

The Holy Spirit 4

The Temple of the Holy Spirit

There are three occasions when Paul tells the Corinthians that believers are the Temple of the Holy Spirit:-

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16 NKJV)

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19 NKJV)

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. (2 Corinthians 6:16 NKJV)

This is not just a picture, an allegory; he means it literally. If we are to grasp what he is getting at we need to understand what the temple meant to the Jews. In fact, we have to go back beyond that to the Tabernacle, for the Temple was simply the permanent representation in Jerusalem of what the Tabernacle had been in the wilderness.

When you think of the numbers involved in the wilderness - a complete nation living there for 40 years, you realise the amount of administration that must have been involved. Whenever they pitched camp they set up their tents by tribes, each tribe in its appointed place round a central square and that central square, or oblong actually, was the Tabernacle. Very simply; it was a tent for God. God had told Moses, "I will be with you." But he knew that the people needed more than words, they needed a sign, a symbol. There, right in the middle of the camp, was God's tent. If it rained, if the wind blew, then it rained and it blew on God's tent as much as on that of the people. That was where they could meet with God. But it was hidden from full view by a high fence.

The Tabernacle was taller than the fence so the people could see the top of it, they knew it was there, but it was separated from them. There was only one entrance through that fence and when you went in, there at the far end was the Tabernacle but just in front of it, partly obscuring your view, was a massive altar - the place of sacrifice. What a brilliant visual aid; God was present with his people, but they were separated from him by their sin. They could worship him, but first they had to offer atonement for their sins.

Years later, when the people were no longer wandering through the desert but were established in the land and lived in permanent dwellings, they built God a permanent dwelling also - the Temple. It was modelled exactly on the Tabernacle, except that everything was twice the size. In the courtyard there was the altar, behind it was the heart of the Temple itself, the Holy Place, where only the priests could enter, and that after elaborate cleansing ritual, and behind that the Most Holy Place. It was there that the shekinah, the glory of God, actually dwelt. There only the High Priest could enter and that only once a year and bearing an offering for his own sin and the sin of his people.

Of course, there is much more teaching enshrined in the meaning of the Temple, but I have said enough to show that above all, it was the place where God dwelt among his people and, therefore, it was holy. You will remember, of course, that Jesus cleansed the Temple because it had become unholy, with the words:-

"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a den of thieves.' " (Mark 11:17 NKJV)

Jesus became a human being and John tries to explain the implication of what that meant by writing:-

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, . (John 1:14 NKJV)

Now, the word 'dwelt' is literally, 'tabernacled' or 'he pitched his tent among us.' And the shekinah - the glory of God which dwelt in the Most Holy Place and which the High Priest alone saw once a year - that glory, says John, was seen in the person of Jesus. So Jesus became the Tabernacle or the Temple of God. In fact, Jesus himself refers to his body as the Temple of God. When he cleansed the Temple the Jews demanded what was his authority to do it, what sign could he give?

Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19 NKJV)

Naturally, they think he is speaking of the Temple building he has just cleansed, and they remonstrate that it took 46 years to build, how can he raise it in 3 days? And John comments:

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (John 2:21 NKJV)

-and, of course, that Temple, his body, was destroyed on the cross but was raised after three days.

Now, at last, with that background, we can begin to consider what Paul means when he says, "You are God's Temple, and God's Holy Spirit lives in you."

It is important to understand that in those two texts from his 1st letter to the Corinthians which in English look so similar-

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16 NKJV)

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you? (1 Corinthians 6:19 NKJV)

there is a major difference. The first refers to the Church corporately (as does the reference in 2 Corinthians 6:16), the second to individuals. The first is plural. Paul is saying - "You who are the believers in Corinth make up the local Church and you, together, form a temple in which God's Holy Spirit lives." Previously God dwelt in the Temple at Jerusalem; then in the human body of Jesus; after his resurrection he breathed on the disciples saying, "receive Holy Spirit" (giving them authority to forgive or not forgive the sins of others); and now he lives in his Church; not the building but the people. Wherever God's people are, God is there. In the year 70 A.D. the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed - about 40 years after Christ's ascension. God no longer needed the physical building that was confined to one place on earth. Now he is world-wide; wherever his people are his Spirit is there.

But from all we have seen about the meaning of the Temple, think what that means for us. We are to be the place where men and women can meet with God. They are to receive forgiveness and salvation, not from an altar set up in front of one building, but from the Christ who is living in us in the person of his Holy Spirit, which is why he gave his Church the authority to forgive sins when he breathed upon the disciples:-

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23 NKJV)

Under the Old Covenant the place of worship was the Temple, now we are the worshipping community. Others are to be drawn to worship God because of us, our worship. Don't for one

moment think that I am referring only to the worship we offer in church with our prayers and our songs; that is only part of it. Our lives are to be our worship. Paul understood that clearly when he said to the Roman Christians:-

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1 NKJV)

I believe that the greatest single hindrance to the spread of the Gospel in the world is the failure of the Church to be the Temple of the Holy Spirit.. He is the Spirit of Unity; he is a person who cannot be divided any more than Christ can be divided:-

For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13 NKJV)

Yet we spend so much time at each other's throats. It isn't simply that the world is confused by the different denominations, it may be, but that would not prove an obstacle to faith if we loved one another. The heart of the problem is that by our disunity the Holy Spirit cannot work freely through us. I do not agree with certain doctrines of other denominations, that is why I am an Anglican and not one of them. But God is bigger than any one person's understanding of him and any one denomination's understanding of him. Compared with the unbelief out there in the world, our differences are so trivial. In fact, the very way we should cope with our differences, by showing love and understanding, could be a tremendous witness to the world.

If you look at the words Christ spoke to his disciples on his last evening with them, between the time that Judas went to betray him and the time he came with the soldiers to arrest him, you will see that the burden on his heart was that they should love one

another. Six times he commands it and then he turns to his Father and prays three times that they will be one as he and his Father are one. The major burden on the heart of Christ as he faced his death was the unity of believers, his Church, his body on earth.

We Christians have got to get the Kingdom going amongst ourselves so that the world can see at least something of it, if ever we can expect them to desire it for themselves. To concentrate on unity between the different denominations can remove the problem from the immediate area where we live out our lives. How much have we really got the Kingdom going amongst us gathered here today? How much do we love each other? I haven't time to develop that now, but we will look at it in greater depth when we come to study the fruit of the Spirit. Let me make another point to which we will return later. The gifts of the Spirit (words of knowledge, prophecy, healing etc.) relate primarily to the Church, the corporate Body of Christ:-

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: (or 'for the common good' i.e. corporate) [1 Corinthians 12:7 NKJV]

Whereas the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace etc.) relates primarily to us as individuals, our own characters, the people we are.

That leads me on to look at the other text, 1 Corinthians 6:19 where Paul is saying that each of them, individually, is the Temple of God where his Holy Spirit lives.

You see, if ever we are to allow the Spirit to work in us corporately as a Church, obviously he must be directing us individually. What is more, as we have seen with the material Temple in Jerusalem, our bodies, being the new Temple, have to be cleansed. The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit and for him to take up residence in us we must be holy.

Here we meet a paradox which many Christians find difficult to grasp. On the one hand we are told not to strive, but just to relax and let God work his work in us; allow the Holy Spirit to produce his fruit. On the other we are told to strive and to make every effort to be what we should be. A text which particularly highlights this paradox is

Therefore, beloved... be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; (2 Peter 3:14 NKJV)

The NRSV says 'strive' and the NIV says 'make every effort'. That really is odd isn't it? We are to make every effort to be found in peace, whereas peace is a fruit of the Spirit. What are we to do? Look at it like this. When we submit to Christ, make him Lord of our life, what the Bible describes as being born again, something happens. It is not just a new way of thinking, not just a theory; we are actually given a new nature, it is the very nature of God himself.

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him. (1 John 3:9 NKJV)

The original word behind seed is 'sperma'. At your conversion God's nature was put into you. No wonder John says that all who have been born of the Spirit become children of God:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13 NKJV)

So you have a new nature, BUT the old nature is still there. It has been put to death potentially:-

Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with. (Romans 6:6 NKJV)

But we have to decide that we will make that real:-

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5 NKJV)

Do you understand? It is co-operation. Before, it wasn't possible for us not to sin; Christ has made it possible. We have to decide which nature we shall use - the new nature of God or resurrect the old nature of sin. God will not over-ride our free will; he does not want us as automatons or robots. He wants us to be free human beings; but to use that freedom to choose him. That is our value. It is that which we have to offer him and therefore to delight him. The striving comes in choosing to have nothing to do with the old nature and to live in the new. We are the Temple of the Holy Spirit and must be holy.

The technical term for this is sanctification. Our justification was the matter of a moment. The instant we accept Christ as Lord and Saviour, we are accounted sinless, the slate is wiped clean. Our sanctification, making us holy, is the work of a life time.

I have nearly done, but let me close with this explanation, because I believe it is very important you understand this in the light of the current manifestation of the Holy Spirit. We are what our pasts have made us. There are our own sins, and although these have been forgiven, the consequences of them, or of some of them, are still with us. But there are also the sins of others against us. For instance, those who have been abused as children carry the scars, the hurts and the fears with them. Much of my ministry has been spent in deep counselling of people in the middle of life who have been crippled spiritually and mentally by

the hurts and rejections of their early years. That sort of counselling takes time because the pain comes to the surface only gradually as the mind can bear the memories. The Spirit desires that we should be holy if he is to dwell in us, and holiness involves wholeness. He desires that all these sins of the past, our own and those which others have committed against us should be cleansed.

The current manifestation of the Spirit where people fall down and shake and laugh and groan, is untidy. It is still too early for us to analyse just what is happening and why. But I am leaning strongly to the belief that one of the things that God is doing is making people whole. The outward shaking is a speeding up of the effect of long term counselling. The hurts and the pains of the past, deep within the unconscious, are beings released and healed. Sometimes the memory is by-passed so that the person does not have to suffer the re-thinking of those hurts. In other cases or at other times, oppressive spirits are released and driven out. On yet other occasions, personal sins and habits, such as bitterness and resentment, are brought to mind in order that they may be confessed and forgiven. If these things are going on, they are soul shattering and I am not surprised if there is some physical manifestation of shaking, or that the joy of release in their spirit after years of bondage should produce laughter, even if the person is not fully aware of just what it is that God is doing within them.

Let me just add a word of warning, I believe that what *begins* as a work of the Holy Spirit can degenerate into a work of the flesh where the manifestations are manufactured by the person. Also we must not expect God to deal in the same way with everyone and there must be no hint of pride such as "the Spirit has fallen on me and apparently not on you." It may be that some are more fortunate than others and do not have the same hurts from the past which need healing; or their hurts may have been healed by

counselling or they may have learned more effectively how to account their old nature as dead and be walking more consistently in the Spirit than those who are being touched by the Spirit in a more overt way. Then again, it may have nothing to do with making whole. There are some people who will fall down under the Spirit as soon as anyone prays for them. We are all different.

But with all our differences (and it is God who has made each of us unique because he delights in variety) he has made us for himself; to be his Temple. He longs to take up residence within each of us and for that we must be holy, even as he is holy.