

Cleaning God's Home

John 2:13-17

As we continue our worship by focusing our minds on the word of God, I would invite you to open your Bible with me to John 2 for this message entitled, "Cleaning God's Home." No, this sermon is not an extended appeal to join our cleaning ministry, but if you're interested, you can contact Julie Dossett and she'd be delighted to talk to you. Our text for today is John 2:13-17 and in this text we see Jesus aiming to restore true worship among the people by cleaning out the obstacles of worship from the temple.

Follow along as I read John 2:13-25 for context and then we'll narrow our focus to vs. 13-17. . . .

Our Father, with this text open before us we submit our hearts and minds to what the Spirit would teach us today. Open our minds, illumine our hearts, show us Christ. Sanctify us by the truth; your word is truth. For those among us that need it—young and old—give sight to blind eyes, hearing to deaf ears, life to dead souls. We believe that only you, Holy Spirit, can save and sanctify; and we pray that you would do it for the glory of Christ. For his sake we pray. Amen.

There is nothing God takes more seriously than true worship. In John 4 Jesus says, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." The reason there is nothing God takes more seriously than true worship is because there is nothing God is more committed to than his glory.

God is the most supreme, exalted, magnificent, powerful, majestic, righteous, sovereign being in existence. And at the same time as being exalted and lifted high he is yet loving and gracious, merciful, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. He is categorically and utterly above and beyond and unlike all other beings. In a word, he is glorious. He is full of glory and his glory permeates all of creation.

As the most glorious being it is right and necessary that he be jealous for glory. And so he says in Exodus 34:14, "you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." And in Isaiah 42:8 he says, "I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols." Jealousy is wrong when someone is jealous over something that doesn't belong to them, but it is right and good when something that belongs to you is taken. So when worship is given to anything or anyone other than God, God is jealous and that is good.

Because there is no one like him, it would be wrong for him to share or give his glory to a something that by its very nature cannot carry the weight of his glory.

So because God is utterly committed to his glory there is nothing he takes more seriously than true worship. We see examples of distorted worship and its consequences all over Scripture. In Genesis 4 Cain offered a sacrifice that didn't meet God's standard and God didn't accept it. In Leviticus 10 Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu offered fire to the Lord that he did not prescribe, and they were put to death on the spot. In 1 Samuel 15 King Saul offered a sacrifice of animals that were under the ban, so God rejected him as king. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira lied about their giving and they immediately perished. Examples abound in Scripture of how people give false worship. Some experience immediate judgment, the judgment of others came later.

False worship doesn't happen because God has been unclear about how to worship him. To promote true worship, God has revealed himself, and he has revealed what constitutes true worship. So there is no mystery in whom we worship, why we ought to worship, and how we ought to worship Him.

One problem is that true worship is easy to fake—not that God can be deceived, but we can deceive ourselves and others. We can convince ourselves that we are worshipping rightly and we can convince others, and then lead them in that false worship, much like King Saul led the people in making an offensive sacrifice.

This is a frightening reality that Jesus describes in Matthew 7:21-23 where he says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

There will be many who will reach the gates of heaven with confidence and excitement only to find out that they are barred from entrance. I cannot think of a more sobering thought that should cause each one of us to examine our own hearts. After all, right now, right here, I along with all of you appear to be worshipping in spirit and truth.

But among those who are actually doing so—among those who sing from the heart, affirm the prayers, and embrace the word preached—are some who are living in sin, secretly or openly. Some of you this last week practiced sexual immorality. Some of you this last week mistreated your wives, or your children, or both. Some of you this last week were enslaved to alcohol or drugs. Some of you this last week lived in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.

This shouldn't be a surprise. The church of Jesus Christ has always included not just attenders but members who actively live in sin. It's been this way since the beginning of the church. Every New Testament letter written to a church includes exhortations to stop living in sin. And each letter written to pastors—Timothy and Titus—admonishes them to exhort the people in their churches to stop living in sin. Almost every church Jesus Christ himself wrote to in Revelation 2-3 were admonished for practicing sin of one kind or another.

So it should not surprise us that Hope Bible Church is made up of sinners, some of whom are actively living in sin. The very purpose of the church is for sinners who have confessed the Lord Jesus Christ and received His grace and redemption to come together and teach, rebuke, correct, and train each other with the word of God so that we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin but be rather growing in likeness to Christ.

And while genuine believers battle with sin, there are always tares among the wheat, goats among the sheep, false professors among the true. And those are often unknown until they can no longer tolerate the truth proclaimed and they depart, or until their sin is revealed and they refuse to repent. But in the meantime, they are false in their worship.

Again I say, God is not deceived. He knows your heart and whether you are genuine or false. He delights in the praises of his people, especially those who struggle and battle with sin. But he despises the praises of those who only give him lip service.

What we have in our text today is a lesson of how seriously God takes true worship. Our text is simple and straightforward in its account of what happened. But its richness can only be understood in the light of the true worship the Lord established in ancient Israel.

And because you and I are so far removed from the dynamics of temple worship, we have to do a good bit of background to understand why Jesus had such zeal for his Father's house. You and I gather for corporate worship in this building, but this is not a temple. A common name for a room like this is a sanctuary. A sanctuary is a sacred place set aside for worship. We call it a Worship Center, because it's the central place where we gather to worship as a local body.

But the physical location, the material building and room itself, we understand are inconsequential. We could just as easily file outside and gather in the parking lot and worship God. We could move from this building to another building, or from this room to the new worship center, and none of that matters. The location in terms of the address of the church, the building itself, and the room itself do not make our worship more or less acceptable to God.

We know, because the Bible teaches, that God is concerned about the heart. And his concern for the heart is that it be devoted to him and submitted to him. God only cares about the externals to the degree that they conform to his revealed will, which for the New Testament church gives a great amount of freedom. But this is not the way it's always been.

Turn a page or two over to John 4 where Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that God is seeking those who worship him in spirit and truth. Just before that they had this interaction starting in vs. 20. She says to Jesus, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." Here Jesus announces a seismic change in God's revealed will as it relates to the location of worship.

This new standard for worship is what we've known for 2,000 years, namely, that the location of worship is irrelevant, it's the heart that matters. But what we read in our passage in John 2 occurs before this so we need to get into that world.

To do that I want to walk through the Old Testament with you with a focus on God's standard for worship as it relates the location of worship because having this in mind will give us greater insight to the zeal Jesus had for the Father's house.

From the beginning of creation through to the end of Israel's 400 years of captivity in Egypt, there was no central place to worship God. Those who did worship Yahweh, few as they were, worshiped him wherever they were. They would often set up altars and sacrifice to God in those places where he met with him, but then they would move elsewhere. They were sojourners and did not have a fixed homeland, so there was no central place of worship.

When the Lord redeemed Israel from Egypt, they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses was up on the mountain receiving the law from God. Among the laws given to Moses were precise and detailed instructions regarding the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a portable tent that would become the focal point of their worship. Knowing that Israel would not enter the land for another 40 years due to their rebellious hearts, the Lord was gracious to give them a center of worship that moved around with them.

When I say that the instructions were detailed and precise, they span Exodus 25-30, and that's a common section where people get stuck in their Bible reading because it seems so tedious to modern minds. But the details and instructions are God's way of revealing how seriously he is concerned with true worship. He leaves next to nothing the creativity of man. He describes the colors and fabrics and

decorations and shapes and sizes of every part and piece of the tabernacle and its furniture.

To emphasize the central role of worship, the Lord also instructed that the tabernacle was to be set up at the center of Israel's camp with each of the twelve tribes organized around it such that they all had direct access to it.

In addition to the construction of the tabernacle, God gave lengthy and detailed instructions on how sacrifices were to be made, and for what reason, and at what times, and by whom, and with what animals. No creativity was allowed. No human ingenuity. No self-expression and personal preferences. Israel was to worship God the way God prescribed, or they would die. Again, Nadab and Abihu became an object lesson for that.

Now, the reason God was so concerned about the details of the tabernacle and all involved with worship, is because the tabernacle was not merely symbolic or representative of a heavenly temple—the tabernacle was to be God's home on earth. This is to say, though he is personally present in all places at all times, the tabernacle would be the place where he would uniquely and especially manifest his presence and dwell with his people. He would be among them as their God, and they would be his people. Wherever they went he would be there among them.

His presence was tangibly expressed, surprisingly, in the instructions on how the people were to handle their bodily waste. After giving such instructions, Deuteronomy 23:14 says, "Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you."

So God's concern for the tabernacle rose from the fact that this was not simply a place for people to worship, but it was the place where God would dwell. When the construction of the tabernacle was finished, God moved in. Exodus 40:34-38 says, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys."

The tabernacle would then be carefully assembled and disassembled every time the Lord directed the people to move around the wilderness for the next 40 years.

When the people entered the Promised Land, because of their military campaigns they no longer set up camp like they had in the wilderness, so it seems that they did not set up the tabernacle until they finished conquering the land.

Since they didn't set up the tabernacle, they carried the Ark of the Covenant around with them as the representation of God's presence. Remember that the priests carrying the ark were the first to step into the Jordan which caused the waters to divide as they had at the Red Sea which allowed the people to pass over into the Promised Land. And then the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant lead the parade around the city of Jericho.

And so it was that the ark of the covenant served as their reminder of God's presence among them. But then they finished conquering the land and it says in Joshua 18:1, "Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them."

The tabernacle stayed there in Shiloh for hundreds of years, and that's where the people would gather to celebrate all the feasts prescribed in the Law of Moses. After three centuries the ark traveled a bit, starting with a stint with the Philistines who captured the ark in battle. But they returned it because it brought plagues to their people.

Sometime after David became king, he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. And so it is that when David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, they set up the tabernacle for what may have been the first time in many years. That began a thousand years of Jerusalem being the center of worship for all who worshiped the one true God of Israel.

Though David wanted to build the Lord a temple, because he was a man of war, the Lord denied his request but honored the desire by saying that his son would complete the project. The temple Solomon built was nothing like the tabernacle. It was exponentially larger and grander and more ornate and built with the best materials. And though the Lord had given precise details for the construction of the tabernacle, we don't have record of him doing that for the temple. It may be that he simply inspired the architects, as it were, but whatever the case the Scripture is clear that it was built with the blessing of the Lord.

When it was complete, the Lord moved in. 1 Kings 8:10-11 says, "And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord."

In dedication of the temple, Solomon sacrificed—get this—22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. It's hard to comprehend the logistics, the sight, and the sound of sacrificing 142,000 animals in a span of days.

From this moment on the temple in Jerusalem was the center of worship. And in many ways it was the pride of Israel as the nations stood in awe when they saw it. All Israel would come to Jerusalem to worship and sacrifice at the temple at least three times a year. Tragically, after building this temple it wasn't long before Israel began to depart from the Lord.

As Solomon married many foreign wives, he set up places of worship for the gods of his wives on a hill right across from the temple, next to the mount of olives. Though there were still many who were faithful to the Lord, their numbers grew fewer and fewer decade after decade. Over the next 300 years the temple fell into disrepair even while there would be cycles of renewed worship followed by false worship.

But then the Lord used King Josiah to repair the temple, and in the process of repairing it, you know what they found? A copy of the Scripture. The nation had so far departed from the Lord that the physical copy of the Law of God had been lost and forgotten. But they found it and out of excitement brought it to King Josiah as though they had found a magnificent jewel—which is exactly what they found.

When they read the Scripture to King Josiah, 2 Kings 22 says, “When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes.” And he said, “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.” The Lord used King Josiah to bring about a great revival of true worship and restored the temple practices as well as the Passover.

Unfortunately his reforms did not last long and the people went after idols once again. Despite extraordinary patience and longsuffering, the Lord finally decided that he would no longer dwell with his people in the temple. The Prophet Ezekiel, who had gone into exile with the northern tribes into Assyria, was given a vision of the Lord departing the temple.

He describes in Ezekiel 10-11 the slow and methodical movement of the glory of the Lord departing out of the Holy of Holies, out to the threshold, out to the gate, up the Mount of Olives, and up to heaven. The reason the Lord gave Ezekiel this vision is because no one in Jerusalem, including the people who were in the temple worshipping idols, noticed that the glory of God departed.

The time came when the Lord handed Judah over to their enemies and Jerusalem and its temple were utterly destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BC. For 70 years the rubble sat as a testimony of what happens when you turn away from the living God.

But as God had promised to Daniel and Jeremiah, after 70 years he provided for Ezra to lead some of the people back to Judea and Jerusalem for the purpose of rebuilding the temple. When the foundation for the temple was complete, many rejoiced, but Ezra 3:12 says, “But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid.” This new temple would be nothing like Solomon’s temple. Nevertheless they continued the work and it came to completion.

Remember how Solomon sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep at the first dedication? At this dedication, they sacrificed 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and 12 male goats as a sin offering. Whereas Solomon’s reign was defined by spectacular prosperity, at this time they were in poverty.

This temple was renovated and expanded by Herod which was 46 years in the making when get to John 2. But it actually didn’t get completed until about 63AD, and then the whole structure was destroyed by the Romans just seven years later.

Remember how the Lord moved into the tabernacle? And then how he moved into Solomon’s temple? That didn’t happen with Ezra’s temple. Though they did right by rebuilding the temple to restore true worship, the glory of God did not return to reside in the temple with the people. Why?

In the words of, Isaiah 50, when the Lord gave Judah into the hands of the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, that was the Lord’s certificate of divorce by which he sent the people away. Though he was not utterly finished with them and still promised a future restoration, their incessant spiritual adultery broke the relationship such that rebuilding the temple—as good and right an act as that was—could not restore what they once had.

So when Jesus arrives on the scene, there is no glory in the temple. But that’s not to say that it wasn’t the God-approved place of worship. It was. Though his glorious presence was not in the temple, it was still God’s house, which is why Jesus calls it “my Father’s house,” not just here but in multiple places. God still viewed the temple as his house, and it was still the proper place to worship God.

The sanctity of the temple as God’s house was so important to Jesus that not only did he clean God’s home near the beginning of his ministry, he did it again at the start of the final week of his ministry. John doesn’t record it, but Luke 19:46 tells us

that after Jesus drove out all the merchants, he said, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

While John doesn’t record that Jesus said this the first time he cleared the temple, it’s possible he did. But even if he didn’t, I’m convinced the very reason that Jesus cleared the temple is because it was a house of prayer. Let me demonstrate that to you.

In 1 Kings 8 we read about the dedication of Solomon’s temple. At that dedication Solomon offered an extended prayer of dedication. We don’t have to read the whole prayer as it’s quite long, but after he starts with praise he says, “[Listen] to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.”

And then he goes through eight scenarios under which the people would cry out to God either from the temple or when facing the temple from anywhere in the world. And with each situation he asks that the Lord “hear in heaven” and respond to the prayer by bringing forgiveness or restoration or whatever is needed.

It would be a mistake to think about temple worship as primarily if not exclusively defined by sacrifices. True worship at the temple was defined more by prayer than by sacrifice. The prophet Isaiah wrote about God’s salvation of Gentiles and in Isaiah 56:7 he says, “these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

Sacrifices happened there, but it was called a house of prayer. And not just a house of prayer for Israel, but a house of prayer for all peoples. Gentile salvation is not what makes the New Testament new. The Lord had long since proclaimed that the nations would be blessed through Abraham, and he established his home, the temple, to be a place where Jew and Gentile could come to worship him.

With all of that as background, are you ready to look at our text?

The Passover was at hand, it says in vs. 13. This means that Jerusalem would be starting to swell with people from all over the world. Mostly Jews, but also believing Gentiles. Though the temple would be most busy on Passover, those from afar would spend time at the temple praying and worshipping since they rarely had the opportunity to do so.

The temple had sections divided by demographics such that the outer court was the Court of the Gentiles, the second was the Court of the Women, and the court closest to the holy place was the Court of the Men.

LOOK at vs. 14. . . . though it doesn't specify where in the temple these animals and money-changers were, it is without doubt that was in the court of the Gentiles since that was the outer court where all people were allowed.

The practice of selling oxen and sheep and changing money was not the problem. The Law of God recognized that once they were in the land, it would be impractical for many Jews living throughout the land of Israel to travel for days and weeks carrying their tithes and sacrificial animals. So it says this in Deuteronomy 14:24-26, "And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, when the Lord your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the Lord your God chooses, to set his name there, then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the Lord your God chooses and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household." Remember that when an animal was sacrificed, depending on the purpose for the sacrifice, part of the ritual involved cooking and eating some of the sacrifice, as well as giving some of it to the priests.

So those who lived far away would not bring their tithes of produce and sacrificial animals, they would bring money, and then in Jerusalem they would buy what was needed and worship the Lord with those purchases. This obviously required that Jerusalem have a large market where people could buy oxen and sheep and pigeons.

Money-changers also became necessary once Israelites started living beyond the borders of Israel and would come with foreign currency. The need was even more pressing when the Romans came in and many people had to use Roman currency for many aspects of their lives, such as taxes. But the Jews would not allow the temple tithe and animals sacrifices to be purchased with foreign and Roman coins, so many would exchange their currency and use the temple coins to purchase what they needed.

All of that was legitimate in and of itself. The problem was not that there were people selling animals and there were people buying animals. The problem was not that there were people exchanging currency. The problem was where they were doing those things.

Historians tell us that the market for money changing and the buying and selling of animals for sacrifice used to be just across the Kidron Valley on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. It wasn't far, but there was sufficient distance that the market and

all the traffic and noise it generated did not disrupt the worship in the temple. But when the market was moved to temple, that changed everything.

You can imagine that with hundreds of thousands of Jews coming for the Passover, there would need to be many thousands of animals on hand. The amount of noise from the lowing of the oxen to the bleating of the sheep and the cooing of the pigeons, plus all the people talking and probably shouting making transactions. And where was this? In the court of the Gentiles! In the very place where those who had come to pray to the Lord and to engage in worship and focus their hearts and minds on the Lord, there was untold distraction.

Imagine if we had a coffee shop like many churches do, but instead of being in the lobby or down the hall, it was here in the worship center! And while most of us were trying to sing and pray and listen to the preaching, there were others ordering coffee and there was the loud frothing of milk, the clinking of containers being stirred, and Frappuccino's being blended. Can you imagine how impossible it would be to stay focused on the worship of God?

That was the situation. The temple was the Father's home—the place where he met with his people, the place where people were to come and pour out their hearts to him and receive the word of God and make their sacrifices. But it had become a madhouse market.

To make things worse, adding to the chaos was the sin of extortion. The religious leaders ensured that they would benefit from this arrangement, so they allowed the sellers and money changers to take advantage of the people by charging exorbitant rates. That's why Jesus said in Luke 19, "you have made it a den of robbers."

So the entire enterprise disrupted the worship of the people and took advantage of those who wanted to worship rightly but had no other option than to buy these animals. Out of zeal for the purity of true worship, and the sacredness of Father's house, and being the Messiah who is to redeem his people to a right relationship with God, Jesus exercises his divine authority and clears everything out.

LOOK at vs. 15-16. . . . With animals being purchased there would have been a lot of rope around so he made a makeshift whip and used it to clear the court. And while we might shrink back from the thought that Jesus would express violent anger and do anything that would harm animals and people, make no mistake about it—these people deserved the same judgment as Nadab and Abihu. Jesus would have been just to call down fire from heaven and consume them all.

But in mercy he manifested righteous anger and his actions brought a temporary end to their false worship. We should be careful to not justify our own expressions

of anger by Jesus' example—as the Judge he has the right and responsibility to rain down judgment on sinners, we do not. But his example does remind us that there is such a thing as righteous anger. How that is to be expressed will depend on the situation.

Some wonder why Jesus drove out the oxen and sheep and money-changers, but he spoke to the sellers of pigeons. The most reasonable answer is that the pigeons were in cages and they needed to be carried. This tells us that Jesus was not out of control. He restrained and told them to carry out their birds.

Finally, LOOK at vs. 17. . . .

The disciples were almost certainly in stunned by what they witnessed. By now they'd been with Jesus for weeks and perhaps months and he had always seemed remarkably calm and gentle with people. To see him act with such force and energy would have been shocking. But since they were just observers and not the recipients of his actions, they had the ability to process what was going on and the Spirit brought Psalm 69:9 to their minds. Psalm 69:9 says, “For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.”

The second of half of the verse the apostle Paul quotes in reference to Christ in Romans 15:3. Applied to Jesus it means that when God was dishonored he felt the offense. When God was rejected, he felt the pain. When God's word was distorted, he felt insulted. When God's house was abused, he felt the anger.

But the first part is what came to their minds, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” It ate him up. Zeal took over and controlled his response to the situation. Witnessing the desecration of God's house was more than he could bare. Knowing that there were people trying to worship God, trying to lift up their prayers, trying to offer sacrifices of praise and tithes and offerings, but the religious establishment stole the house of prayer to use it for their own personal gain, it was impossible not to act.

Undoubtedly he had seen it before in years gone by. But now that his ministry was launched and he was being publicly proclaimed as God's Messiah, it was time to do something about it, so he did. He was zealous for God's house, he was zealous for true worship, and he took swift and decisive action to protect it.

We'll look at how the Jewish leaders responded next week, but as we draw to a close today I just want to ask you, are you zealous for God's home? Are you zealous for true worship? We are the church—and among the metaphors the New Testament uses to describe the people of God is that we are members of the household of God,

Ephesians 2:20. We are God's building, 1 Corinthians 3:9. And then in vs. 16-17 of that chapter Paul says, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

We are no longer limited to worshiping God at a particular place in a particular building. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, we can worship God in spirit and truth wherever we are. And the danger that informality brings is we can become much more lax in how we think about worship. Like the sellers in the temple we can deceive ourselves into thinking that God cares very little about what we do. That we can live our own way and still worship him.

Consider that when Jesus cleaned God's home, he modeled for us the zeal that should consume us. We must not give sin rent the courts of our hearts. We all sin and we all have different battles with sin, and we must not let those battles stop us from running to Christ in faith and repentance and worship. But we cannot become complacent and tolerate patterns of sin.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus used graphic language to describe how zealous we should be in rooting sin out of our lives. Does your eye cause you to sin? Cut it out! Does your hand cause you to sin? Cut it off! Hyperbolic language that may be, but it conveys the seriousness with which we ought to remove sin from our lives and pursue faith-filled worship of God.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that no matter how much sin has characterized our lives, there is forgiveness to be found as a result of his finished work the cross. Our false worship, our hypocrisy, our harboring of sin can be forgiven in Christ if we would but confess it and turn from it and run to him who was so zealous to clean God's home that he gave his life on the cross so that we could be washed by his blood.