

1Corinthians 3:16-18 "Living Wisely To God's Glory"

As we continue our study this morning it's worth noting that Paul has been trying to help these Corinthian believers to understand that the body of Christ is meant to show forth the unity found in the Spirit. This unity enables the church to accomplish the task Jesus Christ has given us; namely to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and then to translate that grace and knowledge into service for Christ.

The service He calls us to encompasses a wide variety of things from sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ to encouraging each other in the faith. But again, if that unity is disturbed then what the church is left with is confusion and division.

Remember, this is where Paul has been going for the better part of this letter so far. In fact, this is the way he started.

1CO 1:10 "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."

But, we'll also see that though he has much to say to encourage these Christians he never really leaves the theme of division and how that must be overcome in the body of Christ.

1CO 11:17-18 "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it."

1CO 12:24-27 "..... But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

And so, what we see is that since the body of Christ is made up of many parts, each part is important for not only keeping the unity, but in that unity bringing glory to the One who has formed the body, Jesus Christ Himself.

And as we saw last week what makes the unity is how each part is doing the work which is meant to be built upon the foundation, who is Christ.

1CO 3:12-13 "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work."

And so, if we are pursuing the things of the Spirit which entail loving and serving our Lord, then we will find what it means to be united in the Spirit, since we will be more concerned with Christ and His work. And in the process "self" will take more of a back seat to the concern of others and the work of Christ each of us does.

PHI 2:3-5 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:..."

This building, which is secured to the foundation of Christ, is a holy building or as Peter puts it a spiritual house.

1PE 2:4-5 "As you come to him, the living Stone -rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

When we place our relationship to Christ in this setting it takes our salvation to heights which we may have never even considered. It takes it beyond simply being forgiven of our sins on a personal level and puts it into a category of considerable importance as a unified house designed to bring glory to the builder.

It brings into perspective how the builder, God Himself, expects each part to be active and dependent upon Him for the building of this house on the foundation of Christ. And as important as each individual is, it is when the larger picture of the kingdom of God is considered, and our involvement in it, and advancement of it, that we begin to appreciate the love of Christ extended to us.

Paul reflects on this when he wrote to the church in Ephesus.

EPH 3:16-21 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

It is when we dwell on His love for us that we begin to find ourselves wanting to love Him above all things. And that love will be translated into wanting to love our neighbors in a way that encourages their growth and participation in the Kingdom of God to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Hopefully we can begin to see how a proper understanding of the church and its mission broadens our scope of what the body of Christ is all about and the importance of understanding how God views His church, which is you and me in Christ. And so, we come to our text.

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

Here Paul identifies the church as the temple of God. Though later in this letter he will identify the individual believer as the temple of the Holy Spirit, here in our text he is talking about the local body of believers as a collective temple in which the Spirit resides.

Paul brings this out in the second letter to these Corinthians, as well as when he wrote to the Ephesians.

2CO 6:16 "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27)

EPH 2:21-22 "In him (Christ) 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."

God is wanting to dwell among His people so that He may be our God and we may be His people to His glory. This is why I say, Christianity is bigger than just being saved and having a place secured for us in heaven, as glorious as that is. God has a purpose for us in His kingdom.

By the way, it is no coincidence that Paul uses the term holy temple, or temple of God when referring to the church. This is a designation which is used of the temple in Israel during the O.T. period.

The Greek word used here for temple is *naos* and it's in the singular which means that Paul is identifying a group of people as one entity. But, the other interesting thing about this word is that it specifies a particular part of the temple.

If we are talking about the temple complex it would include the outer court as well as the inner court and the Holy of holies. The designation for all of these parts as the temple, in the Greek, is *hieron*. But, in using *naos* it specifically identifies the actual temple or holy of holies in which God manifested Himself in Israel.

This is the temple Solomon spoke of.

1KI 8:20-21 "The LORD has kept the promise he made: I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised, and I have built the temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. 21 I have provided a place there for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with our fathers when he brought them out of Egypt."

What Paul is saying in our text is that the place where God dwells is in the midst of this holy temple. Not a building built by human hands, but in the hearts of individual believers who make up this building we call the church of Christ.

And by the way, this is precisely why the church is not a replacement for Israel, but is rather a fulfillment of the true Israel of God that is demonstrated in a temple that only God can build. The temple in Israel was a temporary shadow of the Holy temple in which the Holy Spirit would reside.

This is the way God views every true church who names the name of Christ and is faithful to represent Jesus Christ according to His word. And so, this designation is given not only to the church in Corinth but to any church in any age. Calvary Chapel Port

Charlotte is viewed by God as a holy temple in which the Spirit of God dwells.

And since that is the case there is nothing insignificant about this work in which the Holy Spirit is leading and directing and guiding. And there is nothing insignificant about the work each individual does in this church to the glory of God. But, it should also encourage all of us to consider how we should be working in this holy temple.

But notice that Paul is reminding these Corinthian believers of something they should already know.

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

Paul is saying that you ought to know this. 'This is something you've known from the beginning as I was with you and taught you these things.' How could he expect them to know otherwise unless they've been taught? I'm sure both he and Apollos spent countless hours going over these things and now Paul reminds them of their status in Christ. "You are God's temple."

But, what Paul is also doing is showing these Corinthian believers that in their behavior, which includes "strife, jealousy, immorality, and permissiveness ....., [they] were desecrating God's temple and, as Paul writes in another epistle, were grieving the Holy Spirit." (Simon Kistemaker)

To desecrate the temple of the living God is an act of destruction and actually undermines the purpose of that holy temple which is to let the world know that God resides there. You see, this is what happens when the body of Christ is not being that light in a dark world.

When the church is not faithfully representing Christ, we not only give a false picture of our Lord, who is the light, but our Lord Himself is grieved and will often take measures to put that church back on the right track.

We see this clearly in the book of Revelation when Jesus Christ addresses the seven churches. They too, were the temple of God where Jesus dwelled but most of them had become complacent to some degree in being that light to the world.

When addressing the church in Ephesus Jesus said, "... These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: (REV 2:1)

He began with an encouragement of how they persevered in many hardships but He closes with these words.

REV 2:4-5 "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

Every church is meant to be a lampstand, a light which represents the light of the world. But if that light will not shine Jesus reserves the right to remove it as being an ineffective temple of God. That doesn't mean He will necessary destroy the individual church, though that is certainly His option, but rather will render it ineffective.

We have seen this on a world-wide scale as many mainline denominations have turned their backs on the truth of the gospel and the word of God. In years gone by many of these churches were pillars of the truth. But today, they are shells of what they used to be as they question the deity of Christ, the validity of the word of God, and purpose to which they were called.

For all intents and purposes Christ has taken their lampstand away and they are only Christian by name. They may boast of having a candle stick but there is no light that it can give off. And in one sense they have desecrated the temple and in so doing destroyed it.

And this actually part of what the Lord prophesied regarding the destruction of Jerusalem which also points to the end times and how the very church He established will, like Israel of old, turn away from the truth of God's word.

**Matthew 24:9-11** <sup>9</sup> "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. <sup>10</sup> "*At that time many will fall away* and will betray one another and hate one another. <sup>11</sup> "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.

This falling away is also mentioned by Paul when writing to Timothy.

**1 Timothy 4:1** <sup>NAU</sup> But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

He would describe this same trend as the apostasy of the church as he tied it to the second coming of Christ.

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-4** <sup>NAU</sup> Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, <sup>2</sup> that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. <sup>3</sup> Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come unless the apostasy comes first*, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, <sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Back to our text.

1CO 3:17 "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."

Here the temple being referred to is identified as both a collective group and individuals within that group. But notice that Paul says that if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. And the reason given is that what God has deemed holy must be honored as holy or set apart.

The word destroy in our text is actually derived from the same Greek word which means to defile or corrupt. And so, those who would cause division with false teaching or with behavior which lead others astray, in effect, destroy or defile the temple of God by creating an environment of corrupting it.

The warning given here in our text may be directed to those unbelievers within the church, but in all likelihood it could very well be directed against believers who are self-seeking and going astray in the flesh as they are causing divisions within the body of Christ.

If unbelievers are being addressed the warning is clear. God's wrath will visit them as they continue on a path of destroying or corrupting the temple for which Christ died. If believers who have gone astray are being addressed this warning should shake them to the core as the Spirit who resides in them convicts them of their sin and prompts them to repent.

Again, keep in mind that the imagery Paul uses here of the temple is used deliberately. The imagery goes back to the law of how this temple was to be treated and the consequences of anyone defiling it in any way.

LEV 15:31 "You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my tabernacle which is among them."

They would die if they tried to approach the tabernacle in their uncleanness. And in like manner, those who would defile the tabernacle of God, or the temple as it's used here in our text, will not go unpunished.

It is a serious matter for people to oppose the temple of God on earth as it is revealed in the church. God takes it personally. We need only look to Paul and his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus to see this.

ACT 9:3-5 "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied."

When he persecuted the church of Christ he was persecuting Christ Himself to the degree that Christ is in the church as He dwells among us in the Spirit. It's not a hypothetical dwelling, but a real dwelling as He abides with us. This is why our Lord calls His church the temple of God.

Now, as we come back to our text, Paul nails down one of the reasons for divisions which lend themselves to defiling or destroying the body of Christ.

1CO 3:18 "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."

Here is kind of a play on words in the sense that Paul compares the wisdom of the world to being deceived. But in pointing out this deception he essentially says that you solve the deception, or you become wise, by becoming a fool.

A fool in what sense? A fool to the wisdom of the world. In other words, you relinquish your worldly wisdom by acknowledging that

such wisdom is really foolishness that leads to destruction or corruption.

There is a tendency to place intellectual worldly wisdom above the revealed will of God found in His word. Remember, it is the word of God that nourishes us to become mature believers thus promoting an environment where the body of Christ grows and the temple then grows into a spiritual house to the glory of God.

If we think ourselves wise, simply with knowledge, then we've actually become fools if that knowledge supersedes the word of God or the will of God; fools in the sense that we know better than God. And in this way we deceive ourselves.

This too is important to consider because deception is one of the main weapons the enemy uses to try and disrupt the body of Christ. I've actually had Christians tell me that believers can't be deceived because we have the Spirit.

The moment we entertain that idea we have already been deceived. We are not above deception. Why do you think Paul spends so much time warning against false teachers if we can't be deceived? How can we possibly grieve the Holy Spirit of God unless we've been deceived into following a path of sin?

Listen to what James says about the word of God and the way in which believers are to respond to the word.

JAM 1:22 "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

James is saying that Christians can actually be in the word of God on a daily basis and study it and meditate upon it. They can gather all sorts of knowledge concerning the word and even be able to relay that information to other Christians. But, if that's as far as it goes; only being a hearer of the word without living out that word, then that Christian has become deceived.

As James says later, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder." (JAM 2:17-19)

James is saying we must be doers of the word, not hearers only who delude ourselves. Faith must have feet and we must walk

according to the path which has been set before us. Your word O Lord is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

There is so much worldly wisdom today which has infiltrated the church and has defiled the temple of God. And yet, many in the church have baptized it with a few bible verses and tried to justify their acceptance of it.

Most seminaries today teach some form of evolution as the way in which God brought everything into existence. They call it Theistic evolution. I suppose they think that when you put the term Theistic in front of evolution it makes it okay.

I've been reading a fascinating book called "Darwin's Black Box". It's written by an unbeliever who is a scientist and though he is not sympathetic toward the biblical explanation of the creation of the world through God calling it into existence, he does raise some serious questions of the whole system of evolution.

What makes his approach so different is that he deals with the issue of evolution on a molecular level. He doesn't talk about animals taking quantum leaps from one species to another, he addresses the molecular mechanics of how that could happen gradually.

His analysis is that it can't. He says, "as strange as it may seem, modern biochemistry has shown that the cell is operated by machines -- literally, molecular machines." (Michael J. Behe)

What he suggests is that these machines are an irreducible complex system, which means that every part is essential for the functioning of that machine, and that this machine cannot be put together gradually.

He uses the mousetrap as an example of an irreducible complex system. If any one part of the mousetrap is missing it will never work. If your life depended on catching mice with such a trap you would die waiting for it to assemble itself over a long period of time.

It must be complete and functioning by day one. The same is true of our biological make-up. Something we all take for granted is our body's ability to clot blood. The biological mechanical complexity of our cells is beyond our imagination. But that system of being able to clot blood is irreducibly complex. It must be in tact completely from day one to be able to work. To form over

time would ensure any species that it would bleed to death before ever being able to evolve.

The saying is true of the scientific community which will not admit these facts, "professing to wise they became fools."

But this is true of other areas as well where sections of the church have adapted to fit its growing and evolving need to keep up with the wisdom of the world. Men like Freud, Jung, Maslov and others who have developed the system of psychology have essentially denied God's existence and instead have given man the ability explain his behavior and the solution to it with wisdom that does not take sin into account.

But whenever you start with a system that deals with the spiritual problem of man and then determines that it can be solved with human wisdom you have a system which is doomed to failure from the beginning. To hang bible verses on it makes it no less deceptive.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump and so to think that you can have "Christian psychology" is like saying we can have "Christian paganism". The two don't mix any better than oil and water. What does light have in common with darkness?

1CO 3:18 "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."

The world, and even many in the church, would take issue with such an approach to counseling, for example, but I would rather be a fool with the word of God as my standard for dealing with man's spiritual problems, than an Einstein using a godless system which excuses man's sin as nothing more than a disease.

The common expression that many use today, "What would Jesus do?", leads me to the answer to such wisdom that the world and much of the church has adopted as it relates to this issue of psychology.

Jesus would direct people to the only source who not only deals with the outward manifestations of man's sin, but gives the real solution to it; deliverance from the penalty and power of sin through Christ's shed blood and resurrection.

It is the word of God that gives such wisdom that the world could never comprehend, and it is the word of God that deals directly

with the problems we encounter in this world. Peter addresses this in his second letter to the church.

2PE 1:3-4 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

Furthermore, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Why give in to the wisdom of the world when you have the mind of the Creator of the universe on every issue that deals with the heart of man and where every issue of the heart of man has as its root problem sin? Praise God sin can be dealt with.

We'll look more at this problem of the world's wisdom next week. But just remember this: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (JAM 1:5)

Where is the wise man? He is the one who sees his sin and his need for the Savior and finds grace and mercy, compassion and forgiveness at the foot of the cross.