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Sermon Notes

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The Spiritual Temple of the Living God

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Last week, Brian Young preached to us from 1 Peter 1:13-16

Key command:

1 Peter 1:15-16 just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Holiness for the people of God is paramount...

I. Be Holy, for You Are God's Temple

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

A. Context

1. The Corinthians were pridefully bickering about human leaders

1 Corinthians 1:12 One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"

a. This prideful bickering was destroying the unity of the church

b. It also displayed spiritual immaturity and worldliness

1 Corinthians 3:2-4 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?

2. Paul puts all human leaders in perspective

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe-- as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

3. Their focus on human leaders was destroying the unity of the church

4. So, Paul wants to establish as clearly as possible the doctrine of Christ's church... the essential UNITY we all have in Christ, and the role each skillful leader is playing in building the church

B. You Are God's Temple

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

1. Amazing statement to make to a group of Gentiles, former pagans, who would have been EXCLUDED from entering the temple in Jerusalem
2. In fact, the Jews in Jerusalem stated a riot concerning Paul because they wrongly assumed he had brought a Gentile named Trophimus into the temple area
3. The Romans had upheld the Jewish laws about the temple being off limits to Gentiles... if even a Roman soldier went in there, the Romans themselves would execute that man
4. But in the New Covenant, Ephesians 2 tells us that the blood of Christ has removed the "barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" between Jews and Gentiles
5. In that same chapter, Paul makes it clear that the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians together form a SPIRITUAL TEMPLE

Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

6. This is true of each Christian INDIVIDUALLY

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 Flee from sexual immorality. ... he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

7. But here, the image is COLECTIVE or CORPORATE... the Corinthians TOGETHER make up the new temple
8. Therefore, their DISUNITY over different spiritual leaders is very destructive

C. God's Spirit Dwells In You

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

1. The indwelling Spirit is the essence of this temple image; it is what makes the temple more than just a dead building

Many Cathedrals and massive church buildings are made of stone and echo with the sounds of your footsteps as you take the tour... given that the gospel has not been preached in many of those places in centuries, they are nothing more than TOMBS spiritually; many of the European churches actually ARE tombs, since they have Lords and Ladies and other key figures buried there

2. But what made the temple of the Jews the meeting place between the people and the living God was his presence by the Holy Spirit
3. The glory-cloud descended into the tabernacle and then the temple showing the presence of God
4. But these were just types and shadows of the reality that was still to come; that reality was brought by Christ
5. When Christ died and rose again, he brought in the era of the New Covenant... the temple would not be merely a physical place where people would go, but a SPIRITUAL REALITY... the unity of God and his people together

John 4:23-24 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

6. The New Covenant temple focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit uniting different people—all of them sinners, all of them divided from each other naturally—making them a new spiritual UNITY in Christ
7. But their sins—prideful arguing and sexual immorality and pagan idolatry—were ripping apart the unity of the temple

D. God's Temple is Sacred

1 Corinthians 3:17 God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

1. Sacred = HOLY, set apart unto God for his personal possession
2. Like God said to Moses

Exodus 3:5 "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

E. So... BE HOLY Because You Are God's Holy Temple

1. The essence of holiness is purity from evil

1 John 1:5 God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

2. Paul will deal with many aspects of the Corinthians' unholy thoughts and practices...
 - a. Sexual immorality in chapter 5, in which he commands them to excommunicate a member who was committing immorality with his father's wife and in chapter 6 not to unite with temple prostitutes
 - b. Marital issues in chapter 7
 - c. Meat sacrificed to idols in chapters 8-10
 - d. Getting drunk at the Lord's Supper in chapter 11... and ETC.
3. But especially here, with their unholy prideful bickering about human teachers and leaders
4. Because God's temple is SACRED and you ARE that temple, you must be holy in all you do

II. Be Warned, for God is Zealous for His Temple

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

- A. Here, Paul WARNS People Who Would Destroy God's Temple... the Church
- B. They Should NOT Underestimate the Zeal God Has for the Purity and Protection of the Church
- C. Who Does Paul Have in Mind?
 1. "If anyone destroys God's church..."
 2. At one level, it is anyone who assaults the church with blows meant to put it to an end... such as vicious persecutors
 - a. There in Corinth, there were many enemies of the gospel who would exert all their power and authority to kill the church
 - b. So also we have today the power of many governments around the world that have set themselves against the church... like the Communist government in China, which is systematically attacking cell churches and imprisoning our brothers and sisters; so also Muslim governments

Every year, Open Doors publishes a "World Watch List" which compiles facts and trends concerning the persecution of Christians worldwide

- Approximately 215 million Christians experience high, very high, or extreme persecution.

- North Korea remains the most dangerous place to be a Christian (for 14 straight years).
- Islamic extremism remains the global dominant driver of persecution, responsible for initiating oppression and conflict in 35 out of the 50 countries on the 2017 list.
- Ethnic nationalism is fast becoming a major driver of persecution.... such as in India

Open Doors noted that India rose to its highest rank ever, No. 15, amid the continued rise of Hindu nationalism. "An average of 40 incidents were reported per month, including pastors beaten, churches burned and Christians harassed," stated Open Doors. "Of the 64 million Christians in India, approximately 39 million experience direct persecution."

- The most violent: Pakistan, which rose to No. 4 on the list for a level of violence "exceeding even northern Nigeria."

God will not sit idly by while governments and movements assault his church...
 "If anyone destroys God's church, God will destroy him."

Book of Revelation:

Revelation 16:4-6 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; ⁶ for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

NOTE: The man who wrote this warning in 1 Corinthians 3:17 was once one of the worst persecutors on earth:

Acts 8:3 Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

On the Road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus confronted Paul and asked him this question:

Acts 9:4-5 "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

Saul's eternity hung in the balance at that moment; Christ could justly have DESTROYED Paul for DESTROYING his bride, the church... but instead, he converted and saved him

So... "If anyone destroys God's church, God will destroy him" could mean simply a warning for persecutors

D. ALSO... Destroy Here Means "Defile"

1. This could be Paul's warning to FALSE TEACHERS in Corinth, and their doctrine which was leading to immorality
2. The defilement here seems to be related to IMPURITY... sins that were polluting the church
3. Christ is zealous that his church be holy
 - a. Twice in his life, at the beginning and end of his public ministry, he made a WHIP and drove out the beasts and moneychangers from the temple... he was burning with ZEAL for the purity of his church
 - b. In Revelation 1, we have this overpowering image... the resurrected, glorified Christ walking amidst seven golden lampstands, representing local churches

Revelation 1:14-16 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

- c. People who are sexually immoral, idolatrous, covetous, leading secret lives are defiling the church
- d. Christ means to purify his church by convicting anyone who is defiling the church and warning them to repent

III. Be Wise, for God Says the World is Foolish

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

- A. "Do not deceive yourselves" is frequently a warning against SINFUL THINKING in the pattern of the WORLD

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

B. Here, Paul warns them against the **WORLDLY, PAGAN, MAN-CENTERED** thinking that has dominated their dispute... “I follow Paul.” “I follow Apollos” “I follow Cephas”

C. Even worse is the pagan thinking about Christ and the cross itself

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing

D. They are seeking to be seen as wise by their unconverted neighbors and family members... and as those unconverted people continue to **MOCK** Christianity and the Christian church, the Christians who want to be seen as **WISE** in this present world will be increasingly tempted to betray Christ

E. To Be Truly Wise in God’s Eyes, We Need to Be Seen as **FOOLISH** in the eyes of the godless in this present age

1. Become a **FOOL** for Christ’s sake; Burn the bridge... make the stand!!
2. Become an intellectual outcast, so that you may become eternally wise in God’s eyes... someday, the gospel will be vindicated

F. God Will Hunt Down the Worldly Wise and Catch Them

1. Paul quotes Job here... to the end that God is actively working in this world to expose the worldly wise as fools
2. He “Catches the wise in their craftiness” pictures God as a **HUNTER**, effectively laying traps for his so-called wise enemies
3. Like when Haman built a gallows for godly Mordecai, and ended up hanging on it himself
4. Like when the Roman Emperors burned Christians on stakes to light their dinner parties, and Christianity ends up conquering the Roman Empire spiritually
5. Like when the Communist party in Eastern Europe tries to stop the flow of Bibles into their countries at the border, and God orchestrates the relentless spread of Christianity behind the Iron Curtain anyway
6. God “catches the wise in their craftiness”...
7. And the Lord has **SEARCHED** the mind of the wise and knows that their thoughts are **EMPTY**

G. **SO... Be TRULY** Wise, and stop trying to imitate and impress your pagan neighbors

IV. Be God-Centered, for God Owns You

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future-- all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God

- A. Paul comes full circle, and finishes his argument against their man-centered mindset, their boasting in human beings
 - 1. In saying “I follow Paul” vs. “I follow Apollos”, they were MAN-CENTERED... boasting in human wisdom, eloquence, power
 - 2. Even worse, they did not realize the true spiritual situation
 - 3. Paul, Apollos, Peter and ALL GODLY TEACHERS are all part of the same Body, sent by the same Lord to benefit the entire body
- B. The Corinthians were LIMITING their blessing
 - 1. The rival factions were saying “I follow Paul, AND NOT Apollos”... “Oh, yeah?? Well I follow Apollos AND NOT Paul”... “Oh, yeah?? Well I follow Peter and NOT EITHER ONE of your heroes!!”
 - 2. But Paul says “You don’t seem to realize! Paul and Apollos and Peter and every other true teacher of the word are ALL yours!!”
 - 3. Every true teacher of the Word of God throughout all of church history belongs to the whole church... and whatever they taught of true doctrine was a GIFT FROM GOD to EVERYONE
 - 4. Different teachers are all PIPELINES of grace from heaven to earth... clean, pure water of grace flows through all of them to every single member of the church
 - 5. Paul and Apollos and Peter and James and Augustine and John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards and John Bunyan and Wesley and Spurgeon... as much as any of them were teaching the truth, they are all pipelines of grace
 - 6. So let’s say “I follow Calvin” **and** “I follow Wesley” as though they are allies for your soul
 - 7. Now... no teacher of the word of God is perfect... everyone needs to have their teaching weighed against the Word, like the Bereans
 - 8. But ALL THINGS ARE YOURS... meaning, all these true teachers are here to serve God’s purpose in your life, namely, your final salvation in Christ
- C. So also Everything that Seems to Be Against you or could cause you trouble

1 Corinthians 3:22 the world or life or death or the present or the future-- all are yours

1. The world may seem to be against your salvation... but it is YOURS in the sense that God is overruling everything in the world for the final salvation of his elect
2. Life is orchestrated by God to serve your salvation... the events that just seem to happen to you are actually designed by God to work together for your final salvation
3. Even death, the final enemy, is actually your servant to bring you from this world of suffering and temptation into the bright eternal joys of heaven
4. Time itself—the present and the future—exists for the elect... it is WHY God allowed history to unfold from Eden till now
5. Parallel texts: Romans 8

Romans 8:28-32 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

See... Just like our text... "All things are YOURS!!" Meaning "All things serve God's ultimate purpose in your life, your final glory in heaven"

Romans 8:38-39 I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

D. And... When All is Said and Done, You Will Realize This:

1 Corinthians 3:23 you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

1. You don't belong to Paul or Apollos or Cephas...
2. You BELONG to Christ... Christ OWNS you

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price.

3. And Christ BELONGS to God, for he is his only begotten Son

4. So STOP BOASTING ABOUT MEN!!

V. Applications

A. Alarm to the Unconverted

1. Do not be deceived by the world's apparent dominant wisdom... that the life of pleasure and power and money is the best way to live; that the cross of Christ is foolish; that Christians are foolish
2. The powerful and influential people of this world may seem so brilliant, but God is going to expose their entire worldview as utter foolishness... for "The fool says in his heart 'There is no God'"
3. Rather this text calls on you to become a fool for Christ... to realize that the truest wisdom in the world is to trust in Christ; even if it means being mocked by your unsaved family, friends, fellow students or employees
4. Come to Christ NOW while there is still time! He is gracious and merciful and will forgive all your sins and give you the gift of eternal life

B. Christians: Meditate Deeply on the Fact that We are TOGETHER the Temple of the Living God

1. We are meant to be together! To be interconnected with each other by the Spirit
2. This means covenant membership in a healthy church, giving and receiving the benefits of spiritual gift ministries
3. This means MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT in the bond of peace
 - a. So, if you have anything against anyone in the church, forgive them; bear with them;
 - b. If anyone has anything against you, go and be reconciled to them

C. Think of All the Symbolism of the Temple

1. The temple was built by materials—stones and timbers—prepared offsite, hewn and polished in another location, so that no tool was heard on the site of the temple; so none of us is worthy in and of ourselves for Christ's temple. We have nothing to offer, but God had to work in us to make us fit for this temple... he cuts, carves, polishes, and works us continually to make us fit for his service
2. The temple is magnificent in beauty... but not because of its physical stature. No, it is was glory that GOD HIMSELF brings to the temple that makes it beautiful. So it is with a believer's soul—it is the radiance of God's indwelling in us by the Spirit that gives us the beauty that attracts Christ to us

3. The temple was sacred to God, a holy place... so must each of us be consecrated to God in holiness; is there anything that is defiling your soul right now? Picture Christ with his whip, driving all uncleanness from the temple; so allow Christ by his Spirit to drive away all defiling thoughts and habits from you

2 Cor. 7:1 let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

4. The temple was a place of sacred sacrifices, costly sacrifices, where those sacrifices were burned as a fragrant offering to God. Now, we are called on to offer pure spiritual sacrifices to God... hearts filled with worship, acts of self-denial in service to others, time/energy/money given in sacrifice to the spread of the gospel
5. The temple was a place of sweet fellowship between God and his people; so also must we be, in intimate fellowship with God and each other; God met with Israel above the mercy seat, where the blood of the animals was poured out... but now, our fellowship is with God and with each other through the blood of Christ
6. The temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations... so also may we pray, give, go for the unreached peoples of the earth