

YOU ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD

In **1 Corinthians 3:16** we read about an analogy that is used in the Bible several times to describe the church of God. In that verse we read the following: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

There are a few lessons that we can learn from this analogy that is used a few times in the Bible. In the sermonette time today I’d like to go through three simple lessons that we can learn from this analogy of the church of God being likened to the Temple of God.

The first lesson can be found in the next verse where we read: “If anyone defiles [or destroys as the margin reads] the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are” (**1 Corinthians 3:17**).

Our fellow brothers and sisters in the church are very precious to God. God is in and lives in our fellow brothers and sisters through His Holy Spirit. When we hurt or offend any of our fellow church members God takes it very personally because He dwells in them also through His Holy Spirit.

The first lesson here is that we have to take care of the way we treat all of our fellow members in the church - not just some or most of them but all of our brethren regardless of their station in life or their personality temperament. We should do all we can to help build one another up in His spiritual Temple so as many of our fellow brethren as possible can make it into His kingdom.

This point is also brought out in the parable of the sheep and the goats in **Matthew 25**. The focus in that parable is a little bit different in that it focuses not on sins of commission (things that we do) but on sins of omission (things that we don’t do). That parable encourages us to not hurt our fellow members in the church through neglect.

In **Matthew 25, verses 44 to 45** we read: “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’” The corollary of that is, if we are reaching out to those in the church who are hungry, physically and emotionally, who are lonely, who are new and visiting from other places and who are hurting and in need, even “the least of these My brethren” to use Christ’s words, then we are doing it to God, who dwells in them through His Holy Spirit and God will bless us in return.

The second lesson we can learn from the analogy of the church of God being likened to the Temple of God is to not pollute our minds and our bodies since God dwells within us. We read about this in **1 Corinthians 6:18-20** where we read the following:

“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [*which*] is in you, [which] you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and [as it also notes here] in your spirit, which are God’s.”

Since God has made a home and dwells in us through His spirit we must not pollute our minds and bodies with the sinful values and practices of this world. Paul says that since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit we must not pollute it or offend God with practices such as sexual immorality, which is every bit as much a problem today in this world as it was in Corinth in Paul’s day.

The third lesson of our analogy is found in **1 Peter 2:5**. In that verse we read the following: “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

What is the purpose of a temple for God? It’s a place that people go to worship and honour the great God who created the universe. We are to be actively engaged in offering up spiritual sacrifices to our great God through our prayers and intercession for others and doing good works that bring honour to God when they

appreciate the way of life that we live that comes straight from God. Hopefully when we look back on each day or week or month or whenever we examine our behaviour we can point to a good number of spiritual sacrifices that we have done.

As the temple of God we need to have a reverent attitude towards God. This can be hard with our Australian culture. We have a very casual, easy-going, egalitarian or classless society here that's even a bit anti-authoritarian at times. This can affect our attitude towards God and we need to take care that our attitude and relationship towards God doesn't become too casual as a result.

There is a very interesting prophecy relating to the Temple of God that is found over in the first chapters of the book of Zechariah. Now Zechariah lived in the days when a remnant of the Jews came back from Babylon to rebuild the temple. In chapters **Zechariah 3 and 4** Zechariah makes mention of a couple of individuals by the names of Joshua and Zerubbabel. **Haggai 2:2** tells us that Joshua was the high priest and Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah at the time.

Now, while the prophecy certainly related to Zechariah's time, it appears as if this prophecy might also be dual with an end-time context as well. In **Zechariah 4 and verses 11 to 14** we read: "Then I answered and said to him, 'What *are* these two olive trees—at the right of the lampstand and at its left?' And I further answered and said to him, 'What *are these* two olive branches that *drip* into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden *oil* drains?' Then he answered me and said, 'Do you not know what these *are*?' And I said, 'No, my lord.' So he said, 'These *are* the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.'"

Hold your place there in Zechariah but this is very similar to **Revelation 11:4**. In that verse, speaking about the two witnesses that will prophesy in the Great Tribulation, we read: "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth."

I find that expression "the two lampstands" somewhat intriguing because the symbol of a lampstand is used to refer to a church in **Revelation 1:20**. If we substitute the word church for lampstand in **Revelation 11:4** it says, in effect, "These are the two olive trees and the two churches". I've kind of wondered what the significance of that might be and my best guess is that possibly they represent the two groups of people that are referred to in the next chapter – some of who go to the place of safety and the rest who Satan goes after in the Great Tribulation.

Coming back to Zechariah's prophecy in chapter 4, there are some encouraging points we can draw from it. If it is a dual prophecy we can see a fascinating parallel between what happened in Zechariah's day and what has happened in the end-time church of God. Just as Judah went into Babylon we have also seen our former association go into a kind of spiritual Babylon. A remnant of the Jews returned to rebuild the Temple of God in Zechariah's day. In like manner, a remnant of God's people in our time have had to come out and to rebuild the work and the church of God.

With that as background let's read **Zechariah 4** with an end-time context in mind beginning in **verse 6**: "So he answered and said to me: 'This *is* the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts...[dropping down to verse 8] Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish *it*. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.'"

This is God's work, not the work of any man and since it is His work He'll do whatever it takes to help us complete the job we have been given to do. We can have complete and utter faith in that. That doesn't just apply to the work of preaching the gospel but also refers to the building up of the spiritual Temple – the church. However slowly it might happen at times, the Bride of Christ will be ready in time and we can have complete faith in that.

A friend of mine at the time I left our former association was quite impatient about how slow people were about taking a stand on the doctrinal changes at the time. I would jokingly reassure him with the famous words that Rachel Hunter used to say in her popular shampoo commercial - "It won't happen overnight but it will happen!"

In between my time with the Worldwide Church of God and United I attended another church of God group for a few years and so I've had the benefit of being able to compare and contrast that group with United. I

initially had a couple of misgivings about the move to United and felt that the move was a little bit of a leap of faith at the time but I had complete faith that if God was working with United and was where He wanted me to be then those would be resolved in time. In time they were and I have been most encouraged by the progress that I have seen in United at both the local and the international level.

Going on to the next verse in **Zechariah 4** it says the following in verse 9 something that would be familiar to many of us where God says: "For who has despised the day of small things?"

Back a few pages in **Haggai 2:3** God says through Haggai: "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, *is this* not in your eyes as nothing?"

Do we have this attitude today regarding the size of the church and the work in comparison to how it was in our former association? Do we despise the day of small things now when we compare ourselves with the days when the church numbered 150 000 and the Plain Truth went out to millions of people each month?

If we go down further to **verses 7 to 9 of Haggai 2** God says "I will fill this temple with glory," says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver *is* Mine, and the gold *is* Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts." As Paul Vaughan brought out in his feast sermonette at Noosa, God almost always starts things out small but with a very big end in mind.

In time the whole world will be ruled by God and people of all nations will become converted and what we had in our former association will be miniscule in comparison. The point is that God is far more interested now in the quality of our own personal conversion than He is in the quantity of people converted.

We can see this in the verses that immediately proceed our opening verse in **1 Corinthians 3**. We read in **verses 11 to 15**: "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work 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. If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

These verses remind me a lot of the nursery rhyme about the wolf and the three little pigs who built their houses out of straw, wood and brick. The wolf went huff and buff and blew the first two houses down yet the one made of brick remained just like the character of gold and precious stones here in **1 Corinthians 3**.

When it comes to building His spiritual Temple God is intensely interested in building real depth and quality of conversion in each and every one of us from our elderly members to our young ones here in the church. We could ask ourselves the question, "Is our interest in the truth of God and His way of life marked by shallowness and complacency or is it marked by passion and real depth of conviction?"

In conclusion, we are the Temple of God, and, as such, that has great implications for each of us in the church. Firstly, we have to be careful not to hurt or offend any of our fellow church members. Secondly, we must also not pollute our minds and our bodies with the sinful values and practices of this world. And finally, we have to be actively engaged in offering up spiritual sacrifices to our great God and being the kind of godly people that bring honour to Him since we truly are the Temple of God.