

The Building as Temple

I. - The Individual Temple

“Therefore then you are no longer strangers and outsiders but you are fellow citizens with the saints and dwellers in the House of God, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone, in whom all the building, having been fitted together grows unto a holy temple in the Lord, in whom also you have been built together unto a dwelling place of God in the Spirit”
(Ephesians 2:19-22).

It is commonly known that we are God’s building; though not so commonly known how intricate that building is. Nor is it commonly known or at least understood, that we are not just a building, as something of a service center, but we are a temple—indeed, a holy temple. It is also commonly known that our bodies are individual temples of the Spirit, but invariably seen from the perspective of the flesh, as a vessel, which must be kept clean and pure, since it houses the very Spirit of God. In many respects, it is true that our physical person is merely a temporary dwelling place of the Spirit. However there is a much deeper sense in which we are also centers of worship, both individually (I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19) and collectively, as He indicated to the Ephesians in this text.

The Old Testament tabernacle established in the wilderness was a very carefully designed and intricate type of both the individual temple and the collective one. All the furnishings of the tabernacle together with the building and the courtyard were all types of Christ primarily, both as to His attributes, as well as to the nature of His relationship to us. A complete discussion of this as well as of the entire sacrificial system and the priesthood in its typical symbolism is found in the book of Hebrews. In the 9th chapter we are told that these were all shadows of the things to come, but Christ is the reality of these things. The tabernacle was of course the original structure, which followed a very carefully proscribed pattern, but was temporary as the worship center in the wilderness. Subsequently, the temple was built by Solomon as a more permanent structure (though even such permanence was transient); and was followed by the temples of Zerubbabel and Herod. Each of these temples followed the pattern of the tabernacle. Thus, when Paul speaks of a temple, he is employing the same types and symbols as were used in the tabernacle in the wilderness. And thus we have the liberty of employing the same types and symbols in connection with our identification with the temple. This is true both collectively and individually.

As individuals, our spirits are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and He establishes a worship center within us. This worship center functions continuously, in spite of the vacillations and transiency of our fleshly selves. Thus, whether or not we feel close to Christ or feel confidence or peace, we are dealing with a fleshly emotion. The reality of our relationship to Christ is functioning by the Holy Spirit within us, in spite of these external, fleshly factors. Paul establishes this point very clearly in Romans 7, where he is reflecting on his fleshly inadequacies. At the same time, he makes a very strong point of the work of the Spirit within in Romans 8, and makes no distinction whatever as to a difference in his spiritual state over chapter 7. Some have made such a distinction, but

there is no foundation for it whatsoever. (A complete discussion of this issue is given in the author's Commentary on Romans, which is available upon request). The fact that the Holy Spirit is functioning within us in spite of our vacillating fleshly state, is confirmed by the fact that we care about our fleshly state. With Paul, we want to do what is best and right, but we do not always do that, because we are humans. The general experience of Christians everywhere, including the believers in the early Church, is that the flesh is a problem throughout our earthly lives. If the Holy Spirit were not working with us, we would not care.

The constant interactions that we have with Christ through the Spirit in the process of His communing with God on our behalf, is typified in the continual burnt offering and the altar of incense in the early sacrificial system. The continual burnt offering typified our constant sense of the need of atonement in the face of our own human inadequacy. The altar of incense reflects the continuous intercession between the Spirit of Christ within us and His encountering of God for us (Romans 8:26). There is never a moment when the Spirit of Christ within us is not in touch with God for us (Romans 8:26). Further, the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies is the constant reminder of Christ as the "propitiation" for our sins. The veil of the temple between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies typified the barrier between God and humans, because of sin, but for us the veil was rent asunder in the sacrifice of Christ and we have continual mercy and forgiveness. Other furnishings in the temple include the "table of show bread" or the "presentation loaves." Historically these were identified with the twelve tribes of Israel and included them in the worship implications of the tabernacle. Typically, they reflect Christ as the "Bread of Life," nourishing His people. The nourishment, of course, is symbolic of the nourishment of the Spirit, fulfilled in the New Testament. There was also the Seven Branch Lampstand or *Menorah*. This, of course, typified Christ as the light of the world. And, once again, it is a matter of the Spirit. As Paul tells the Corinthians, "*God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of [presence of] Jesus Christ*" (II Corinthians 4:6). The mind understands obscurely, but the presence of Christ in our spirits assures a light that goes beyond human capacity.

Furthermore, there is the altar of incense. This typifies the constant communion between our spirits and the Spirit of God. In the days of the tabernacle and the temple, prior to the coming of Christ, the flow of communion in the Spirit was only symbolic. After Pentecost, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us insures a constant communication between our spirit and God's. This connection is true in spite of the vacillations of the fleshly mind and emotions. Our feelings, which are part of the flesh, are always subject to change. If we measured the presence of Christ in our spirits by the attitudes in our flesh, we would be on a continual "roller coaster." Of course, many believers are on such a roller coaster, failing to comprehend the difference between the flesh and the spirit. This brings about much doubt and discouragement, often causing such ones to harbor doubts and fears as to their salvation.

Thus, in the Holy Place of our spirits we have a center of worship which is in constant touch with Christ, in spite of the conditions of the flesh that surround us. The flesh is only a cocoon or vehicle for the Spirit of Christ within us. It is subject to much battering by the world around us in general and Satan in

particular. When Jesus encountered the woman of Samaria and she enquired of him as to the circumstances of worship, He said to her, *They that worship the Father must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.* And thus He set the stage for the inner temple of worship, which would be realized after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Paul sets the stage for the concept of the individual temple in his letter to the Corinthians. He said to them *You are the temple of God . . .* He did not say you will be the temple of God if you do everything right and keep yourselves pure. On the other hand, he urged the Corinthians to watch their conduct, since they were the temple of God. He never suggested that if they didn't behave themselves, they would cease to be the temple of God. Once again, the ultimate test of the presence of the Spirit within is not flawless conduct, but the desire to have the Spirit within. If the Spirit were not with us, we would not have such a desire.

Thus it is for the individual temple. Next month we will discuss the collective temple which Paul is referring to specifically in Ephesians 2.

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