

Day 11: The Temple of God

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Devotion

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple...?"

1 Corinthians 3:16

In the past, I have always assumed that this passage was talking about the individual Christian being a holy temple of God. Whilst this is true, there are both contextual and grammatical reasons to suggest that Paul here was referring not just to the individual but rather to a collective of God's people – that is, the local church. Indeed, Paul emphasises in verse 17 that “you together are that temple” – a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells and which therefore is a sacred and hallowed institution.

Tragically, many Christians today dismiss the importance of the local church. Church attendance and participation is critical. Although your salvation is not dependent on your church attendance, you could say that your Christian maturity is! The Bible is clear that it is impossible to be obedient and fruitful apart from the local church.

Today's passage reorients our perspective to the importance of the church in the eyes of God. This in turn helps us to place the church in its proper place in our lives.

Prayer

*God the Father, you are the head of the church. God the Son, you died for the church. God the Holy Spirit, you dwell in the church. May we together as your people love the church, and join with you in building your church!
Amen!*

Day 12: A Call to Repentance

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Devotion

"Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become 'fools' so that you may become wise."

1 Corinthians 3:18

Today's passage is a call to repentance. Although the word "repent" is not found in these verses, the concept of repentance is very clear. Paul calls for the Corinthians to change their thinking and actions regarding wisdom and their leaders.

Instead of taking pride in worldly wisdom (which we are to regard as folly), we are to take pride in the wisdom of God – which the world regards as folly. We are to return to the simple yet eternally powerful message of the Gospel of Christ crucified as the wisdom of God and the foundation of our ministry.

The reality is that the errors so prevalent in the Corinthian church are just as evident in churches today. Let us take heed of Paul's words and respond accordingly to the leading of the Spirit through heartfelt repentance.

Prayer

God, keep us from ever becoming overly dependent or reliant on our own acquired wisdom or the wisdom of the world. Instead, keep us childlike and foolish, clinging only to the power of the Gospel. Amen.

Day 13: Surrounded By Grace

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 4:1-7

Devotion

"What do you have that you did not receive? And...why do you boast...?"

1 Corinthians 4:7

There's a story about a woodpecker who was persistently drilling through the bark of a tree one day, when without warning lightning struck and shattered the old tree into a thousand little pieces. The woodpecker flew to another tree, and said, still shivering and shaking, "Wow! To think I did that all by myself!"

It's easy to start thinking that we've done it all by ourselves, isn't it? God gives us physical abilities, and we take the credit for our athletic performances. God gives us a brilliant mind, and we begin to think we are superior to others. God prospers us in our business or our profession, and we begin to think our success is all due to our hard work. God grows our church or ministry, and we give the impression that it's because of our remarkable relational and preaching skills.

Paul warns us to remember that all we are and all we have is from God. In reflecting on our achievements, let us not forget the grace of God that has made it possible for us to accomplish whatever we may have done. Indeed, we are surrounded by God's grace, or as Paul notes in Acts 17:28, "in Him we live and move and have our being". Only God deserves the credit!

Prayer

Father in heaven, please help us to remember that all we are and have and ever will be are because of your grace in our lives. In Jesus' name we thank you. Amen.

Day 14: True Apostleship

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 4:8-13

Devotion

"We are fools for Christ..."

1 Corinthians 4:10

In these verses, Paul sets out to compare himself with the believers in Corinth. He sarcastically uses a series of rhetorical statements to expose their foolish boasting. While the Corinthians regarded themselves as victorious kings leading a victory parade, Paul described himself (and the other apostles) as prisoners sentenced to death, put on display at the end of the parade as a form of humiliation.

He goes on to make the point that the apostles' "way of living" was consistent with the Cross. Whereas the lifestyle of the Corinthians and their aspirations were opposite to what the suffering Christ endured. In other words, all of the negative experiences of suffering that the apostles experienced were not so much hardships or trials that they had to overcome, but rather distinct marks that revealed the authenticity of their apostleship. They were demonstrators of the apostles' conformity to Christ's sufferings.

The apostle Paul demonstrated by his life what following Christ would entail. Hence he was challenging the Corinthians (as well as us today): if you want to be a true follower of Christ, take a good look at Paul's life. This is what following Christ really looks like!

Prayer

Lord, correct any misconceptions we may have of what it looks like to follow you. May you keep us from seeking after the wrong kinds of success in our quest to be more like you. Amen.

Day 15: Fatherly Concern

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Devotion

"I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children."

1 Corinthians 4:14

Ever since becoming a father, I feel as if I have discovered a whole new set of emotions that I didn't know I had. It's a constant juggling act – whilst on the one hand I so want to keep my son close to protect him, on the other I want to release him to explore and discover the world. Whilst on the one hand I so desire for him to accomplish and achieve great things, I also desperately want him to feel loved and cherished even in the absence of those accolades.

Today's passage emphasises the importance of having spiritual fathers in the faith – or perhaps more generally spiritual parents. Those older men or women who – like the apostle Paul – love you enough to provide a role model for you to imitate (v 16), to correct you firmly when needed (v 18) and to love you 'up close' rather than from a distance (v 19).

In our generation, it is becoming less and less common for God's people to have fathers and mothers in the faith. We tend to individualise our relationships with God, forgetting that He has gifted us with older men and women who can come alongside us and encourage us in our walk with God.

Who might be someone that you can prayerfully ask to vouch for you as a spiritual parent? Or who might you be able to spiritually father/mother today?

Prayer

God, thank you for being our perfect Heavenly Father who loves us, disciplines us, comforts us and encourages us. I pray that you would place around me spiritual fathers and mothers who can play a similar role for me, as the Apostle Paul played for the Corinthian church.

Day 16: Idle in Immorality

Today's Reading

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

Devotion

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate..."

1 Corinthians 5:1

Paul now turned to confront the flagrant immorality that had plagued the Corinthian church. The key issue was about the church's careless attitude towards immorality among its members. Paul brought up a situation in which a man in the church was having a sexual relationship with his father's wife. Paul was so appalled by the situation that he said it was a sexual immorality that was not even found among the Gentiles.

In verse 2, Paul condemns not only the culprit but also the church for their indifference towards the matter. Instead of having that member dealt with, the church essentially turned a blind eye toward his sin. Paul told them that something ought to be done to arrest the situation. The culprit should have been removed from their midst. Paul was saying that they had a responsibility to deal with the moral conduct of individuals as it would affect the life of the whole community.

As members of the body of Christ, all of us have a responsibility to ensure that as a community we are honouring God in every area of our lives. The way in which we conduct ourselves really matters to God. Let us continue encouraging and spurring one another on to holiness and good deeds, rather than remaining silent when we see otherwise!

Prayer

God, thank you for saving us into a family – a community in which all of us are responsible for the holiness of each other. Help us by your Spirit not to be callous in the way that we respond to sin in our midst, but rather swift and firm – for the sake of the renown of your name.