

1 Corinthians

Bible Study

The Temple of God

1 Corinthians 3:16–17

Every believer in the Body of Christ will be judged following the Rapture at the Judgment Seat of Christ. People who fail to see a difference between God's program for Israel and His program for the Body of Christ believe that the Judgment Seat of Christ is the same judgment as the Great White Throne in Revelation 20. Much of this is because they believe the Rapture is the Second Coming and that there will be no seven-year tribulation or Millennial Kingdom. They believe Christ is coming and all people from all ages will be judged at one common judgment. To make their theology work, they do a lot of allegorizing and spiritualizing of Scripture. For instance, the physical promises given to Israel are seen by them as being fulfilled spiritually through the Church, the Body of Christ.

Paul tells us that we will be judged for our works. Romans 14:10 says that we (believers) will all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. We will all give an account of our deeds (Romans 14:12). From 1 Corinthians 3 we find that we will be judged according to how faithful we were to build on the right foundation. Paul calls himself the master builder who is building a structure on the foundation of Christ. Paul has started the structure, building according to Jesus Christ's instructions, now we are to be careful to build upon the structure built for us by Paul. In other words, we need to continue the building process by following the blueprints given to Paul by God. These plans are found in Paul's 13 Epistles.

Most people who read 1 Corinthians teach that we need to follow the doctrine of Jesus Christ since He is called the foundation. They say this doctrine can be found by studying what He did during His earthly ministry. Most people do not acknowledge Paul as a master builder who laid the foundation for the Body of Christ. They have already made up their minds about what they believe and often force Scripture to fit within their predefined theology.

Even worse are people who twist Scripture to say that Jesus is the master builder who is building believers into the structure that He wants, or as master builder, he is using us as His tools to accomplish His purpose. These are both spiritualizations of the truth that Paul is teaching. Hebrews does say that God is the maker and builder of the heavenly city of Jerusalem (Hebrews 11:10), and of course, Jesus Christ did create all things in the universe. However, Paul was not speaking of God in that manner. He is explaining that he was given the special position of being the master builder of the Church, the Body of Christ. Unfortunately, Paul just isn't given credit for the position given to him by Jesus Christ.

God's temple (verse 16)

As Israel began their journey to the Promised Land and subsequent wondering in the wilderness, God gave them specific plans to build a tabernacle. When they finally settled, God told them to build a temple in Jerusalem. The first structure was temporary, and the second was permanent. Both became the dwelling place for God and the place where Israel could approach Him (Psalm 76:2). Sacrifices were offered by the priests in His presence to atone for the sins of the people. Priests were designated by God to represent the people before Him. The priests' function was to bring man to God, in contrast to prophets bringing God to man.

When the tabernacle was complete, God visibly came and filled the tabernacle with His glory. It was so overwhelming that Moses was unable to enter into it (Exodus 40:34–35). The same thing happened at the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 7:1–3). This outward manifestation of God's presence departed Solomon's temple at the Babylonian captivity (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:18–19; 11:22–25). There is no record of the glory of God entering the last temple, usually called Herod's temple. This is perhaps because the Ark of the Covenant was lost and this is where the presence of the Lord resided. The Ark of the Covenant will not be in the Millennial Temple because Jesus Christ will be physically ruling from that

location according to Jeremiah 3:14–16. It might be noted that when Jesus went into the temple that the presence of God was finally in the temple, but He was not technically dwelling in the temple.

When Paul says that we are the temple and that the Spirit of God dwells in us he is speaking of the church body, not about individuals. When believers assemble themselves together to worship God, the Holy Spirit is in their midst. Obviously, Paul is not talking about a church building, but about an assembly of believers who are in the Body of Christ. There is something special about a group of believers coming together to meet and worship God in unison. Unfortunately, this unity of the Spirit was broken within the Corinthian church because of the divisions and quarreling over doctrine.

The information Paul is writing has already been taught to them. This is why Paul says, “Know ye not...?” In fact, Paul repeats this phrase eight times in this letter (1 Corinthians 3:16; 5:6; 6:3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:24). It is obvious that what they were taught previously was forgotten, or not heeded. Paul is writing 1 Corinthians to get them back on track by reminding them to follow his doctrine. Instead they were following the wisdom of men, being swayed by personalities instead of properly evaluating sound words of truth. The Corinthians were baby Christians unable to digest deeper concepts because they were not living godly lives. Their carnality led them to argue over who they were going to follow instead of accepting the doctrine of Paul as the master builder.

Destroy and be destroyed (verse 17)

Since the church body is the temple of God, Paul makes it clear that anyone who destroys the temple will himself be destroyed. Paul is speaking of those who come into a church to tear it apart with false doctrine. Paul writes to Timothy warning him to be aware of such things happening. He shows us what to watch out for so that a church will not come to ruination. Paul warns about churches that reject the truth and reject those who are teaching sound words (2 Timothy 4:3–4). The Corinthians church also begin to listen to those who were teaching false doctrine. Paul ran into false doctrine throughout his life and warns Timothy to be vigilant in keeping churches free from wrong teaching (1 Timothy 1:3–7; 19–20; 4:15–16; 6:3–5), and warns us to be on the lookout for those who do the same (1 Timothy 4:1–2). Our standard for sound words of doctrine are found in Paul’s 13 books (2 Timothy 1:13–14). The Corinthians first rejected Paul’s doctrine, and then began to accept doctrine that was contrary to what he had been teaching them.

The main problem (verses 18–23)

Paul hits them again with the ultimate cause of their problem. There are people within the assembly who are using worldly wisdom to evaluate spiritual things. When this happens, true spirituality looks foolish, and is therefore rejected. The Corinthians were evaluating the message based on the messenger instead of the content. They were looking on the physical instead of the spiritual. Since they were carnal, they were unable to correctly judge and understand the doctrine. They were rejecting what Paul had taught them and were following other ideas that made more earthly sense to them. The wisdom found in the preaching of the cross was lost on them.

They did so thinking that they had the wisdom of God, but they were completely deceived because they were so immature. They were fully convinced that they were operating in the Spirit, but because they were operating in the flesh, they became incapable of properly evaluating their condition. They were not only deceived, but they were also deceiving others (2 Timothy 3:13). This happens when people rest on the words of other people instead of upon the word of God. This is prevalent in today’s churches. The man with the most polished and enticing words wins the biggest church. In general, people today do not even desire to hear sound doctrine, but love to hear things that make them feel good about themselves. Most pastors are more than willing to fulfill the desires of the congregation by dishing out big helpings of spiritual pabulum (2 Timothy 4:3)

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