

In I Corinthians 3:9, Paul introduced another analogy for "The People of God." He said, "We are God's fellow workers; you are ... God's building." Throughout the New Testament, God's People are compared to a building. But not just any kind of building. Paul asked the church in Corinth, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are" (1 Cor 3:16-17). Paul informed the church in Ephesus that they were "a holy temple in the Lord," a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," with Jesus Christ Himself as the "corner stone" (Ephesians 2:19-22). The "Temple" analogy emphasizes a very important concept for us to consider: The church is the dwelling place of God's Holy Spirit.

God has always revealed to mankind how and where they could come into His presence. In the days of Moses, the children of Israel were told to "seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God shall choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come" (Deut 12:5). Later, in the days of Solomon, God revealed that Jerusalem was the place He had selected. God appeared to Solomon by night and said, "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. For I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually" (II Chronicles 7:12-16). Under the Old Covenant, "The Temple" was the place where God accepted worship, where God heard prayers, where God's name resided, and where God's attention and affection was directed.

Today, under the New Covenant, Christ's church is the recognized Temple of God. There is only one place where mankind can come into the presence of God - and that is in His Temple, the church, where His Holy Spirit resides in the heart of every Christian (I Cor 3:16-17; Jn 14:23; I John 4:15-16). When the apostle Peter wrote a letter to the church, he reminded them that they were "living stones ... being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5). The only worship acceptable to God is offered through Jesus Christ. The only priesthood recognized by God is the priesthood of believers in Christ Jesus. Why? Because God has designated Christ's church as His "Temple." Indeed, affiliation with Christ's church is the only way to God's heart today.

A great burden of responsibility rests upon today's church to offer up worship to God which is pleasing to Him. Under the Old Covenant, God was very meticulous in specifying the details of the sacrificial system. God said, "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it" (Exodus 25:8-9). Is there a "pattern" for us today? Will God accept just any kind of worship from His people today? God consumed in flames two priests who violated the pattern of Moses' law (Leviticus 10:1-2). Should we be any less concerned that our sacrifice of worship is according to the pattern? Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Jesus said that God's Word is Truth (John 17:17). We must be certain that the worship offered in God's Temple, His Church, is according to His Word. Paul said, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us" (II Thes 2:15). It behooves Christians today to search the pages of the New Testament and carefully study the assemblies of first century Christians. What they did was by the authority and according to the traditions of the apostles. Here we will find a pattern for our worship which will be "acceptable to God ... through Jesus Christ." (I Peter 2:5)

1. What is the emphasis of the "Temple" analogy? (I Cor 3:9,16-17; Eph 2:19-22)
2. According to I Cor 3:16-17; John 14:23; I John 4:15-16, where does God's Spirit reside?
3. What did Peter mean when he called Christians "living stones ... built up as a spiritual house"? (I Peter 2:5)

4. From II Chronicles 7:15-16, list four things about "The Temple" which made it unique.

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Do you think these same points are true concerning God's "spiritual temple" - the church?

5. Why does Peter call the church a "priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices"? (I Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15; Romans 12:1)

6. Is it possible for our sacrifices of worship to be unacceptable? (I Peter 2:5)

Do you think God cares what we do when we worship Him? (John 4:24; 17:17)

Did God care what the priests of Israel did when they worshipped Him? (Lev 10:1-2)

Did God supply a "pattern" for His physical sanctuary under the Old Covenant? (Ex 25:8-9)

Did the apostles of Jesus intend for their traditions to be carried on? (II Thes 2:15)

Is it possible for us to discover what first century Christians did when they assembled?

Do you think we should follow their pattern?