesthai* ‘to act like a Corinthian’, i.e. to practice fornication . . . Plato (c. 429-347 B. C.) used *korinthia kore* ‘a Corinthian girl’ to mean a prostitute (*Republic*, 404D).”

What kind of immorality?

There is some debate as to what kind of sexual activity Paul is referring in this passage. Is it immorality in general, immorality in connection with prostitutes, either sacred or secular, or is it the immorality discussed earlier in chapter five concerning the stepmother (was she selling herself to her stepson)?⁸⁰

Some commentators believe it refers to sexual immorality in general.⁸¹ In 5:1-13 Paul dealt with a specific example of immorality, that of incest. Now he talks of immorality in general.

Will Deming has argued that Paul is referring to the stepmother of 5:1. He hypothesizes that the church was divided over the issue and took the man to court, which action Paul addresses in 6:1-11. The man was acquitted, giving him occasion to quote a Corinthians slogan "All things are lawful for me" (6:12). The harlot of 6:16 is the stepmother and all of chapters 5 and 6 deals with that particular situation.⁸²

Other commentators believe Paul is addressing the visiting of prostitutes, and are divided as to whether he meant sacred prostitutes⁸³ or secular.⁸⁴ Brian S. Rosner believes

⁸⁰ Will Deming, "The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5-6," *JBL* 115/2 (1992): 295.

⁸¹ Robertson and Plummer, *I Corinthians*, 121; F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: 1953), 143; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Columbus, 1937), 233.

⁸² Will Deming, "1 Corinthians," 295.

⁸³ J. Weib, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) cited by Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," *NovT* 40 (1998): 336-351; M. Miguens, "Christ's 'Members' and Sex," *Thomist* 39 (1975): 24-48.

⁸⁴ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 56; Hans Herter, "Die Soziologie der Antiken Prostitution im Lichte des heidnischen und christlichen Schritums," *JAC* 3 (1960): 72-73, cited by Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," *NovT* 40 (1998):

Paul is referring to prostitution as part of festivities involving a celebratory meal held at a temple.⁸⁵

Will Deming's scenario of the man being acquitted by the secular courts seems unlikely since Paul specifically mentions that his action was reprehensible even to Gentiles, not even being named among them (5:1), so if the church had taken him to court he would not have been acquitted.

Paul uses πορνεία in v.13, which refers to "unlawful sexual intercourse"⁸⁶ and includes adultery, prostitution and sex between unmarried people. Any of these forms of sexual relations are considered sinful and not to be engaged in by believers. However, Paul uses πόρνη ("harlot for hire," "prostitute") in v.15, which specifically refers to sex for money.⁸⁷ Paul is therefore condemning immorality in general in vv. 13 and 18 and narrows his focus in vv. 15 and 16 to refer specifically to prostitution. Whether the prostitutes were sacred or secular is not as important as the fact of the unlawfulness of the believing men of the Corinthian church having sexual contact with them.

The Corinthian Problem

Some Corinthian Christians were visiting or at least talking about visiting prostitutes, justifying their actions for two reasons, evidenced by Paul's responses to them. Firstly, they had a distorted view of their freedom in Christ (cf. Gal 5:1) in which

⁸⁵ Brian S. Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," *NovT* 40 (1998): 336-351.

⁸⁶ BDAG, 3rd ed., s.v. "πορνεία"

⁸⁷ Hauck, Schultz, "πόρνη," TDNT, 6: 580-595; BDAG, 3rd ed., s.v. "πόρνη"

they are able to quote a slogan “All things are permitted” (6:12).⁸⁸ Secondly, they had a distorted view of the value of the human body, that it has no significance, enabling them to quote another slogan “Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods and God will destroy both it and them” (6:13).⁸⁹ They appeared to be influenced by a type of Platonic thought in which what was done in the body – eating, drinking, sexual activity – is on a lower plane than what was done on the higher level of the “spirit.” Whatever is done in the body belongs to the transient realm and so does not really matter. The spiritual realm alone is eternal.

Paul’s Countering Arguments – Freedom and The Resurrection

Their first argument “All things are permitted” reflects their poor theology and Paul counters it, not by rejecting the statements, but by twice qualifying them to reflect an accurate view of freedom and the body. He says, “All things are permitted but all things are not beneficial . . . All things are permitted but I will not be mastered by anything” (6:12). In the first slogan the Corinthians prove they misunderstand Christian freedom, feeling that it means they can do whatever they please. Paul teaches them that their freedom means they can do whatever they please so long as it is edifying, either for themselves or for others (10:23, 33). Furthermore, this case of sexual promiscuity cannot be considered freedom since it may mean the person has become enslaved to passion⁹⁰ or that the person, by sleeping with a prostitute, has given authority over his body to her, in

⁸⁸ C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 196.

⁸⁹ Murphy-O’Connor, *1 Corinthians*, 50; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 167-68.

⁹⁰ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 103; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), 146.

the same way husbands and wives give authority over their own bodies to each other⁹¹ (cf. 7:4).

The second Corinthian argument for visiting prostitutes is the notion that all the appetites of the physical body can be treated the same. They say that “food is for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy both.” This implies they felt that since there were no restrictions concerning food and since the sexual appetite is basically the same as the appetite for food then there must be no restrictions on sexual activity.⁹² Paul responds by distinguishing between bodily appetites. He does not reject their view of eating but he says that the “body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord” (6:13). In the creation order food was given for humans to consume (Gen 2:16). Sexual activity was to be a part of marriage (Gen 2:24) “for the propagation of the human race and for the enrichment of the marriage partners.” Paul “sees the use of the human body for fornication to be absolutely contrary to this purpose (see I Thess. 4:3-5).”⁹³ Secondly, Paul refutes the Corinthians notion that the body will only last for the present life. They say God will destroy the body (6:13) and Paul does not disagree. But he reminds them that the body of Christ was raised from the dead to a new life by the power of God. As followers of Christ, the body of the believer will also be raised to a new life by the power of God. If the body is raised, if it has a part in the plan of redemption, then the

⁹¹ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 253; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 104.

⁹² Fee, *First Corinthians*, 225.

⁹³ Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Bakers Books, 1993), 195.

Corinthians cannot argue for the right to visit prostitutes in the grounds that the body does not matter since the resurrection proves that bodies do indeed matter very much.

Believers and Christ

Paul uses the marriage bond to illustrate the relationship of believers to Christ. The LXX uses κολλάω⁹⁴ to describe the joining that a husband and wife experience in the context of marriage – “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife” (Gen 2:24). Furthermore, not only is the pair joined one to the other, but they somehow become a new entity – they become “one flesh.”⁹⁵ Such a joining was originally intended to be unique to that relationship – that is, all other relationships a spouse might have must be respectful of the marriage relationship.

Paul also uses κολλάω to describe the believer’s relationship with Christ – he or she is “joined to” or “clings to” the Lord. The believer is a “member” (μελὴ) of Christ – he or she is one of his limbs (Eph 5:30). The two are also described as becoming “one spirit” with each other (1 Cor 6:17) and Paul calls this joining “a great mystery” (Eph 5:32).

Although Paul uses different phrases to describe the respective relationships (“one flesh” for marriage and “one spirit” for Christ and believer), the principle behind them is the same – the emphasis is on “oneness.” By using differing terms Paul merely acknowledges that the latter is not a sexual joining.

⁹⁴ BDAG, 3rd ed., s.v. “κολλάω”

⁹⁵ This contrasts with prevailing Greek understanding in which the sexual act was simply a satiation of a physical need like eating or drinking. Plutarch, *Plutarch: Lives of the Noble Greeks*, Edmund Fuller, ed. (New York: Dell, 1959): 95, for example, implies as much when in speaking of the wedding night says “the bride and bridegroom shall be shut into a chamber, and eat a quince together.”

The spiritual implications of κολλάω and the derivative προσκολλάω (“to glue,” “to adhere to closely, be faithfully devoted to, join”) are evident in their use in the LXX where they are used to refer to Israel’s relationship to the LORD. Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20 say “You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him and shall cling to Him and shall take oaths in His name.” Deuteronomy 11:22, 23 say “If you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do – to love the LORD your God [and] to hold fast to Him – then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you.” Jeremiah 13:11 says “For as a sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me.”

Union with Christ Precludes Union with Prostitutes

Πορνεία is translated here “sexual immorality,” a broad term that includes all types of illicit sexual relationships, i.e., those involving parties unmarried to each other. Πορνή refers to a person who engages in a specific type of immorality, prostitution, commonly translated as “harlot”.

Since believers are members or limbs of Christ they cannot be joined to one who is not also a member of Christ “whose body therefore is not destined for resurrection.”⁹⁶ By having sexual relations with a harlot the believer, who is joined with Christ, automatically involves Christ in the illicit act.⁹⁷ It means taking one of the “limbs” of

⁹⁶ Fee, *Epistle*, 260.

⁹⁷ Raymond Ortlund, *Whoredom: God’s Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 145-146, notes that Paul uses “one body” to refer to the results of a sexual encounter with a prostitute and “one flesh” to refer to that between spouses. Believers are “one spirit” with Christ – “‘one flesh’ does not violate ‘one spirit,’ while ‘one body’ does, because ‘one flesh’ unites two Christ-indwelt believers while ‘one body’ forges a monstrous connection between the believer, a ‘member of Christ’, and ‘the members of a prostitute.’”

Christ and making it a “limb” of a prostitute.⁹⁸ Paul replies to the possibility of such a situation with an emphatic *μὴ γένοιτο!*

Another possible reason for not joining with a prostitute is an authority issue. Being joined with Christ, believers relinquish authority over their own bodies to him, much the same as husbands and wives relinquish authority over their own bodies to each other (1 Cor 7:4). Spouses are required to render affection to each other; they cannot “deprive one another except with consent for a time” and then they must “come together again” (7:5). They cannot act only in their own interests.

Similarly, by being joined to Christ, believers give authority over their bodies to him. They can no longer live according to their own interests but according to his. Their allegiance is to Christ. Paul describes the *σῶμα* as being “not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (6:13). The believers visiting prostitutes violated the authority Christ had over them by engaging in relationships that were contradictory to their allegiance to Christ.⁹⁹

“Being-in-Christ entails a bonding and binding (*κολλάω*) which is threatened with a wrenching apart if the body (*τὸ σῶμα*) is “bonded” with that which contradicts the Christ bonding, or pulls in a different direction.”¹⁰⁰

Or, considering Paul’s teaching that believers are part of a new “race” of humans (cf. 1 Cor 15:23; Rom 8:1, 5, 16), Dunn writes that the Corinthians

⁹⁸ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 168, 169.

⁹⁹ Rosner, “Temple Prostitution,” 342, notes, “assuming that some of the men resorting to prostitutes were married it is remarkable that Paul does not speak in terms of a sin against the wife. He says nothing of defiling the marriage bed, breaking a covenant or remaining faithful. Rather he conceives of the sin as fundamentally one of religious allegiance.”

¹⁰⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000): 464.

were inevitably in corporate relationships as members of Christ's body which should . . . render unthinkable a bodily relationship with a prostitute, *representative of another corporate order*.¹⁰¹ (italics mine)

Having been joined to Christ, becoming part of his "body," and thus having relinquished authority over themselves, believers must submit to Christ by not being joined to the body of someone who is not also joined and in submission to Christ.

Believers and the Holy Spirit – Property of God

Related to the issue of authority is the issue of property ownership. The concept of God's people as his bought property is significant in the Old Testament. Concerning the people of Israel God says "I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage" (Micah 6:4). The Song of Moses asks the Israelites concerning God, "Is he not your Father, who bought you?" (Deut 32:6). Later the Song says the enemies of Israel would not have overcome them, "Unless their Rock had sold them," (32:30).

A clear illustration of ownership concerns the firstborn of the people of Israel. All of them belonged to God because "on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I set them apart to Myself" (Num 8:17). Later on, God commanded Moses to dedicate all the males of the Levites in place of the firstborn males of the rest of the tribes of Israel. Yet because there were more firstborn males than there were Levites the difference was made up by each extra male paying five shekels to the temple sanctuary, in effect compensating God for the people he owned. It should be noted that no one was God's property by virtue of any personal merit but simply by God's choice.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that though they are the temple of God, indwelt by

¹⁰¹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 58.

the Holy Spirit, they cannot act with an air of pride, feeling they are somehow above the laws that govern others because the Holy Spirit was given to them as a gift from God and not through any merit of their own (6:19). Not only is the Holy Spirit of no cost to them but it was of cost to God to give the Holy Spirit to them – Paul tells the Corinthians “you were bought at a price” (6:20) – just as it cost the people of Israel to buy back their firstborn from God in the Old Testament.

The very nature of the believers’ relationship to Christ dictates how they must live. They are joined to Christ, and thus have given up authority over themselves. Further, they are bought property. So even if believers did not become one with Christ upon conversion, they still would not be free to behave as they please because they would not have owned themselves, having been redeemed with Christ’s blood (Ro 3:24, 25). It is the good fortune of believers, both then in Corinth and today, that by becoming God’s property they also become one with him. He is not a distant master but a loving husband.

Believers and the Holy Spirit – The Temple of God

Paul’s last arguments against sexual immorality include the statement that the Corinthians are the temple of the Holy Spirit. All of his discussion of the union that occurs during sexual activity is a fitting illustration for this final statement. Previously, Paul called them the temple so they would exercise care in the edifying of fellow believers (3:16, 17) and so they would be a holy community, in accordance with the presence of the Holy Spirit (5:1-8). Here, by setting his statement in the context of a profound bonding experience he highlights the intimacy involved in being the Holy

Spirit's dwelling place. The Holy Spirit does not live with believers like a roommate; he lives with them like a spouse. This is where the parallel with the physical tabernacle/temple breaks down.

The temple did nothing if not graphically portray the separation between God and humanity. The approach to God was highly regulated and woe betide the person who did not use the proper procedure, as in the case of Uzzah who was struck dead for his seemingly innocent act of steadying the ark when it was about to fall (1 Chron 15:13). The inner sanctum of God's presence was almost entirely inaccessible, open only to the high priest, only once a year, only with specific rituals (Lev 16:2-4, 15-20, 29-30).

It is not as though God did not express tenderness toward his people. In Hosea he says, "I taught Ephraim to walk . . . I drew them . . . with bands of love . . . I stooped and fed them . . . How can I give you up Ephraim? . . . My heart churns within me" (11:3, 4, 8). "Therefore, behold I will allure her . . . and speak comfort to her . . . You will call me my husband . . . I will betroth you to me forever" (11:3, 4, 8; 2:14, 16, 19)."

But the very presence of the physical temple kept people at an arm's length. The temple along with the law told people how sinful and unworthy they were. All they had to do was look at the temple and they were reminded of the distance between them and God – the Levites encamped around the tabernacle and set it up and took it down since "the outsider who comes near shall be put to death" (Num 1:51). Not even just any Levite could have contact with the articles of the tabernacle – only the descendents of Aaron could touch the holy things "lest they die" (Num 4:15). The ark could not be touched lest the person die, as in the case of Uzzah.

The separation did not prevent David from exclaiming, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’” (Ps 122:1). And the presence of the temple assured people of the presence of the LORD to the point that as long as the temple stood they were invincible despite committing blatant transgression (Jer 7:1-15, 30).

Yet in the incident with Uzzah “David was afraid of God that day” (1 Chron 13:12). If that was what it meant to have God live among them, David could not bear it and so he “would not move the ark with him into the City of David, but took it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite” (1 Chron 13:13).

The contrast between the old experience of God’s presence in the temple and the new experience of his presence within his people is stark. Each believer is God’s temple – he indwells and is united with each one. But it is not a terrifying, dangerous presence. It is like a husband and wife physically bonding. When they are joined there is no fear.

Neither is their joining only limited to their bodies. The emotions, their spirits, their wills are bonded in great intimacy and tenderness. In a similar way the Holy Spirit makes his home within the believer, in great intimacy and tenderness. The Holy Spirit takes up residence in humans in the sense that wherever the believer goes, the Spirit also goes. However he does not indwell a body in the sense that if an arm were removed, a part of the Spirit would be removed. The Spirit’s effect on a believer is to sanctify, justify (1 Cor 6:11), give life (Ro 8:10), and to be the medium of adoption into God’s family (Ro 8:14, 15). He enables believers to do God’s will and he illuminates them concerning the truth (Jn 16: 13, 14). Therefore, the Spirit’s indwelling is to be understood in spiritual terms rather than according to a physical location.

This intimacy, this joining with his people was God's intent all along (Ezek 37:26-28). If this is so, the physical temple is only a picture of God's intentions for his people and the temple of the believers' bodies is the "real thing." In this case the temple is the metaphor of the body, not the other way around.

Conclusion

Believers do not have authority over their bodies. Having received forgiveness they are joined to Christ in a mystical way that precludes them from a type of joining that is immoral. Sexual relations are not considered mere physical acts such as eating or drinking. They unite the participants in a profound sense and must therefore be regulated, unlike taking in nourishment in which the believers could eat whatever they wished with a clear conscience so long as they did not offend a believer with a "weak" conscience (1 Cor 8:8).

Believers are united with Christ because they are bought at a price – his death on the cross. This transaction makes the believers holy and therefore fitting dwelling places for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's presence makes the believers the temple. The transaction also switches authority over a believer's body from him or herself to God.

By being united with Christ believers relinquish authority over their bodies, in the same way as husbands and wives relinquish authority to each other. By being the dwelling places of the Holy Spirit, the temple, believers must be holy. By being bought at a price, believers do not own their bodies and so must please the one who bought them, God.

In all three illustrations believers do not have authority over their own bodies but God does. Therefore believers are not free to behave in whatever way they wish but rather must act in ways pleasing to the one who has that authority – God. Paul argues that sexual immorality is a violation of a believer's relationship to God in all three instances.

The image of the believers as the temple is of particular significance as it comes right after a discussion of the intimacy enjoyed by both husbands and wives and Christ and believers. This new temple situation requires holy living as did the old temple but it has a dimension of intimacy unknown in the previous situation.

CHAPTER FIVE:

1 Corinthians 10:14-22 – Undivided Loyalties

Introduction

This chapter examines the issue of idolatry in relation to those who are the temple of God. The Corinthians wished to attend feasts in pagan temples. Was such an activity acceptable? First, the chapter examines idolatry in the Old Testament. What did it mean for the Jews to be the people of God? What was their relationship to him – was it exclusive? What was the significance of God's presence in the temple? Secondly, this chapter applies the concept of exclusive loyalty to the believers in Corinth. What did their participation in the Lord's Supper signify? What did participation in feasts in a pagan temple signify? Could a believer participate in both, or are the concepts contradictory? As the temple of God, how did the believers have to live in light of the nature of idolatry?

This passage is relevant because it speaks of the fellowship that people have with the deity to which they sacrifice. The believers are to flee from idolatry because of this fellowship – they are united with Christ, as demonstrated by their participation in the Lord's Supper, therefore they cannot be involved with demons. Such divided loyalty puts their secure status with God in jeopardy. In the Old Testament God dwelt in the temple but when the people continued to participate in idolatry, when they trusted in things other than the true God, he cast the temple away. Likewise, in the New Testament (1 Cor 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21, 22; 1Ti 3:15; 1 Pet 2:5; Heb 3:6) the

believers are the temple (house) of God but if they are idolatrous, their allegiance to God is compromised and they risk losing his presence, that is, their salvation.

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people. Judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not the common participation of the blood of Christ? The bread we break, is it not the common participation of the body of Christ? For, though we are many, we are one bread and one body, for we all share in the one bread.

Observe Israel according to the flesh. Are not the eaters of the sacrifice participators of the altar? Therefore, what do I mean? That meat offered to idols is anything? Or that an idol is anything? But what they sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God and I do not wish you to be partners with demons. It is not possible to drink of the cup of Christ and the cup of demons. It is not possible to participate at the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Context

Paul begins his discussion of eating idol-meat at 8:1 and continues it to 11:1. In 8:1-13 Paul speaks to the Corinthians about how they ought to run the church. If it is based on knowledge they will be “puffed up” but if based on love they will be “edified.” Those believers who have “strong” consciences know that idols are nothing and therefore the meat offered to them is harmless and so they have no problem with accepting an

invitation to feast in a pagan temple. But those with “weak” consciences believe eating meat sacrificed to idols is sinful. If the ones with a strong conscience insist on the rights as determined by their knowledge they will run roughshod over their weaker brothers and sisters, perhaps causing them to sin (8:10). Paul commands them not to let “this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak” (8:9). They must be willing to deny themselves for the sake of others.

Paul then goes on to hold up his own lifestyle as an example of self-denial for the benefit of others, even though he is an apostle who more than all others should be able to insist on his rights and demand that others fall into line with him. Paul has further limited himself by supporting himself financially rather than asserting his right to be supported by the wealthy members of his congregations. He has made himself a servant “that I might win the more” (9:19).

Up until now Paul has argued against eating idol-meat on the basis of loving, self-denial for the sake of others. But in 10:1-22 he argues that though idols are nothing, by eating idol-meat in an idol’s temple the believers are “putting themselves in spiritual peril [by] . . . putting Christ to the test (v.9) and provoking the Lord to jealousy (v.22).”¹⁰² Paul reveals that though idols are nothing in reality the worshippers are sacrificing to demons (10:20), something in which believers are to have no part – he tells them to “flee idolatry” (10:14). Paul cites the people of Israel as examples from which the Corinthians can learn (10:1-11). They were God’s people, to whom were given many spiritual blessings (10:1-4) and they demonstrated their loyalty to the LORD by eating part of the sacrifices (10:18). But “their bodies were scattered in the wilderness” . . . because “with most of them God was not well pleased” (10:5). The LORD’s charge against them was

¹⁰² Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 159.

idolatry, such as in the incident with the golden calf at Mount Sinai (10:7). Idolatry violated the exclusive relationship they were to have with the LORD therefore he rejected them. By eating in an idol's temple the Corinthians inadvertently commit idolatry, violating their relationship with the LORD.

Paul wraps up his discussion with the conclusion that everything should be done "to the glory of God" (10:32) and that anything can be eaten with thankfulness (10:25, 26) although believers should refrain if their eating is offensive to someone (10:28, 29, 32).

Idolatry in the Old Testament

Idolatry is one of the most prominent themes in the OT. The LORD chose the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel, to be his own special people (Deut 7:6). His decision was not based on their numbers or because they were righteous (Deut 7:7; 9:4) but on his love for them. His relationship to them was not casual or distant. He established a covenant with them – "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God . . . I will redeem you" (Exod 6:7, 6). He commanded them to "make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exod 25:8) and He commanded them to make an ark with a mercy seat for the tabernacle so that "there I will meet with you" (Exod 25:22). The temple was the physical object in which was the LORD's name, toward which Solomon requested of the LORD that "Your eyes may be open, . . . that you may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place" (1 Ki 8:29) and toward which the sinner was to "spread out his hands" in prayer for forgiveness (8:38, 39).

The LORD's relationship with his people was usually depicted in two ways. The first was as a marriage, Israel being the wife of the LORD – "I will betroth you to me

forever . . . You will call Me ‘My Husband’” (Hosea 2:19, 16). They were commanded to “fear the LORD your God, . . . serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast.” “Hold fast” translates κολλᾶω, “to cleave,” which is the same word used in the Greek translation of Genesis of a husband and wife.¹⁰³

But Israel is described as an unfaithful wife – “‘Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband so have you dealt treacherously with Me O house of Israel,’ says the LORD (Jer 3:20).” “They have played the harlot against their God” (Hosea 4:12). They were unfaithful by committing idolatry – “They went to Baal Peor, and dedicated themselves to that shame” (Hosea 9:10; Jer 13:11). They “raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and [they] worshipped all the host of heaven and served them” (2 Chron 33:3).

The second depiction was political. The LORD was Israel’s king (1 Sa 12:12) and they were his subjects. He was the one who protected and provided for them (1 Ch 16:35; 29:11, 12) and they were expected both to trust and obey him exclusively. But Israel rejected the LORD’s kingship. When they demanded Samuel give them a king like the nations around them, the LORD’s response was “they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam 8:7). Later, when Judah was threatened by Assyria they did not trust the LORD but looked to other humans for protection – “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help . . . but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 31:1).

The religion of Israel was very different than those of the surrounding nations. The gentiles worshipped and served many gods since they had the power of life, death, health and sickness, controlled each person’s destiny, rewarded righteousness, punished disobedience and were the patrons of the many spheres of human activities. Ugaritic

¹⁰³ See also Josh 22:5; Jer 13:11 for other uses of the term.

epics mention the head of the pantheon, El, the creator god, his consort Asherah, Baal, Anath and Astarte, among others. The gods were powerful but not omnipotent and were sometimes at odds with each other. El, for example, encouraged a rivalry between Baal and Yamm in which Baal was victorious. However, on another occasion Baal was conquered by Mot who was in turn conquered by Anath who was raped by Baal. Since the gods had limited spheres of influence it made sense to worship as many as one's situation required.¹⁰⁴

The religion of Israel was of a completely different order. They only worshipped one god, not because they simply preferred one out of many but because only one God existed (Isa 46:9). Their God, the LORD, was the creator of heaven and earth (Gen 1:1; Isa 45:12) and the one who had power over all things (Isa 44:24-28; 45:1-7; 1 Sa 2:6-8). As such the LORD commanded his people to worship him exclusively – “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exod 20:3); “There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour, there is none besides Me” (Isa 45:21). The LORD had one place of “residence,” the tabernacle, wherever it happened to be located at the time and later the temple in Jerusalem and it was there that sacrifices to him were to be offered and eaten (Deut 12:6, 7).

Since the LORD was the only true god, worship of other gods was futile since they were “dead” things that could not give aid – the nations “pray to a god that cannot save” (Isa 45:20), their gods “themselves have gone into captivity” (46:2) and their gods must be carried about by the humans who worship them (46:7).

¹⁰⁴ See W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968); *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, “Canaanite Religion,” Michael David Coogan (New York: Macmillan, 1987); *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, “Assyro-Babylonian Mythology,” (New York: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1959); John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) for details of ancient near eastern religion.

Not only was idolatry futile for the ones committing it, it was an affront to the LORD since it ascribed to a lifeless, helpless object that which was within the sphere of the LORD alone – the ability to create, control, save, and destroy. Particularly telling is the fact that one of the names of the LORD is “Jealous” (Exod 34:14), he referred to himself as a jealous god who commanded exclusive loyalty (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:8-10) and he is described as being provoked to jealousy by the idolatrous practises of his people – “because of . . . your idols . . . I will judge you . . . I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy” (Ezek 16:38). The concept of jealousy is indicative of the exclusive nature of worship the LORD required; there could be no divided loyalties. To worship any other god was to sin against the LORD since he alone was worthy of worship.

It may be thought that since the gods that Israel worshipped were merely images of wood and stone no real harm being done since the images were “dead” and powerless things. But the Song of Moses indicates otherwise saying, “They sacrificed to demons, not to God,” (Deut 32:17; cf. Ps 106:37). When they prostrated themselves before their images, when they sacrificed to them, the people of Israel joined themselves to demons, beings in opposition to the LORD’s purposes. Such a grievous sin could not go unpunished.

The seriousness of idolatry is clearly seen in Israel’s history. When they worshipped the gold calf at Mount Sinai 3000 were slain by the sword and the “LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made” (Exod 32:28, 35). When the people refused to completely destroy the nations of Canaan the LORD said, “I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side” (Judges 2:3). Throughout the book of Judges Israel provoked the LORD by worshipping

gods and he retaliated by selling “them into the hands of their enemies all around” (Judges 2:14) and “the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity” (2:15).

When the monarchy was inaugurated Israel was not idolatrous but the LORD warned them of the ultimate consequences for such activity – “if you turn away . . . and go and serve other gods, and worship them, then I will uproot them from My land which I have given them” (2 Chron 7:19, 20). But they became unfaithful to the point of setting up idols in the temple itself and worshipping the sun from its precincts (Ezekiel 8) and eventually God removed his presence from the temple (Ezekiel 10).

After a long period in which the LORD “sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place, but . . . they despised his words” (2 Ki 36:15), the LORD finally brought disaster on them – an invasion by the Assyrians for the northern kingdom (2 Ki 17: 5-23) and an invasion by the Babylonians for the southern. The holy city of Jerusalem and the temple were sacked, many people were killed and all the rest except the very poor were taken captive to Babylon (2 Chron 36:17-21).

The Corinthian Situation

It was the custom in Corinth to attend feasts in pagan temples. According to Rostovtzeff, cited by Witherington, Corinth owed its wealth to commerce both foreign and inter-provincial. Witherington notes that “it was necessary for such people to maintain their social contacts, e.g., in the temples, in order to keep their businesses

growing.”¹⁰⁵ The Corinthian believers were former pagans who would have participated in such activity and after their conversion undoubtedly continued to receive invitations from their non-believing friends to attend such feasts. According to 1 Cor 8:10 the Corinthians were continuing to attend these feasts. In 10:14-22 Paul addresses the issue, telling them that by participating they are manifesting disloyalty to God and putting their salvation in jeopardy.

Pagan feasts were not merely meals but had a strong religious nature. According to Plutarch, “It is not the abundance of wine or the roasting of meat that makes the joy of festivals, but the good hope and belief that the god is present in his kindness and graciously accepts what is offered.”¹⁰⁶

Paul opens by telling them to flee (φεύγετε) from idolatry (10:14), reminiscent of his command in 6:18 to flee sexual immorality. Just prior Paul tells them “no temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who . . . with the temptation will also make the way of escape” (10:13). There is only one way to face the temptation to continue eating in pagan temples and that is to flee. They cannot simply pray for strength to resist the temptation of idolatry when they attend these feasts. Φεύγω has a sense of urgency. Louw and Nida define it “to move quickly from a point or area in order to avoid presumed danger or difficulty” and note other usages of the word such as Matt 24:16 when those living in Judea must get away from Jerusalem when the “abomination of desolation” is set up in the temple.¹⁰⁷ In this case those fleeing are

¹⁰⁵ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995): 186, note 2. M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire I* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957): 172.

¹⁰⁶ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 1102A.

¹⁰⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1:190.

literally running for their lives. The word is therefore appropriate considering the grave, spiritual ramifications of idolatry. Idolatry must not be resisted, it must be fled since it will kill one's spiritual life.

The Corinthians seemed to have had a high view of their level of knowledge (1 Cor 4:10; 8:1; 2 Cor 11:19) so Paul appeals to that by saying "I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say" (10:15). He urges them to take his arguments against participating in pagan feasts as common sense by describing the Lord's Supper, phrasing his questions in such a way as to require the readers' agreement, as though the answers were self-evident – "The cup of blessing . . . is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (10:16) requires the answer "Of course!"¹⁰⁸

Firstly, he reminds them that by sharing in the cup and bread of the Lord's Supper, the believers "share . . . in the benefits secured for them through the blood of Christ."¹⁰⁹

Not only are believers united with Christ by their participation, they are united to each other – "The bread which we break, is it not the common participation of the body of Christ?" (10:16). Gordon Fee suggests that whereas the cup represents the believers' communion with Christ, the bread should be understood as referring to the fellowship of believers. "Body" therefore refers to the believers rather than to Christ's earthly or heavenly body – "For though many, we are one bread and one body; for we all share in that one bread" (10:17).¹¹⁰ Participating in the feasts has both a vertical character

¹⁰⁸ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 464; Kistemaker, *First Corinthians*, 340.

¹⁰⁹ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1968), 232.

¹¹⁰ Fee, *First Epistle*, 449ff.

(communion with the spirit world) and a horizontal character (communion with other people).¹¹¹

Secondly, Paul cites as evidence of this sharing, the relationship of historical Israel and the LORD. The people shared in the benefits procured by the sacrifices offered on the altar when they ate of the meat (10:18). By eating they acknowledged their submission to the LORD and his requirements for fellowship with him – “to share food is to establish fellowship.”¹¹² Numbers 25:1-3 recounts how the people of Moab invited the people [of Israel] to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

In that situation eating of the sacrifices signified more than just a friendly meal with the neighbours. It was an intrinsic part of idol worship, hence the LORD’s anger and the ensuing plague (25:9) along with his command to Moses that the offenders should be hanged (25:4).

Therefore, it follows that eating meat offered to an idol in a festal yet religious setting joins the participants to each other and to the deity represented by the idol. Paul acknowledges that the images to which the pagans offer worship are nothing (10:19). They are merely blocks of wood and stone. Hence he can give permission for believers to buy meat offered to idols from the marketplace and to eat such meat when it is placed before them when dining at a friend’s house (10:25-27). However, this situation is different because here the meat is eaten in a setting that is religious not just social and so

¹¹¹ See also Hays, *First Corinthians*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 167.

¹¹² Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 145.

the eating here has ramifications not present in the other situations.¹¹³ In quoting Deuteronomy 32:17, “they sacrificed to demons,” Paul contends that behind those images of wood and stone stand evil spirits that “use people’s readiness to worship idols. Thus, when people sacrifice to idols, it cannot be said that they are engaging in some meaningless or neutral activity. They are sacrificing to evil spirits.”¹¹⁴ By eating in this setting they are partners with demons and Paul says, “I do not want you to be partners with demons” (10:20). They are also partners with the pagans. Such bonding weakens, even destroys the bonding the believers are to have with other believers (8:10-12).

According to Paul, “you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons” (10:21). It is impossible for believers to attend and eat at a pagan gathering because by doing so they ally themselves with powers that are in opposition to God and therefore they can no longer be called followers of God.

Perhaps the Corinthians participating in pagan feasts did not understand what they were doing and so Paul has explained it to them. Now that they are aware of the implications of their behaviour they must make a decision whether to continue in the activity or not. Paul gives them a warning – by continuing they will provoke the Lord to jealousy (10:22). Using the word “jealousy” ought to bring to mind for them the Old Testament accounts of the jealousy of the LORD as previously delineated. It is his name, and when he is provoked to jealousy the consequences are devastating. There may have been grace for their ignorance up to this point but now if they persist they risk losing their salvation.

¹¹³ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 188.

¹¹⁴ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 144-145.

The Temple of God

The Corinthians may have felt that eating in a pagan temple was a harmless, social activity. It seems unlikely they had any intentions of participating in idolatry. Perhaps they thought that because of their knowledge of the true God, “pagan rituals had lost all meaning and value”¹¹⁵ or that because of their experiences of baptism and sharing in Eucharist they were somehow mystically protected from evil spiritual influences.¹¹⁶ But the fact remains that eating meat in that setting constitutes worship offered to demons whether the participants realize it or not. By eating of the meat a person says he or she is in submission to the deity “hosting” the gathering. As the temple of God, the believer that eats in such a setting would be so defiled that God’s presence could no longer live in him or her, in the same way as God’s presence could not live in the physical temple when it was defiled with idolatrous practises (Ezek 10). Such a practise puts the believer’s very salvation in jeopardy.

In 1 Corinthians 5 the temple was defiled by the presence of the blatant sin of an incestuous relationship. The believers were ordered to cleanse the temple by excommunicating the sinner so that their actions would be in line with their state as a new, unleavened “lump” by the sacrifice of Christ (5:7). They were also to cleanse the temple so that the sinner who was “put away” could be “saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (5:5). In this case of idol worship, even done unintentionally, the situation is more serious. Paul is not referring to actions of which the believers need to be cleansed. Here he is addressing a situation in which the actions do not merely defile a person before God, they cut off that person from fellowship with God.

¹¹⁵ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *1 Corinthians*, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier inc., 1979), 97.

¹¹⁶ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 220.

Earlier Paul discussed eating in an idol's temple with regard to the example it sets (8:1-13). Those with "strong" consciences know that idols are nothing, therefore meat that is offered to them has not changed in any way. The meat is thus no worse for consuming than meat that is not offered. But "there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled" (8:7). Those with weak consciences who observe the others eating in a pagan temple will be emboldened to do likewise and will be destroyed (8:11).

All believers, whether "weak" or "strong," are the temple of God. Chapter Two of the present work discusses the fact that according to 1 Cor 3:17, God will destroy those who destroy his temple. Those who eat in pagan temples have compromised their own salvation. Not only that but they cause others to follow suit and thus compromise their salvation. This qualifies the instigators for destruction. This is an important illustration of the corporate aspect of being the temple of God. The corporate nature means that the believers must look out for one another, building one another up rather than causing one another to sin and be destroyed. As in 3:5-17, everyone has a role to play in building the temple and everyone has a role to play in maintaining it.

In 6:12-20 Paul commands the believers to flee from sexual immorality because it destroys the exclusive relationship they are to have with Christ and sins against the temple of God that their bodies are. Likewise in 10:14-22, idolatry compromises the exclusive relationship they are to have with their God, defiling the temple that they constitute, and they must therefore flee from it.

Conclusion

There is only one God, maker of heaven and earth, and worship belongs to him alone. Believers have received forgiveness upon confession of faith and are therefore fit to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, making them God's temple. They demonstrate both their allegiance to God and their solidarity with their co-believers when they participate in the Lord's Supper.

Eating of meat in a pagan's temple implies a person has submitted to the deity to whom the meat has been offered. Since a believer has demonstrated submission to God, eating in a pagan temple is not acceptable. Such an action makes him or her an idolatrous "partner with demons." Doing so violates the temple of God that the believer is, making it no longer a fit dwelling for the Holy Spirit, just as idolatry in the physical temple made it no longer fit for God's presence.

CHAPTER SIX

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1: The Temple of God Must Be Pure

Introduction

This passage is the last in the Corinthian correspondence to refer to the temple of God and so is included in this study. However, there is a major textual issue here. Is this passage authentically Pauline or is it an interpolation? A treatment of this issue will precede all other discussion.

This chapter will examine the contact allowed between believers and non-believers, the nature of God's relationship with his people and the way in which they must respond to this relationship.

2 Cor 6:14-7:1

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what sharing has righteousness and lawlessness? Or what communion has light with darkness? Or what agreement has Christ and Beliar? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, as God has said: I will dwell in them and I will walk among them and I will be their God and they will be my people. Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean and I will receive you. And I will be to you a father and you will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.”

Therefore, having all these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, completing holiness in the fear of God.” (OT words in bold).

Context

In 2 Cor 5:14ff. Paul reminds the Corinthians of Christ’s death on their behalf “that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (5:15). He says that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new” (5:17). God has reconciled them to himself by “not imputing their trespasses to them” (5:19).

God has reconciled the believers to himself, through Christ, and given them the responsibility to spread the word of reconciliation. This reconciliation is based on Christ being made sin for them “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (5:21).

The believers are reconciled to God and are new creations, because of the grace of God extended to them. Paul pleads with them not to “receive the grace of God in vain” (6:1) and commends his ministry to them. He and his fellow ministers have suffered on their behalf (6:3-10); now they must be open to him (6:11-13). Paul then exhorts them to be separate from unbelievers since God dwells in them and there is nothing in common between God and idol-worshippers.

Textual Authenticity and Integrity

The authenticity and integrity of this passage has been questioned for a number of reasons: it interrupts the flow of thought between 6:13 and 7:2, it contains six *hapax legomena*, it contains a supposedly non-Pauline use of the phrase “everything that

contaminates the body and spirit,” it contains an apparent exclusivism that goes against other Pauline teaching, and it bears a strong resemblance to Qumran literature.¹¹⁷

Although there is considerable debate regarding the authenticity of this passage, there is no textual evidence that this passage was ever omitted from any copy of the second letter to the Corinthians. As this thesis is concerned with the use of the metaphor of the church as the temple of God as found in the Corinthian correspondence this passage is included for study.

¹¹⁷ According to J.-F. Collange, as reported by Margaret E. Thrall, the passage is too exclusivist to be Pauline. See Margaret Thrall, “The Problem of II Cor. VI.14-VII.1 in Some Recent Discussion,” *NTS* 24 (1978): 135. See also H.-D. Betz, “2 Cor 6:14-7:1 An Anti-Pauline Fragment?” *JBL* 92 (1973): 88-108, who believes the theology of this passage is so exclusive as to be anti-Pauline. See Simon J. Kistemaker, *II Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997): 232 for the argument that Paul is advocating ethical purity, not cultic and therefore physical separation. Fitzmyer, Dahl, and Gnilya all believe this passage is related to the Qumran literature as it uses words and phrases common to that community, and is of non-Pauline origin. See J. A. Fitzmyer, “Qumran and the Interpoled Paragraph in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1,” in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, 205-217. (London: Chapman, 1971); N. A. Dahl, “A Fragment in Context: 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1,” in *Studies in Paul*, 62-69. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972); J. Gnilya, “2 Cor 6:14-7:1 in Light of the Qumran Texts and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs” in *Paul and Qumran*, ed. J. Murphy-O’Connor, 48-68 (London: Chapman, 1968). David Rensberger believes the passage is a “reworked exhortation to separateness of ‘Essene-Christian’ origin” placed in the letter by Paul. See David Rensberger, “2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 – A Fresh Examination,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 7-9 (1977-79): 25, 26. See F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, (London, 1971) and C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (London, 1973) for arguments against a Qumran origin. Concerning the use of *hapax legomena*, Hughes, Barrett and Bruce feel they do not point to non-Pauline authorship. See Philip E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 242; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 216; C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 216. Concerning the use of the phrase “body and spirit,” see Hans Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief* (Gottingen, 1924), 218 as noted by Thrall, “The Problem,” 133, who believes the use here is un-Pauline. See J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body*, (London, 1952), 18, as noted by Thrall, “The Problem,” 133, who believes “Paul uses $\sigma\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ to refer to the whole person, not just one part, while here there seems to be dualism of human nature.” See Bruce for arguments that the use is Pauline. Concerning whether this passage belongs at the place it appears, see Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 378-383 for arguments for and against. A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, (Edinburgh, 1915), 25, believes it is impossible for it to have been inserted accidentally. Barrett, *Second Epistle*, 23, 24, believes there are no good reasons for the passage to have been placed here by an editor.

The Old Testament Catena (6:16-18)

Paul tells the believers they are God's temple and follows his assertion with several OT texts:

"I will dwell in them and walk among them" comes from Lev 26:11a ("I will set my dwelling place among you") and 26:12a ("I will walk among you") and possibly from Exod 25:8 ("I may dwell among them"), 29:45a ("I will dwell among the children of Israel"), 1 Ki 6:13 ("I will dwell among the children of Israel") and Ezek 37:27a ("My tabernacle also shall be with them").

"I will be their God and they will be my people" is mentioned in Exod 6:7 ("I will take you as My people, and I will be your God"), Lev 26:12b ("I will . . . be your God, and you shall be My people"), Jer 32:38 ("They shall be My people, and I will be their God") and Ezek 37:27b ("I will be their God, and they shall be My people").

"Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean" is based on Isa 52:11 ("Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing").

"And I will receive you" is based on Ezek 20:34 ("I will bring you out . . . and gather you") and 20:41 ("I will accept you as a sweet aroma").

"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters," says the LORD Almighty" is a mix of 2 Sa 7:14a ("I will be his Father, and he shall be My son") and 2 Sa 7:27, the LXX of which uses the title "LORD Almighty." The reference to "daughters" possibly comes from Isa 43:6 ("Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth").¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol 10, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 360.

None of these texts however, explicitly call God's people his temple. Verse sixteen outlines the covenant between God and his people – "I will be their God and they shall be My people." Verse seventeen gives the practical implications of this covenant – the people are to "come out . . . and be separate." Verse eighteen reiterates the covenant in a similar form as verse sixteen – "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters." So why does Paul quote these OT texts here?

2 Corinthians 6:16

The Exodus and Leviticus passages deal with the covenant that God established with the nation of Israel when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. Exodus 25:8 specifically connects God's dwelling with his people with the tabernacle – "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."

The phrase "I will dwell in them" does not anywhere occur in the Old Testament and in the LXX, ἐνοικεῖν never has God as its subject. It "must be considered an interpretive comment on Lev 26:12: God's "walking about" among his people (a common OT theme) is understood as his actually dwelling *in them*, as in a temple."¹¹⁹

The Ezekiel passage was part of the message the LORD gave to the prophet concerning the future of Israel: the scattered people will be gathered from among the nations and brought back to their own land (37:21), they will no longer worship idols but will be cleansed of their sin and be made God's people again (37:23), and God will make an everlasting covenant with them and will "set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them [and] . . . the nations also will know that I, the

¹¹⁹ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 363, 374.

LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.” God’s sanctuary and thus his presence are connected to the new covenant in this passage, as is the cleansed nature of his people. Chapter two of the present work outlines this in more detail.

The paragraph preceding the OT catena starts with the exhortation “do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers”¹²⁰ and continues with five rhetorical questions designed to clarify the issue – “What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?” The unspoken answer is obvious - “none!” The final question is “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” As demonstrated in chapter five of the present work, idolatry was to have no part in the religion of Israel and specifically, was to have no part in the temple, if God’s presence was to continue to abide there. Idolatry was incongruous with the temple of the LORD – it was the proverbial square peg in a round hole. Paul has already called the Corinthians God’s temple in 1 Cor 3:16 and 6:19 and has prohibited them from participating in idolatrous rituals in 2 Cor 10:14-22. Now he is referring, not to overt practises of idolatry, but to a more subtle idolatry that can occur through association.

Earlier Paul told the Corinthians he did not require them to have no contact with unbelievers for then they “would have to go out of the world” (1 Cor 5:10). Complete lack of contact would also prohibit them from being witnesses, which is certainly not Paul’s intention. The association here must be considered as taking place on a deeper level than simply day-to-day contact with unbelievers. It may be marriage, eating idol

¹²⁰ This recalls the prohibition in Deut 22:10 against yoking two species for plowing.

meat or taking co-believers to secular courts.¹²¹ Believers have made a covenant relationship with God and are set apart for him, having received the Spirit (2 Cor 1:21, 22). Therefore, any intimate relationships they have must involve those who are also set apart for God, much the same as in 1 Cor 6:12-20 where sexual alliances must be between believers. If they do otherwise the believers may be tempted to compromise the faith or “forget that they are members of the holy people of God.”¹²² According to Hughes, “the metaphor of the yoke which he uses here shows that he is thinking of close relationships in which, unless both parties are true believers, Christian harmony cannot be expected to flourish and Christian consistency cannot fail to be compromised.”¹²³

Holiness is therefore of utmost importance. Bruce describes the phrase “I will be their God and they shall be my people” as “The ancient language of covenant . . . which carried the corollary that they must be holy as he is.”¹²⁴ The people of the first covenant were commanded to abstain from idolatry. The LORD was their God and they had no business worshipping any others. They could not have even the slightest contact with idolatry, hence the commands upon entering Canaan to “conquer [the Canaanites] and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them . . . for they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods . . . you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire”

¹²¹ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 197.

¹²² Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 197.

¹²³ Hughes, *Commentary*, 246.

¹²⁴ F. F. Bruce, *I&II Corinthians*, 215.

(Deut 7:2-5). They were to do this because the Canaanites would “turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods” (7:4).

2 Corinthians 6:17

Cultic Purity in the OT

The Isaiah passage refers to the departure of the captives from the Babylonian exile. The captives were allowed to return to Israel to rebuild the temple of the LORD and Cyrus gave to them the articles from the temple that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1:1-7). The command for purity in the Isaiah passage refers to those who “bear the vessels of the LORD,” reflecting the cultic purity required of God’s people, especially of those who cared for the temple. Leviticus 22:3 warns that any priest “who goes near the holy things which the children of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has uncleanness upon him, that person shall be cut off from My presence.” Touching certain things, such as a dead body (Num 19:13) or the carcass of an unclean animal (Lev 11:24) brought about uncleanness. A person neglecting to purify himself or herself after touching a corpse “defile[d] the tabernacle of the LORD. That person shall be cut from Israel” (Num 19:13, 20). Other actions that defiled the sanctuary are offering human sacrifices to Molech (Lev 20:3) and suffering from a pelvic discharge (Lev 15:31-33).

Purity in 2 Corinthians

Cultic purity cannot be intended by Paul’s quoting of Isaiah in 2 Cor 6:17 since Paul has written to the believers about the liberty they have in Christ (1 Cor 8:4-13; 10:25, 26). They are free to adapt to society so long as they do not compromise their

faith. Paul himself demonstrated this freedom:

For though I am free from all men . . . To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law . . . to those who are without law, as without law . . . to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some (1 Cor 9: 20-22).

If the believers are not required to separate themselves literally from unbelievers as the people of Israel were commanded to, the separation Paul is calling for here must be understood as ethical not cultic.¹²⁵ According to Barrett, “if the people of God cease to be separate in moral holiness from the rest of mankind they cease to be the people of God.”¹²⁶

The OT priests who cared for the temple were required to be pure because they were in contact with the holy things of the temple. The NT believers *are* the temple so how much more should they be pure? Paul sums up by declaring to the believers, “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (7:1). The entire passage has been concerned with the Corinthians’ lingering ties with unbelievers¹²⁷ and so “defilement” here can be understood as idolatrous actions.¹²⁸ As in 5:11, the motivation for holiness is the “fear of God.”

¹²⁵ Ralph, P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 205.

¹²⁶ C.K. Barrett, *Second Epistle*, 201.

¹²⁷ See William J. Webb, “Who are the Unbelievers (ἀπιστοι) in 2 Corinthians 6:14,” *BibSac* 149 (1992): 27-44, for a discussion of the options for understanding ἀπιστοι.

¹²⁸ Ralph, P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 209. Although Paul usually uses σαρξ to denote the “evil” part of humanity and πνευμα as the “good,” Bruce notes that he does on occasion use them to mean simply the visible and invisible aspects of humanity (1 Cor 5:5; Col 2:5; 2 Cor 12:7); see Bruce, *I&II Corinthians*, 216.

2 Corinthians 6:18

This text comes from God's covenant with David. David wished to build a house for the LORD but was not permitted. Instead God covenanted with him to build him a house, a dynasty. David's son would reign after David died and he would build a house for the LORD. If the son were to fail to follow the LORD, rather than removing his Spirit from him, the LORD promised to discipline him as a father disciplines his son and promised not to take his mercy away from him (2 Sa 7:12-16).

This is a word of hope to those Corinthians who had continued to have inappropriate relationship with pagans. Just as the LORD promised to remain with the son of David so He will remain with the Corinthians. They must however respond to his correction from Paul's hand.

Paul possibly quotes Isaiah 43:6 where the LORD promises to bring his people from "the ends of the earth" (captivity in Babylon). He follows this with a declaration of his power and sovereignty – "Before Me there was no god formed, nor shall there be after Me" (43:10) and with a ridicule of idolatry. Concerning those who make idols he says, "There is no understanding to say, 'I have burned half of it in the fire, yes, I have also baked bread on its coals . . . and shall I . . . fall down before a block of wood?'" (44:19). Those hearing this passage quoted would have understood that ties to idolatry are unacceptable – the LORD is the one who saves.

Conclusion

There is nothing in common between believers and unbelievers, as demonstrated by Paul's five questions that contrast things that are opposites (light/darkness,

righteousness/lawlessness etc.). The OT temple was to have nothing to do with idols and when it did it was made unworthy of his presence. Now the believers are God's temple and as such have the promise of his presence, acceptance, and Fatherhood. The temple of God has nothing in common with idols (6:16) therefore the people which are the temple must separate themselves from those who practise idolatry. Considering Paul's evangelistic zeal this separation cannot mean cutting off all contact with unbelievers; rather it means avoiding those ties that cause the believers to compromise their holiness by participating in idolatrous activities. This would have been a key issue for the Corinthians since they lived in a pagan society where religion permeated every aspect of life.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, (Louisville: John Knox, 1987), 65, 66, raises a few possibilities – "If a Christian was a partner with a pagan in business and prior to some new venture the partner wished to read the omens or have a horoscope cast, what should the Christian do? If a bad harvest threatened and the neighborhood decided to placate the local deity with sacrifices, could the Christian easily stand apart from community involvement?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter will first summarize the conclusions of the preceding chapters, then comment on the idea of church as temple as found in Pauline and New Testament theologies, and make some final observations about this metaphor and its importance for further study.

Summary of Chapters

1 Corinthians 3:16, 17

Although God used the Tabernacle and Jerusalem temple as a holy dwelling place, Paul recognized in the promises of an outpouring of God's Spirit, Christ's work of salvation applied to the believers. Although the community of believers could be described metaphorically as being the temple of God, they transcended the metaphor since God now actually dwelt within them *rather than* a building, namely the Jerusalem temple.

1 Corinthians 5:1-8

The holiness of the tabernacle/temple was maintained by regulations excluding certain people from worship. It was suggested that sexual immorality similar to the kind found in the Corinthian church (a man having his father's wife) was one of those grounds for exclusion. Since the Corinthian believers are now the temple of God they must act

accordingly by rooting out wickedness, in this case, a man engaged in sexual immorality, and by grieving that the community, God's temple has been defiled.

Just as there is precedent in the OT for cleansing the temple in connection with celebrating the Passover, so the new temple, the people, must cleanse themselves because "Christ our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5:7).

1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

Believers have been bought with a price, Christ's death on the cross. This makes them holy beings, fit temples for the Holy Spirit (6:19), and makes them members of Christ (6:15). It also means they do not belong to themselves; they have no authority over their bodies. Paul writes that "the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord" (6:13). In fact sexual relations with a prostitute makes a believer "one body with her" (6:16) which precludes a person being one with the Lord – "Shall I take the members of a prostitute and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!" (6:15). Rather, believers are to glorify God in their bodies (6:20).

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

The concept of the temple of God is not explicitly mentioned here. Nonetheless it can be inferred. The believers' relationship to God is exclusive and participating in the Lord's Supper shows their allegiance to Christ. They cannot participate in idolatrous practises, in this case eating meat in a temple, because such an action makes them "have fellowship with demons" (10:20) and provokes the Lord to jealousy (10:22). A person cannot worship one deity in the temple of another deity. The believers *are* God's temple

therefore any worship in which they participate must be worship of the LORD. If they eat meat in an idol's temple they inadvertently participate in idol worship and since people "cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons" (10:21), they have become unworthy for the Lord's presence.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

There is nothing common between believers and unbelievers and therefore close relationships between them are prohibited. Just as the tabernacle/temple was to have nothing to do with idolatry, so are believers, being the new temple, not to have anything to do with those who practice idolatry. They do not refrain from all contact with unbelievers because of the need to preach the gospel but they must refrain from contact that causes them to compromise their dedication to the LORD.

Pauline/New Testament Theologies

James D. G. Dunn writes God's temple is "constituted by the immediate indwelling of God in individual and people, rather than mediately through a temple as such (2 Cor 6:16)," and that "such a direct indwelling . . . made redundant any continuing (or for Gentile converts, new) loyalty to the Jerusalem temple."¹³⁰

Hermann Ridderbos sees the holiness of the people of God as the element that makes them the temple of God. This accords with the sacrificial motif connected with believers: their bodies are to be presented as holy sacrifices to the LORD (Ro 12:1; cf.

¹³⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 545.

15:16). They are dedicated and sanctified to God and therefore must be pure, without defect, spotless, blameless, undefiled (cf. Col 1:22), without blemish (Eph 5:26).¹³¹

Concerning the nature and practice of the church, Ridderbos writes that Paul describes it as the upbuilding of the church, the church being pictured as an edifice: the “house,” “temple,” “building” of God. He writes

applied to the true eschatological Israel, this imagery had its point of departure primarily in the prophetic promise of the gracious restoration of the people who had been given up to exile, of the reconstruction of their devastated houses and walls, of their cities and temple . . . In this . . . eschatological sense it is applied in the whole of the New Testament and especially in Paul to the Christian church as well.”¹³²

The indwelling of the Spirit of God makes the believers God’s temple. Ridderbos does not address the status of the physical temple but does refer to the people of God as the true Israel, which is “entirely determined by Christ and his work of redemption” which is a “continuing and consummating work.”¹³³ This implies that whatever temple there was before, there is something new now – God dwells in his people - and there is therefore no need for non-human dwelling places for God.

David John Williams examines the metaphor of church as temple, noting similarities for example between Roman architecture and Paul’s descriptive language: “the Romans tended to build their temples on raised platforms approached by many steps . . . There may be a hint of this . . . in 1 Tim 3:13 in Paul’s instructions concerning deacons. “Those who have served well as beacons,” he says, “gain for themselves **a step** in the right direction.”” But he goes beyond simple comparison by acknowledging the

¹³¹ Hermann Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 262.

¹³² Ibid., 429, 430

¹³³ Ibid., 431, 432.

replacement of the Jerusalem temple when he writes “Paul implies that the church is now the sanctuary of God and that it is here, in the church (i.e., through the gospel preached and practiced by the church) that God can be found.”¹³⁴

Millard J. Erickson focuses on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the church and how the Spirit affects the church: gives it life and power, produces unity, creates sensitivity to the Lord’s leading, reminds, teaches, equips it, and makes it holy. Concerning the Jerusalem temple he says that “just as the temple was a holy and sacred place under the old covenant because God dwelt in it, so also are believers sanctified under the new covenant because they are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20).”¹³⁵

Thomas R. Schreiner is explicit concerning the metaphor. He writes that for Paul to call the Church God’s temple “is significant because the temple was so central to Judaism; it was one of the pillars on which Judaism rested. For Paul, by contrast, the Jerusalem temple no longer holds any importance.”¹³⁶ People are now God’s dwelling place, Christ is their foundation and they build on the foundation with a variety of materials. Schreiner goes even further by stating that “the Jerusalem temple pointed to and anticipated the church of Jesus Christ, which fulfills what the former temple envisioned . . . Second Corinthians 6:16 makes it abundantly clear that the temple imagery of the Old Testament is fulfilled in God’s dwelling in his people corporately.”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ David John Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context and Character*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 245.

¹³⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1041.

¹³⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 342.

G. E. Ladd concurs when he writes “while the primitive community continued as Jews to worship in the temple (Acts 2:46), Stephen was the first to realize that temple worship was irrelevant for Christians (Acts 7:48f.).” Paul takes up the metaphor of the church as temple because he “sees the Christian community taking the place of the temple as the eschatological temple of God, as the place where God dwells and is worshipped.”¹³⁸

Donald Guthrie speaks of the Spirit dwelling in the ἐκκλησία and that reverence for God’s temple should not be any less “even though it is now *transferred* from a sacred building to human hearts” (italics mine). According to Guthrie this means “the negation of the idea of a special temple. If the believer . . . is the dwelling place of God, location ceases to have importance. Whatever value attached to the central sanctuary for Israel, the Christian church had no need for one.” However, Guthrie states that, “the notion of a building became wholly metaphorical and therefore spiritual.”¹³⁹

Contrast the brief mention of church as temple by G. B. Stevens who does not comment on the Jerusalem temple at all but simply says the Church can be compared with a “temple or other building. . . Christians together constitute a sacred sanctuary of God (ναός), whose defilement by jealousy and strife is a grievous sin (1 Cor.iii.16,17).” Christ is the foundation and chief-cornerstone of this building whose parts “grow into a temple hallowed by the indwelling of the Lord.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Ibid., 343.

¹³⁸ G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 540.

¹³⁹ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1981), 748.

¹⁴⁰ G. B. Stevens, *The Pauline Theology: A Study of the Origin and Correlation of the Doctrinal Teachings of the Apostle Paul*, (New York: Scribner, 1892), 323.

Church as Temple

According to John L. White, “in order to grasp what is most important to him (Paul), we must work through his metaphors and not around them. They express his deepest convictions and are not mere ornamental trappings.”¹⁴¹ I concur. Church as temple provides the rationale behind some of Paul’s instruction in his Corinthian correspondence. Concerning the questions asked in the first chapter of this work, whether Paul was making a serious theological statement by calling the church God’s temple or was simply drawing a comparison, it must be said the metaphor is so serious as to be transcended. When Paul said “you are the temple of God” he did not mean “you are like the temple of God.”

If church as temple is a theological concept it ought to be studied. Ridderbos observes that there are many ways to picture the church, each providing further definition and that “one may not grant one of the several “images” of the church an exclusive significance and absolutize it at the expense of the others.”¹⁴² The image that has predominated in recent decades is that of the “body of Christ.” New Testament and Pauline theologies almost inevitably devote space to the church as understood as the body of Christ but many say little or nothing about the church as temple.¹⁴³ The body of Christ is of course a valuable image for it informs believers of the roles that each believer plays,

¹⁴¹ John L. White, *The Apostle of God: Paul and the Promise of Abraham*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999).

¹⁴² Hermann Ridderbos, *Paul*, 429.

¹⁴³ H.A.A. Kennedy, *Theology of the Epistles*, (London: Duckworth, 1919), 147-152; D. E. H. Whiteley, *Theology of St. Paul*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 186-204; Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), 170-234; Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 188-202.

that each one is valuable and needed for the proper functioning of the church and that prominent parts of the body ought not be given more attention than less prominent ones. But by focusing on this image, other aspects of the Church that are elucidated by other images are neglected, to detrimental effect. For example, an overemphasis on the church as the body of Christ may skew how believers regard the church itself. McKelvey notes “the popular error of substituting loyalty to Jesus for loyalty to God and reducing theology to Christology has its counterpart in ecclesiology when the church is viewed chiefly in terms of its relation to Christ.” However, the believers are never called the “temple of Christ.” Rather, Christ is pictured as being a part of the building; the foundation or cornerstone to be sure, but a part of the building nonetheless. Thus the “church’s primary relationship is to God; its ultimate loyalty is to him.”¹⁴⁴ By picturing Christ as part of the temple, the metaphor does not reduce his significance since “only the choicest stones were used for cornerstones, and pride of place was given to the one laid at the determinative corner of the building, which was naturally the first one laid. Christ is thus the beginning of the church.” By being part of the building, Christ also has a close relationship to the believers – “Christians are joined primarily to Christ and secondarily to one another.”¹⁴⁵

Another aspect of the church that the church as temple metaphor brings out is the concept of accountability concerning moral purity. The temple is both holy and needs to maintain its holiness. In 1 Cor 5:1-8 a local congregation was commanded to hold its members accountable and to take action against sin. In current western society there is much individualism and lack of accountability. But if the Church is to maintain its

¹⁴⁴ McKelvey, *The New Temple*, 181.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

holiness, its members need to be involved in each other's lives and need to take each other to task when ungodliness is evident. This takes boldness and intimacy of relationship. A believer may identify and use his or her gifts in the local congregation as the metaphor of the body of Christ directs, but that does not mean he or she has meaningful relationships with other believers. Relationships in which all parties are free to give and receive correction and rebuke are relationships that involve commitment and love, requirements to which many people are reluctant to ascribe. But if believers are the temple of God and play a role in its holiness then they must cultivate a community in which accountability plays a vital part.

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