

God's Sixth Temple: Individual Christians

Introduction

We have seen how God created the universe and humankind as his temple; the world and mankind was made to be the place where God and man could be 'at ease' with each other. Moral darkness entered the world and mankind, so that the 'natural' presence of God was no longer there. There is always a sense of distance.

For meeting with God, man needed *liturgy* with sacrificial worship at the heart. There was a price to be paid for man and God coming somewhat close to each other. The stone temple in Jerusalem was the most important place where God could be met with. Israel, however, always understood that this was not yet the final 'resting place' of God.



Jesus presented himself as the true Temple of God. He truly united God and mankind in himself; He was the perfect sacrifice; He led the true liturgy as the eternal High Priest. He came to restore the Universe and the New Mankind to be God's temple again.

The Church is so intimately connected with Christ that it can also truly be called the New Creation, the New Mankind, and it is the Temple of God. He is present among his people; in the church, people can be reconciled with God; there, they can be 'at ease' with God again. Howev-

er, not only the community of the Church is God's temple; the individual members in the church are also, each individually, God's temple.

1 Corinthians 6:12-25

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! [...] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you.’ Paul addresses individual Christians here - the ‘you’ is singular. He makes a few statements that are important for understanding his views.

First, he makes clear that the body is important, by pointing to the fact that the body will be raised from the dead just as Jesus was raised from the dead. This is in line with the Jewish view of man, which does not look down on physicality. The Greek culture of those days looked with contempt at the body as the prison of the human spirit.

‘The human body is made for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body’, shows that our body is highly important.



Paul also says that our bodies are ‘members of Christ’, meaning, they are part of the body of Christ. Note, again, that the body is important. We belong to Christ with spirit *and* body.

Then Paul says that our bodies are not our own; we have been bought by the death of Christ. This includes the body; He owns it.

The central concept in this part is that our bodies are called a “temple of the Holy Spirit within you.” After Paul had first stressed that our physical body is important for God, his statement about our body being a temple of God can only mean that Paul thinks here in very physical terms. Our body is not a prison of the Spirit, but the temple of the Spirit. He is present ‘within you’.

Paul does not write this to the Corinthians to teach them Christian Anthropology 101, but he wants to convince them to not engage in temple

prostitution in pagan temple: ‘Glorify God in your body’. Some people suggested that temple prostitution is no problem for Christians because sexuality it is like food, the body needs it and so what. It is the spirit that is truly important. Paul flatly and strongly negates this ‘Greek’ concept.



Jewish view

The Jewish website ‘My Jewish Learning’ speaks of the Jewish view of the body:

Judaism teaches that the body and soul are separate yet indivisible partners in human life. Rather than imprisoning or corrupting the soul, the body is

a God-given tool for doing sacred work in the world. It requires protection, care, and respect, because it is holy.¹

Given this Jewish view of the inseparability of body and soul, I would suggest that when Paul speaks of our body being the temple of the Spirit, we should not think in 'mechanical' terms, as if with our body he means our bones, our nerves, our sinews, our lungs, our skin. It does include our soul. I suggest that the term 'your body is a temple' should be understood to mean: 'Your whole individual being is a temple.' But important to take note, it certainly includes our physical existence.

Halakhah (Jewish law) teaches us that the paramount holiness of human life extends to the human body. *Mitzvot* (commandments) cover mundane bodily matters such as clothing, eating, and sexual habits precisely because care of the body is also care for the soul. Healthcare is the maintenance and upkeep of the soul's home. Torah law prohibits mutilations of the body, including tattooing (Leviticus 19:27-28, Deuteronomy 23:3). Not only medical but even hygienic treatments are often elevated to the level of commandment. Maimonides deemed it obligatory to provide proper sustenance and respectful clothing for the body.

Judaism offers an optimistic view of life, the union of body and soul. The body is a gift from God to be protected and tended. Only with our pure, holy bodies can we bring the commitments and truths of our souls into every action.²

That is exactly Paul's point. To subject our body to anything that is against the will of God, like sexual immorality, is unacceptable as it damages the temple and dishonors God who lives in this temple.

And who can separate body from soul anyway? Modern psychology underlines that we can speak separately of body and soul, but they are

¹www.myjewishlearning.com/article/body-soul/ [accessed 15 June 2015]

² www.myjewishlearning.com/article/body-soul/ [accessed 15 June 2015]

intimately interconnected. What we do with our body is important for God, as he inhabits our whole being, our life.



Can we therefore extend the concept of God living ‘in us’ by saying that he inhabits our whole social life? Western individualism was unknown to the writers of the Bible; they would never dream of thinking of man, or woman, as the hyper-individual that seems to be the image of man nowadays. Man was always seen in his relationships - in the totality of his social life. I suggest that this is the meaning of the idea that we are a

Temple of the Spirit. God has come to dwell in the totality of our existence.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In this passage, the Christian is compared again with a temple - but now with a temple of Christ. Christ lives ‘in me’, Paul says. The Apostle calls us a temple *of the Spirit* in 1 Cor 6, and now a temple *of Christ*. In 1 Corinthians 3:16, when he speaks of the community of the church, he says: “Do you not know that you are a temple *of God* and that *the Spirit of God* dwells in you?”³ For Paul it seemed easy to switch between speaking of God, Jesus and the Spirit in regard to us, His temple; we are, really, a temple of the Holy Trinity.

³ See also: “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”, Philippians 2:13

Romans 8:9-11

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.



Note again, how Paul speaks both of Christ and the Spirit living in us, as exchangeable expressions.

And see how for Paul, there is no distinction between belonging to Christ, and having the indwelling of the Spirit. A Christian has the Spirit living in him or her, without any doubt. A Christian is a temple of God.

And vice-versa. By the the Spirit in us, we are assured that God is our Father, and therefore that we are heirs with Christ. Everything that Christ ‘owns’, is ours.

It is also the Spirit in us who also motivates us inwardly to live a life worthy of God.

How did we become a Temple of the Spirit?

We became a Temple of the Spirit when we became part of (the body of) Christ. On the day of Pentecost, when Jesus sent his Spirit to live in the Temple of the church, Peter said this to the mass of guilt-ridden Jews:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who



received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.⁴

The key words are: repent and be baptized. This is the practical language of Peter on the day of Pentecost, to the crowd of non-Christians. To the Christians in Ephesus Paul, about 20 years later, gives a more theological explanation to how Christians have become a Temple of the Spirit. He wrote,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.⁵



The key word in this passage is ‘in Christ’ or ‘in Him’. By being ‘in Him’, all things

⁴ Acts 2:36-41

⁵ Ephesians 1:3-14

that belong to Christ, now also belong to us. “In him you [...] when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.” The Spirit has come into our lives, we have become a temple of God, when we ‘entered into (the body of) Jesus Christ’, the true Temple of God. This entrance into Jesus Christ, the true Temple, occurs at the moment of baptism and faith, as Peter said in Acts 2.

Individual, not individualistic

The purpose of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you, is to build you up in the body of Christ to the glory of God. He therefore works in you:

- 1 He empowers ([Micah 3:8](#)).
- 2 He sanctifies ([Rom. 15:16](#)).
- 3 He comforts ([John 14:16-26](#)).
- 4 He gives joy ([Rom. 14:17](#)).
- 5 He gives discernment ([1 Cor. 2:10-16](#)).
- 6 He bears fruit ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)).
- 7 He gives gifts ([1 Cor. 12:3-11](#)).

The fact that each individual believer is a temple of God, is not an individualistic matter. We are a temple because we are related to Jesus Christ, the ultimate Temple.

In his first letter, Peter speaks about us being part of the Temple, Jesus Christ, and that we, each individually, are ‘little temples’:

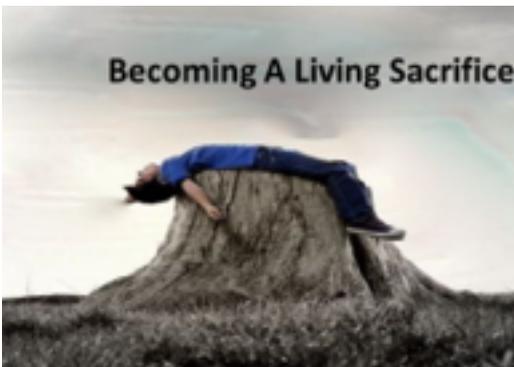


As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Each Christian is part of the Temple, (the church of) Jesus Christ. The Spirit is at work in each of us - we are all 'living stones' for the building of the spiritual house - the temple of God. That is, the body of Jesus Christ, yes, Jesus Christ himself. All Christians together are a holy priesthood, and each Christian individually is therefore, a priest. The task of the priest is to bring spiritual sacrifices.

The Old Testament stone temple and its temple service is an example for us individually. The New Testament uses its imagery to describe what the Christian life should be like. God has given his Spirit in us, to serve him as holy priest with spiritual sacrifices. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul summarizes this:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.



Notice that Paul speaks of the need for us to present our bodies to God. They are to be a living sacrifice for God; that is the manner in which we are to worship Him. Paul uses temple-language to encourage us to make ourselves available for the service of God.

Conclusions

Every Christian who has been baptized and who believes in Jesus Christ is a Temple of God. The Spirit lives 'in' such a person. I think it is proper to say that the Holy Spirit of God 'inhabits' our life: our physical life as well as our soul. Or maybe it is proper to say: the Spirit dwells in our whole being - physical, mental, social.

Our bodies are crucial for God; they are to be treated with great care. Both in the moral sense we have to take care of it, and also health-wise. It is (part of) the Temple of God and the temple deserves great care.

'The body as a temple' helps us to not glorify and worship the body. It deserves attention, but not as if it is autonomous. It is an instrument for the service and worship of God.

We are, each individually, called to live for God by making our whole being available to God as a spiritual sacrifice. This means, we endeavor to do what is good, acceptable and perfect in the eyes of God.



We are, each individually, compared with the Temple, with the sacrifices of the Temple, and with the priests in the Temple. We saw exactly the same when we dis-

cussed Jesus as the temple of God. By our baptism and our faith in him, we have become part of (the body of) Christ, and we are so connected with him, that what He is, we are.

