

# THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 18th January 2004

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Welcome back, those who have been away

Everyone is getting into the rhythms of the new year already, getting back to work, to worship, especially those involved in schooling – this week being the start of the school-year.

In one sense, every day is like another. In another sense – we mark the days, both to organise our lives (calendar) and to give meaning / mark the seasons. New Year / January like that – a new focus, hopefully fresh.

**What will carry us through the year?**

**What will sustain us during the year?**

High times, times of celebration and of things going well and of achievement (personal / centenary of church)

Low times, disappointments and disillusionment (self / others / the world in general)

New year resolutions? No longer quite so popular – realistic because usually not observed consistently.

But resolutions, whenever made, are often about bodies and about relationships – perhaps most significant in our lives – to do with relationships most important to us and with our physical / mental / spiritual health.

Today's Psalm – 36: 5-10:

Celebrates God's steadfast love – poetically stating that it reaches to the heavens, to the clouds

But also, our faith declares that that love resides in us, and even to some (little but not insignificant) extent, it is made known through us.

**NT Reading – 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20: Context:**

The behaviour of a Christian community in a thriving cosmopolitan business centre, Corinth, known for its openness to many religions including Jews and Christians and also known for its pagan temples – including temple prostitution and a seeming absence of moral values. Some of those things have crept back into the Christian community, or people have not realised that they are incompatible with a follower of Christ. St Paul, in writing to address some of these problems and issues, makes various arguments along these lines – and that is the context, but not my major focus

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In praying about preaching, a phrase kept coming at me: The one about us being a temple of the Holy Spirit.

A long time since I've heard anyone talk about it / read anything on it; and although I've spoken about it / referred to it, wasn't sure if I'd ever preached a Sunday sermon on that alone.

It is a powerful thought / expression of our faith; a powerful concept to live by – that I am a temple of God!

Temple – Jewish (& other religions):

- Place where God's presence was made known / revealed
- A place where God existed (or several gods – depending on the religion concerned)
- Sense of being confined to the building or holy place
- Certainly sacred, not to be tampered with
- No matter what you did outside of it, there were certain things you never did inside – esp. Jewish temple!

But now, the Christian knows, in the light of Christ, who has lived and died and risen from the dead, we have been given the assurance that the Spirit of God no longer dwells in certain prophets / specific individuals, but in all people attuned to God

The Spirit of God is not confined to a building / special place (as if it ever was!); its presence is not confined.

Not controllable; “it blows where it wills...”

Spirit of “Immanu-el”, one of the Hebrew names for Jesus – “God in our midst”

Paul (1 Cor 3:16) refers to the Church as a whole as God's temple. But here (1 Cor 6:19) he has developed the thought, and asserts that each one is a temple in which God dwells.

Greek word used: Naos meaning sacred shrine (another word could refer to whole temple area). Quite specific.

That gives dignity to life like nothing else can!

We are carriers of the HS.

In the context in which Paul is writing it has specific application – to sin and specifically to sins of fornication. But the principle quite clearly has broader application. For if the Spirit of God resides not out there somewhere airy-fairy, not even only or specifically within a building, but in the sacred place which is each one of us, then that is a phenomenal thing! This ought to rule out any conduct inappropriate to a child of God. This ought to act as a sobering and thought-provoking concept to live by.

It is a gift of God – not dependant upon self-induced experience, not something to be manufactured by force.

The temple belongs to God. Therefore believers ought not to think or behave as if independent, belonging only to ourselves.

Flies in the face of human nature and of current thinking / values: I belong to me, therefore there is no higher authority or arbiter of truth! In the light of that, an attitude to life that says something contrary – that I belong to God – may be hard to live up to in practice – perhaps part of what is understood by the phrase about “dying to self”.

Paul makes the point that we have been purchased at a price. No need for him to elaborate here... (it is written in the Greek aorist tense – a single act in the past with current and continuing significance) – it is a clear reference to Christ on the cross, and imagery of redemption – also terminology related to slaves, which would easily have been understood by his listeners but for which there is not time to elaborate on this morning. Having been purchased at a price, we are to give glory to God in our lives.

I began with a question: What will carry us through the year? What will sustain us? Knowing God, and realising once again the privilege of being temples of the HS will be part of what will sustain us.

So then, in what way is all this practical?

Many years ago, I used to hear about this concept of the temple of the Holy Spirit in relation to smoking or getting drunk! Well, yes, OK. But many other things, too – such a limited application smacks of self-righteousness – it is a selective argument and is too simplistic and focuses only on the negative. Allow me to elaborate, and then I will conclude...

Yes – it is about how we treat our bodies. It is the “vehicle” by which I exist, by which I am a person. Context of passage: fornication – any misuse of the gift of sexuality.

Can be widened – anything which damages us; what we see / take in visually, emotionally, spiritually / what we do has effects on other people too, and may damage their “temples”. Dignity of life – amazing concept to follow through on...

Also very positive imagery: Presence of God with us and in us

Be alive to it

Develop awareness of it

Go for a walk with God

Have a picnic with God

Not primarily about a guilt trip. Our consciences may well be activated / turned on in areas we've dulled or switched off; but if over-active or overly condemnatory, then seek help, for that is not helpful esp. in drawing us closer to God!

Prayer (different forms of, incl. formal / meditative / "centering prayer")

Worship

Communion

Reading

Scripture

Conversation

All a means of grace, and of developing this relationship with God, and realising how close God is to us.

Combines aspects of important resolutions – about important relationships and about our bodies / health.

An awesome privilege, understood also as being accompanied by responsibility

Go for a walk with God / have a picnic with God

God will sustain us. Grow in knowledge of that

- confidence and strength
- assurance esp. in lows
- humility
- take with us as a concept for living, that we are temples (sacred shrines) in which God's Spirit resides.

Amen.

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,  
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and

**Put your hand into the hand of God -**

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

Minnie Louise Haskins.