

Building the Temple of God

"In Him (Christ) the whole building is being fitted together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you also are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit." Ephesians 2:21-22

Under the Old Covenant, the temple of God was a physical building in Jerusalem that was made of stones cut and carried from local quarries. Imagine if we could ask one of the laborers carrying a stone to the temple site what he was doing, and he replied, "Nothing at all important; I am just carrying stone every day." But what if we asked another laborer the same question and they responded, "I am carrying stone every day to help build the greatest and most beautiful temple ever made for God to inhabit!" This illustrates the importance of having God's heavenly vision in our daily lives. Indeed, the Bible says, "Without vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18)."

Now that we are under the New Covenant, the Bible says we are like living stones that make up God's spiritual house and holy temple (1 Peter 2:5). Yet many of us do not outwardly appear to be involved in any glorious work for God. We go to work each day and do the same job over and over again. Or, we may be a homemaker and clean house, wash the dishes, do the laundry, and change diapers every day. After years of doing daily repetitive tasks, it is natural that the rhythm of our lives can sometimes feel routine, monotonous and of no real importance. This is why it is essential to remind ourselves of God's heavenly purpose for our lives. Salvation is only the beginning and not the end of God's plan. The Bible says, "God has saved us and called us to a holy life... it is God's will that you should be holy... for God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life (2 Timothy 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:3 & 7)." Why is holiness important and how does it relate to building God's temple? God's desire is that we would know Him and abide in Him. And the Bible says the only way we can know Him and abide in Him is to practice holiness (Hebrews 12:14; 1 John

3:6). This is why Jesus said we must deny ourselves and carry our own cross daily for His sake (Mark 8:34). But how can we deny ourselves, carry our cross and live a holy life in this sin-filled world? There is only one way: we must believe and act on the Biblical truth that Christ has freed us from the power of sin by destroying and removing our sinful nature when we were born again, so that He could live in us (Romans 6:6-7; Colossians 1:27; 2:11-12). When we believe and act on this powerful truth of God's grace, we are able (by the Spirit) to "put to death" our old sinful way of thinking and acting and put on Christ's way of thinking and acting (Romans 8:13; Ephesians 4:23). This is the only way by God's grace we can be a holy and faithful member of God's building team.

Paul said, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). We do not want to lose sight of the grace that God has called us to in Christ Jesus. Otherwise, why would we suffer and deny ourselves the pleasures, riches and approval of this world? For example, what if we asked a Christian what he is doing and he halfheartedly replied, "Nothing at all important; I am just carrying my cross every day." This kind of discouraged attitude will lead to spiritual defeat. But what if we asked another Christian the same question and they responded, "I am carrying my cross every day so that I can help build the greatest and most beautiful temple ever made for God to inhabit!" This is the truth: when we carry our cross daily, we are building God's temple, which is His church. This is the truth that encourages and inspires us to persevere by faith in the daily struggles of life.

Under the Old Covenant, when the temple was built in old Jerusalem, the master craftsmen had to fashion each stone into the right form and appearance to make sure they fit properly into God's temple. In the same way, we must allow God (the Master Craftsman) to fashion us as living stones into Christ's image, so that we properly fit into His holy temple, which is Christ's body. The Bible says "we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is, Christ; from whom

the whole body, being fitted and held together by every supporting joint, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Ephesians 4:15-16)."

It should be the heart's desire of every Christian to build up God's temple, His church. However, just as we can build up God's temple by believing in what Jesus has accomplished for us on the cross (that we are made righteous and holy by God's grace), the Bible says we can also tear down the temple of God if we practice unbelief and sin. Paul warns, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy and you are that temple (1 Corinthians 3: 16-17)." There is only one way we can build God's temple: we must practice living righteously by faith in Christ and His completed work on the cross (Romans 1:17). Therefore, let us ask ourselves: "Are we practicing righteousness or practicing sin? Are we building up or tearing down God's temple, His church?"

At the end of this age, all of God's elect who carry their cross daily will be joined together like living and holy stones to form God's heavenly temple. "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be among them (Revelation 21:2-3)." This is why we must stay heavenly-minded by believing and acting on the truth of the cross that we have died with Christ, so that He can sovereignly live in us, His body, His tabernacle.

"Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on heavenly things above, not on earthly things. For you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, is revealed; then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Colossians 3:1-4