

Title: Spirit-Driven Ministry  
Text: 1 Corinthians 3.16-17  
Theme: Be careful how you treat the Church.  
Series: 1 Corinthians #14  
Prop Stmt.

“If I had to do it all over again.” Have you ever said those words? Who hasn’t? Those sound like the words of regret or even resignation, don’t they? But they don’t have to be. They can be words of learning, wisdom and a renewed determination. You really ought to know that this series in 1 Corinthians is turning me inside out. These passages are really challenging me in how we function as a church, so much so, that I said to someone this week that back when I graduated from college, I knew a whole lot more about the ministry than I do now. If I had to do it all over again, I would change some things. But I cannot go back and do it all over again. I can only go forward. I pray that you will go forward with me. This book is a call to the church to be a church. It is a call for us to act upon the gospel that we profess to believe. It is a call for us to intentionally and consistently live like Christians. We are not where we need to be. There are some changes that we need to make in our lives and in our church. The elders have been talking about some of these and we certainly do not have all of the details worked out, but some of our discussion I want to share with you tonight. I just want you to know that personally I listen to the Word I preach. The elders/leaders listen to the Word, examine our lives and examine this church in its light and seek to ask ourselves the hard questions. If we really believe the Bible, then when you study a passage like this, you are left with no other choice than to stop and carefully look at who you are and what you are doing and why you are doing it.

Observations about the Text:

The words that are used (vv.16-17):

These two verses clearly emphasize God (5x), temple (4x), and you (4x). Just from a quick read it is very, very clear that God is serious about church. God is very, very serious about this business of how you treat each other, and how you treat the church.

The question that is asked (v.16):

Ten times in this letter Paul asks this question. “Hey! Don’t you guys know this?” It is more than saying, “I know that you know this because I taught you this.” His point is, do you not realize the implications of this? Are you not connecting the dots?

The warning that is given (v.17):

If you destroy God’s temple, God will destroy you, because God’s temple is sacred, but do not forget – you (together) are that sacred temple.

## **1. Who are We?**

Earlier in this chapter, (5-9) the church is likened to a field, where the leaders are the farmers, but God is the owner. Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase. God is the Hero. Then (10-15), the church is likened unto a structure that is built upon the foundation of Christ. Without the foundation of the gospel, there is no church, even if it is a religious organization. With the right foundation, it is very important that those who build on it, build in a manner that is consistent with the gospel. Theoretically, we would probably all nod our heads in agreement with that. However, when I start to apply this, then you find out if you really believe this or not. ...

In verses 16-17 Paul uses a 3<sup>rd</sup> picture to illustrate the church. Here he calls the church a temple. You are God's temple. Now, look at this carefully. In this passage, is Paul saying that your physical body is the temple of God? Read the text to yourself. Do you see anywhere in this passage where he is saying that your physical body is the temple of or the dwelling place of God? The answer is NO! Not in this passage. He does however, teach that later on in chapter 6. (Look at 6.18-20) There He makes it clear that because God's Spirit lives in you, you are not to contaminate your body with sexual sin. But that is not his point here. Here he is speaking to us as a group. Don't you know that all together you make up God's Temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

### **A. We are God's Temple.**

Again, God is the owner. As a group we do not have the liberty to do whatever it is that we want to do. We are God's Temple. Now, compared to some of the grand temples in Corinth and of course the incredible temple in Jerusalem, which at the writing of this epistle was still standing, this statement may seem a little odd. These people, like many today, were used to thinking that shrines, or temples, or mosques, or cathedrals were holy places. Think of it. What do you see when you walk into shrines? You see the image of the idol or the god that is being worshiped. What do you see when you walk into cathedrals? You see images depicting the god who is being worshiped. OK, hold the phone for a minute, let's make certain that we connect the dots here. What do you see when you come into the temple of the Living God? Hold on to that question for a minute. What is God's Temple? You are God's Temple. What are people supposed to see when they are around us? They are supposed to see God. We are called to show people God. How do we do that? We do that through what we say, and through what we do. God always acts in a manner that is consistent with who He is. We don't. We have to work on it. We have to help each other. But it is absolutely critical that we give careful attention to this because, we are God's temple. God loves the church and has chosen the church as the means by which He reveals Himself to this world.

You are God's Temple because...

### **B. We are indwelt by God's Spirit.**

We are God's temple because we are indwelt by God's Spirit. God's Spirit is the reason why we are spiritually alive. This is the same picture that Peter uses in 1 Peter 2.5 where he says, "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." What makes us a living stones? The Holy Spirit makes us living stones. The Spirit is the mortar that holds us together, and the life that pulses through us. The Holy Spirit is the key to positional and then functional unity in the body of Christ.

Only when you come to faith in Christ are you put in a positional sense into the temple. Only when you come to faith in Christ are you then set upon the foundation and become one of the living stones. So, ALREADY you are the temple. But NOT YET are you living in a manner that is consistent with how you are called. We are indwelt by God's Spirit. God lives within us. God has invested His very self into us. Do you think God takes our life and our part in His temple to be a serious issue? More than we can hardly imagine. We are the place where God dwells. We are the place where God takes up His residence and makes Himself known to the world.

Do you get it now? If Pastor Jerry began to teach that Jesus was only a man and was not God, we would have to address that immediately. If Pastor Fred began to teach that God used to be a man and because he was a really good man, he evolved into a god, we would have to address that. If one of our teachers began to teach that Jesus did not really die, but only fainted on the cross and was revived in the tomb, we would have some serious heresy on our hands. But, what if a husband and wife in the church are living separate lives, divorced or not simply because they just could not get along? We were going in two different directions. We should never have gotten married in the first place.

What if one person in the church is bitter and resentful at another person? Let's say that you are bitter at me. In your heart you hold me at a distance, or vice versa, in my heart I am doing the same to you. Whether it is the couple that is living on two different planets or a fractured relationship in the church, or competition between people (as in Corinth), the result is, the temple is being pitted against itself. The unthinkable is taking place. The church is attempting to turn God against Himself, which He will not do.

## 2. **What are you Doing?**

There are some things that will not be revealed until the Day (v.13). We do not know with certainty or with precision, which leaders are doing things basically for selfish reasons and which ones are earnestly seeking to pursue the honor of Christ. We may have our suspicions, but the Day will reveal it. The works of believers will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and that is part of what motivates us to live carefully. But, even though there is a Judgment that is in the future, these verses (16-17) warn of a judgment that can happen right now! Clearly, while Paul spoke to them as a whole, and as a group he viewed them as followers of Christ, he also knew that it was very possible that there were certain individuals who were not followers of Christ.

### A. **Are you tearing the church down?**

The language here is as serious as any in the Bible. If you destroy the church, God will destroy you. This is not like the warning in v.15, where the builder who used inferior materials narrowly escapes with his life, this is a major warning. This is Annanias and Sapphira stuff. Now, you may think, "Wait a minute." Didn't Jesus say that the gates of hell could not prevail against the church, how could someone destroy the church? Jesus was clearly speaking in Matthew 16.18 of the church as a whole, or what is called the universal church. This passage in 1 Corinthians 3 is dealing with the local church. It is true that no one can destroy God's church in this world, but local churches can be and have been destroyed.

The warning is very, very strong. And the language of v.17 makes it clear that Paul is thinking about more than just the leaders who can destroy a church. So, the question we have to ask ourselves is, am I tearing the church down? How could I do that?

- 1) By embracing and promoting a false gospel.

That becomes very clear from the previous passage that those who promote a false gospel are destroying the church because they are not building on the right foundation. This presents a difficult situation. When someone, like a Robert Shuller, or Joel Osteen for example preaches a false gospel, and someone else, like a John MacArthur or Al Mohler points it out and says that is a false gospel, it is easy for people observing that to think that it is some petty squabble and that people should not ever say anything unkind about someone else. But in reality, Robert Shuller does not preach the gospel and even though he may be popular, he in reality is destroying the church because he does not understand the foundation of it. The church has to have unity, but the unity has to be built upon truth, not on make-believe. If you are working for a construction company that is building the foundation of someone's house out of straw, but the company threatens you with consequences if you say anything about it – what do you do? What you do depends if you have any integrity or not. If you have no integrity, you pretend that everything is fine. If someone is embracing and promoting a false gospel, I have to address it and so do you, because if I don't, then I am contributing to the destruction of the church.

- 2) By attacking the unity of the church. There is a right way and a wrong way to solve problems.

Unity is built upon truth. On the basis of the gospel, we have a mutual kinship. We have a spiritual bond, meaning, we have a bond that is formed by the Spirit. Therefore, when a problem arises in the relationship, we have to address that problem in a manner that is consistent with the relationship that we have in Christ. If I attack the person, instead of attacking the problem, I am aiding in the destruction of the church. If I ignore the problem because I do not want to get involved, I am aiding in the destruction of the church. Either by neglect or by mean-spiritedness, I can help destroy a local church.

- 3) By disconnecting what I claim to believe from how I live.

That is the question that Paul asks in v.16 – isn't it? What if a church preaches the truth, but does not live the truth? What if people do things only for appearances sake? What if a couple is getting a divorce, but are showing up every Sunday in church and sitting together in order to save face? For whom are they saving face? It isn't for God. What is the sermon they are preaching to themselves and to others? The sermon is clear: Appearance matters more than reality. Is that genuine Christianity? Is that what Jesus died on the cross for?

- 4) By failing to see myself (or others) as part of the whole.

I recognize that what this text is saying really goes against the grain of our current self-worship and individual rights, idolization. How many of you want freedom from responsibility? How many do not want to be committed to a ministry, because you want to exercise your right to come and go as you please? Take it or leave it. Come if you feel like it, when you feel like it. Assume that someone else will support it financially. Someone else will help teach. Someone else will help serve. Someone else will take care of the problems. Someone else will grow. I am too busy. I have too many obligations. I cannot afford to give of my time. I cannot afford to give of my resources. If you are part of the whole, then you need to see yourself and others as part of the whole. You belong here.

- 5) By living as if the local church is not very important.

When you look at these verses, do you begin to see how important the local church is to God? Church is not another spoke on the wheel of a busy life. Church is the hub. What is more important than the local church? Some may argue the home. But since both the home and the church are designed to reflect the person and character of God to the world, I put them on equal priority. It is true that strong homes help make the church strong, but it is also true that a strong church helps to make the home strong. You really cannot separate the one from the other. If, I neglect the church, for the sake of my family, I will not only aid in the destruction of the church, but I will set depth charges in place for the destruction of my family. Because instead of worshiping God, I will worship my kids or teach them to worship something else. When you consistently choose other activities over the priority of the church, you preach a sermon that your children hear, loud and clear. I am not saying that you have to be here every time the doors are open, I am not here every time they are open. I am saying that God does not look casually upon the church and neither should you.

#### **B. Are you building the church up?**

- 1) By embracing and promoting the gospel
- 2) By addressing problems in your life and with others in the right way.
- 3) By intentionally closing the gap between your belief and behavior.
- 4) By seeing yourself as a vital part of the whole.
- 5) By living as if the church is absolutely critical to your life.

### 3. How does a church die?

Sometimes churches are destroyed from the outside. The stories of what some of the believers in Sudan and Iraq have been enduring is burdensome, but really beyond control. What is absolutely tragic is when a church dies internally because it choked off the life-giving Spirit. In short, a church dies through suicide.

If I had to do it all over again.... I remember preaching the gospel and inviting people to come to faith in Christ. In an effort to combat what I thought was some people's perception of being a Christian, I would say things such as, "All you need to do is trust Jesus, you don't need to join the church, you don't need to do anything." Now, on the one hand, I was right. If you trust in your church membership as the basis for your salvation, then you are wrong. However, what I was implying is that Christianity is a private, just between you and God sort of a deal. Then I started studying the church in the NT and found out that from the very first day the believers committed themselves to the apostles teaching, (public worship and preaching) to the fellowship (translate that as church membership), to the breaking of bread (communion) and to prayer. Everything they committed themselves to had to do with the body. This was not as private as I was saying it was. Christianity is very communal. It is very community, and it is bigger than your family.