

The Temple of God

By

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Jesus shocked the religious world when He claimed, “One greater than the temple is here” (Mt. 12:6). He sent priests and Pharisees into spasms when He predicted that the temple would be destroyed so that “there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Mt. 24:2).

The destruction of the temple in 70 AD, precisely fulfilling Christ’s predictions, had implications far beyond the fact of judgment upon the Jews for their rejection of God. Its meaning is significant today as applied to three major problems: The effort to restore national Israel; The division of the church over methods of worship and loyalty to human institutions; and: The limitation of worship to the Sunday church service.

The first temple, built by Solomon, God destroyed by the arm of Babylon because of idolatry. The last temple, built under King Herod, was destroyed by Roman armies in 70 AD, because the Jews rejected Christ, their King. This destruction signaled the end of the national status of God’s people. The temple was the center of national law, politics and economics. The government of Israel was executed through the law as applied by the priests. Without the temple and priesthood the government no longer existed. “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12). And the priesthood was changed, “Christ having become a high priest of the good things to come, though the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands...” (Heb. 9:11).

Never again were God’s people to be localized, nationalized and held together by a political, economic or racial power. Henceforth men of “every tribe, and language, and people, and nation” were to flow into the Kingdom of Christ, for His Kingdom is not national or racial, but spiritual, based upon faith in Him and not upon any fleshly considerations.

Equally significant, the destruction of the temple marked a change in the system of worship. The temple was the focal point of religion and the center of worship. There the priests carried out their duties in making intercession for the people. There the sacrifices were slain and the blood carried into the Holy of Holies to be offered to God upon the mercy seat. The temple was the manifestation of God. Yet Jesus said, “the hour comes, when neither in this mountain (Samaria), nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father...when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such does the Father seek to be his worshippers” (John 4:21, 23). The Jerusalem temple was to be replaced by another temple. The tabernacle and the temples had been designed to typify the spiritual house of God. The prophet Amos had predicted that the “tabernacle of David” would be raised up to receive the saved of the heathen. In Acts 15:13–19 James declared that this prophecy was fulfilled in the church, the spiritual house of God.

Christ still dwells in a temple, but He “dwells not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). The hand-made temple has been replaced by that created by God, the human temple. “You also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5). The earthly stones are dead and rejected, replaced by living souls. “And know

you not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you?" (I Cor. 6:19, 3:16–17).

This is the temple "built up" by Christ for it is Christ who transforms and gives life to the new creature; it is He who "adds" to the church living stone upon living stone. And in each stone Christ dwells by the Spirit; thus, the temple is both the individual saint and the collective body of Christ, the whole church.

So it is written "speaking the truth in love (we) may grow up in all things unto Him, who is the head, even Christ from whom" and "in whom every building, fitly framed together grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for an habitation of God in the spirit" (Eph. 4:15, 2:21–22).

The church is the temple because the church is people, redeemed believers in whose individual bodies the spirit of God dwells. Not that we meet together in order that he may come and be in our midst, but He is in our midst when we meet because *He is already in us before we come together*. When we say church we do not mean the building where we meet, but the redeemed persons. For the spirit dwells in living stones, not in the mortar nor the stained glass windows, nor the hymnals. Individually each Christian is a temple of God and therefore all Christians, either locally or universally, make up the temple "For an habitation of God in the spirit."

A host of people cannot pray down the Holy Spirit nor entice Christ into their midst through speech and song and prayer. He is there because he is in the temple, the person, and not because of the manipulation and stimulation of emotions. Individually Christ is in you and in me, and we make up His temples. Collectively we make up the one grand Body of Christ, His Temple.

Therefore the temple is people, and the people are the church. "It is a church whose existence does not depend on form, ceremonies, cathedrals, chapels, pulpits, fonts, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, magistrates, or any act of favor whatsoever from the hand of man." Its existence depends on Christ and the presence of His spirit. There is no necessity for any organization such as a denomination with earthly headquarters or a World Council of Churches nor a Papacy and priesthood, nor all the distinctive human creeds, councils and official decrees. However prestigious they may sound to the carnally minded, they cannot add to the body of Christ, but actually weaken it and diminish the true glory belonging to Him.

The temple was the place of worship. Under the Old Covenant the sacrifice was slain in the temple courtyard and the blood was carried into the Holy of Holies. Destruction of the temple marked the end of dead sacrifices, Christ having been offered once for all to put away all blood sacrifices forever (Heb. 9:26, 10:10, 14). Therefore, we are commanded to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service" (Rom. 12:1). Truth worship, therefore, is not limited to a "church service" but is the perpetual rendering to God our lives in the true temples of our own bodies; thus is fulfilled Christ's promise of the time when men would not worship in the Jerusalem temple but in spirit and in truth.

There are rumors that have been spread around that the Jews are planning to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. For what purpose? It can never function as the Temple even if duplicated in exact detail; there can never again be a sacrifice made to God other than that which has been offered "once for all." The city of Jerusalem was already under condemnation and the Temple doomed when Christ died; therefore He was sacrificed

outside the city gates indicating disassociation with both the city and the Temple. His death was the culmination of all sacrifices, for in His death He was undergoing the penalty for sins of all God's people of all ages. Yet His death had no connection with the Temple inside the city walls. His sacrifice invalidated all other blood sacrifices forever. "Christ entered in once for all into the Holy place, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). Hence there can never be another temple for the offering of sacrifices.

The assembly of Christians, the collective body and therefore the universal temple, remains the temple when disbursed as when assembled; only the activity and purpose are different. The assembly gathers for necessary teaching, for mutual edification, for prayer and for communion. Not only is this meeting necessary for our growth in Christ, but it is expressly commanded by our Lord: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking our own assembling together" (Heb. 10:24-25). The Christian who is host to the spirit of God throughout his daily service will not seek an excuse from the public assembly of the faithful; rather he will eagerly come to it to receive strength and share his joy in Christ. He needs no entertainment, spectacular displays of talent, nor appeal of those who receive the glory of the world to draw him to the assembly. We **gather** to worship because we are already worshipping individually. We are drawn together by the sheer love of the One who indwells us as separate beings.

The issue is not the order of service on Sunday—what must be done or what must not be done in the assembly. Of course, there must be no violation of Christ's commands at any time. But the temple of God is not the church house and worship is not limited to the scheduled hour of assembly.

God destroyed the temple but raised up Christ to live forever. He also "raised us up with him and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).

Therefore, we are to offer our own bodies as living sacrifices and the "sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name" (Heb. 13:15). It is the kind of worship, daily service to God in all of life and the voicing of praise to Him in all circumstances, which God desires and demands. That which is to be manifested to the world is not in the form of fine architecture, ornate buildings and spectacular programs, but rather that we "become blameless and harmless children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

When John saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, the city of the temple, coming down out of heaven from God, it did not appear as so many buildings, but as the redeemed people, "made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Re. 21:2). This is the true temple, the spiritual house of God, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

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