



1 Cor. 3:16-17
A Holy Temple

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

Last week you will remember that Paul spoke of how he had laid the right foundation for the church in Corinth, that foundation was the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He spoke of how once this foundation, which is the only true foundation for a church of Christ is laid, there are two ways that one can build upon it.

The first way was the right way to build a true and healthy church, that is by continuing to preach and teach those precious gospel truths. That is what the Apostles continuously exhorted the church to do, to not make up new doctrines and teaching, but to continue as Jude had written in the third verse of his letter *“to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”* If the ministers of the church would do that, and the people would be careful to see that they continued in that practice, then they would be building a strong church on the only true foundation. They would be building the church up with truths that were precious and lasting like gold, silver, and jewels.

The second way to build was the wrong way, that was to build with the doctrines and traditions and philosophies of men which were of no use in saving people or building them up in the faith. Ultimately these things while they might be popular, were as worthless and perishable as wood, hay, and straw. That was clearly the wrong way to build, and Paul warns against it.

But now he is going to turn to something far worse than building with worthless materials, he is going to turn his attention to the opposite of building. *What is the opposite of building? **Tearing down, destroying.***

Some ministers, Paul is warning do not build up the church at all, they destroy it by ruling in their own name and preaching falsehoods and things that openly contradict the gospel message. This is inevitably what happens when the visible church abandons the Word of God. It happened in the time of Jeremiah when the practice of religion in the temple at Jerusalem became corrupt and apostate. God declared to them in Jeremiah 5:30-31

***30 " An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land:
31 The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power;
And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?***

False doctrine is bad, it is bad enough when we see it in media, on the internet, in conversations, or in popular books and movies like the Da Vinci code. But as bad as that is, it is far worse when that bad doctrine is preached in the church, because the media, novels, and the workplace, they are not temple of God. The church individually, and corporately is, because the Spirit of God dwells within them.

Now when I saw individually and corporately, I mean that every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, and together all of those believers make up the church of Jesus Christ. We need to remember that, you together, brothers and sisters are the church. Not the building, not even the denomination, not even our corporate offices in Atlanta, as "sacred" as they are. But individual believers, who are the stones that together making up the true and living temple of God.

Paul talks about how God is building this temple giving us a beautiful image in:

Eph. 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

*20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,
 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,
 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

That temple, which is the meeting place between man and God, is being built up by true doctrine, therefore when false doctrine invades, the temple is “defiled” or polluted. Actually the word that the NKJV renders defile, is actually *phtheirei* which means to destroy. It is not just that the temple is polluted by false teaching, it is actively destroyed.

Now there have been many varieties in church history of false and destructive doctrines that destroy the church, you have the example of Gnosticism in the early church, Semi-Pelagianism in the Medieval Church, the cults in every age. But perhaps one of the most destructive has been the liberalism and modernism that invaded and continue to corrupt the mainline denominations, the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists and so on. This ant-supernaturalism denies the authority of the word of God, and its central truths – *the sinfulness of man, the holiness of God, the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, His bodily resurrection, and of course the absolute necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men, regenerating and converting them.*

Richard Niebuhr early in the 20th century summed up theological liberalism well when he described it thus:

“A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” – Richard Niebuhr

It is no wonder that, after these destructive doctrines entered and took hold in the churches that those churches began to die. They came in claiming they would lead the church of Jesus Christ to new and ever more glorious heights,

but like all the devils deceptions, all they have delivered was despair and unbelief and eternal death.

When Martyn Lloyd Jones began his preaching career, he was often invited to go to areas where liberalism was the reigning theological paradigm. Often liberal ministers invited him, even though they couldn't stand the evangelical gospel he preached, precisely because when Lloyd-Jones preached, people came and listened because they immediately sensed he had something different from what they had gotten used to hearing, he had the words of life.

A man approached Lloyd-Jones in the 70s and told him that when he had preached in his church 50 years earlier, two prominent liberal ministers from the area had sat in the back and spent the whole sermon sneering and making disparaging remarks to one another. He summed up by saying *they are gone now, and their churches are empty.*

Now ministers like that, who preach false and destructive doctrines may enjoy the limelight for a while, they may even become the darlings of the popular media.

[You ever notice that 9 times out of 10 when the media does a story on Jesus or the bible, the man and women they ask for comments are inevitably incredibly liberal? They'd rather have someone come on and explain how Jesus was really an alien from Alpha Centauri than have a minister who affirmed the truth of the gospel. Its gotten to the point where if the history channel is doing anything on Religion I just immediately blip past it rather than have my blood pressure sent through the roof.]

But brothers and sisters, these savage wolves who speak perverse things as Paul puts it in Acts 20 are with every word actually treasuring up wrath for themselves, and that they will bring a terrible judgment down upon themselves.

God is not mocked, and Christ takes very seriously the sin of destroying His holy Temple, because this is not their flock, it is Christ's flock which He

purchased with His own blood. And it is His desire that this church which He loves be well cared for, cleansed, built up.

Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Those who would destroy the church are warned in Zec. 2:8 that to touch God's church is to touch the apple of God's eye.

So what is the application to us? Well let me give you two, one negative the other positive.

The first and most obvious is to be on your guard against ministers who preach false doctrine: We *always* tend to assume that this cannot happen in our church or our denomination, but if history teaches us anything, it teaches that the very assumption that the very assumption that Satan cannot sow seeds in this field or slip in false preachers to our denominations is the surest way of ensuring that will happen.

As Roger Ellsworth put it: ***“Destructive ministers – what an unsavory thought! So unpleasant is it that many have virtually denied the possibility of it. They seem to assume that false preachers are easily detected and, never having detected any, they conclude that they do not exist. Others believe there are destructive ministers, but they all belong to denominations other than their own. ... The sad truth is that the church has always been afflicted with ministers who do not build anything at all, but simply wait for others to build so they can move in to tear down.”***

Brothers and Sisters, be on your guard, I will tell you that even in this denomination as evangelical and orthodox as we are there are ministers who

preach a false gospel, so be on your guard. Watch me, watch your elders, and watch yourselves. Guard your hearts.

The second application is this, and it is the only way you will guard against these doctrines that destroy: Love Christ and His truth more than anything in the world. Don't go seeking after new and novel doctrines. When Israel was falling into apostasy, here is the counsel that God gave his people. It wasn't to adopt radical new measures, it was to return to Him and His way:

Jer. 6:16 Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.

Depend upon Christ alone, practice Godliness with contentment, become an expert in this His word, and I guarantee you will find that rest the Lord spoke of.