

Sunday, February 14, 2016—I Corinthians 3:16-17: Him Shall God Destroy

Introduction

- For the past two weeks we have been considering Pauline principles regarding reward with respect to I Corinthians 3:14-15. This morning I would like to advance through the passage by considering the next two verses.

I Corinthians 3:16

- **Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?**
- Paul follows up the section in verses 8 through 15 on reward by asking the Corinthians a question in verse 16. This is the first question that Paul has asked them since verse 5.
- *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God*—who is the word “ye” a reference to in this verse? It is a reference to the Corinthians as a collective group i.e., the body of Christ at Corinth. This harkens back to verse 9 where Paul used the word “ye” to describe the Corinthians as God’s husbandry and God’s building.
- In verses 10 through 15, Paul has been using singular pronouns and verb endings; however, in verses 16 and 17 he primarily uses plural pronouns and verb endings.
- Paul says, “Don’t ye know that ye are the temple of God?” Note the present tense on the expression “ye are the temple of God.” The Corinthians were in the state of being the temple of God. In Greek the expression “ye are the temple of God” is a present indicative which asserts something which is occurring while the speaker is making the statement.
- So the Corinthians (“ye”) as a collective group comprise the temple of God in the present, according to Paul.
- *and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you*—the second thing that Paul wanted the Corinthians to know was that “the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.”
- The verb “dwelleth” is once again in the present tense in both English and Greek. The Spirit of God was dwelling in the Corinthians at the time of Paul’s writing thereby making them the temple of God in the first half of the verse.
- The English word “dwell” means: 1) To abide as a permanent resident, or to inhabit for a time; to live in a place; to have a habitation for some time or permanence. 2) To be in any state or condition; to continue. 3) To continue; to be fixed in attention; to hang upon with fondness.

- I think that verse 16 is primarily referring to the Corinthians as a collective or corporate group. That being said, verse 16 could not be true if the Corinthians did not individually have “the Spirit of God” dwelling in them.
 - Romans 8:9-11
 - Ephesians 1:13-14
 - II Timothy 1:14
- I Corinthians 6:19-20—here Paul says that each man’s individual body is the temple of the Holy Ghost on account of the fact that the Holy Ghost is in them. This individual reality that is true of all believers makes the corporate statement in I Cor. 3:16 possible.
- I Corinthians 3:16—the first part of the verse emphasizes the fact that the Corinthians are the temple of God. The second half explains how God dwells in them.
 - Ephesians 2:22

I Corinthians 3:17

- **If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.**
- Verse 17 is a hard verse to understand. Even among those who rightly divide the word of truth and understand the Pauline grace message there are varied opinions as to the meaning of verse 17. Generally Grace teachers take either of the following positions:
 - Verse 17 is talking about believers defiling the temple of God and being destroyed.
 - Verse 17 is talking about unbelievers defiling the temple of God and being destroyed.
- For our purposes this morning I would like to present some general interpretative facts about verse 17 and then consider both options.

Interpretive Facts

- First, the first half of verse is an indicative statement of FACT. The condition “if” is followed by the verb “defile” which is in the indicative mood. Whoever verse 17 is talking about, will as a matter of FACT defile the temple of God and be destroyed by God for doing so.
- Second, “defile” and “destroy” are translations of the same Greek word. The same word is elsewhere translated as “corrupt” or “corrupted” 6 times.

- I Corinthians 15:33—corrupt
 - II Corinthians 7:2—corrupted
 - II Corinthians 11:3—corrupted
 - Ephesians 4:22—corrupt
 - Jude 10—corrupt themselves
 - Revelations 19:2—corrupt
- The English word “defile” means: 1) To make unclean; to render foul or dirty; in a general sense. 2) To make impure; to render turbid; as, the water or liquor is defiled. 3) To soil or sully; to tarnish; as reputation 4) To pollute; to make ceremonially unclean. 5) To corrupt chastity; to debauch; to violate; to tarnish the purity of character by lewdness. 6) To taint, in a moral sense; to corrupt; to vitiate; to render impure with sin. (*Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*)
 - The English word “destroy” means: 1) To demolish; to pull down; to separate the parts of an edifice, the union of which is necessary to constitute the thing; as, to destroy a house or temple; to destroy a fortification. 2) To ruin; to annihilate a thing by demolishing or by burning; as, to destroy a city. 3) To ruin; to bring to naught; to annihilate; as, to destroy a theory or scheme; to destroy a government; to destroy influence. 4) To lay waste; to make desolate. 5) To kill; to slay; to extirpate; applied to men or other animals. (*Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*)
 - The English word “corrupt” means: 4) To defile or pollute. Exodus 32. (*Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*)
 - *for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are*—both verbs (“is” and “are”) in the second half of the verse are present indicatives. In other words, the temple of God “is” in the present holy which is the opposite of being defiled in the first half of the verse. Second the Corinthians “are” in the present the temple of God. This follows logically from verse 16.

Verse 17 is Referring to Believers

- Those taking the view that verse 17 is referring to believers reason as follows.
- The context is dealing with the JSC and the trail of the believer’s work in building upon the foundation laid by Paul.
- *If any man defile the temple of God*—follows Paul’s terminology in verses 8, 10, and 12-15 for speaking to believers.
- In the context, the defilement of the temple would be the teaching of unsound doctrine or improper building upon Paul’s foundation.

- *Him shall God destroy*—is a reference to the destruction of this believer’s work in verse 15 and the corresponding loss of reward. In addition to arguments from the immediate context, those taking this view will point to the following Pauline texts to substantiate their view.
 - I Corinthians 5:1-5
 - I Timothy 1:20
- Those taking this general view include C.R. Stam and Ernest R. Campbell.

Verse 17 is Referring to Unbelievers

- Those taking the view that verse 17 is referring to unbelievers reason as follows.
- Verse 16 constitutes a break in the passage where Paul identifies who and what the temple of God is i.e., the believers at Corinth. Consequently, “any man” in verse 17 seeking to defile the temple of God would by definition be someone who was not a part of it i.e., an unbeliever.
- The biggest problem for some in seeing verse 17 as a reference to believers is found in the expression “him shall God destroy.” This language seems to be talking about the destruction of one’s person who defiles the temple of God.
- Verse 15 which is clearly a reference to a believer who’s work is burned explicitly states, “he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” The believer’s person is saved but his work is destroyed in the fire. This does not seem to fit with verse 17 which has God destroying the person of one who defiles the temple of God.
- II Thessalonians 1:6-9—Paul tells the Thessalonians who were being troubled by persecution and tribulation from unbelievers, that God was doing to take vengeance upon them in flaming fire and punish them with everlasting destruction.
- Those holding this view of I Cor. 3:17 will point out that for believers the fire purifies whereas for unbelievers the fire destroys and consumes.
- Those holding a form of this view regarding I Cor. 3:17 include Alex Kurz of Shorewood Bible Church.