

“DESTROYING THE TEMPLE”  
by Rom A. Pegram (1/21/18)

Without love ... what would the world be like? The Apostle Paul reminds us in his famous chapter on love (1 Corinthians 13:1, NLT),

“If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

Without love... Let me remind you that that is exactly what we’ve been talking about for the past two weeks. Yes, we’re in the midst of a series on worship, but *without love* ... what kind of worship would we have, if any at all? Listen to our Bible lesson for today, as we hear from another letter of Paul’s (to the church at Corinth this time), which sounds a great deal like last week’s lesson. This week, however, he really puts it across to the Corinthian church about the reality of what happens when a church is ... *without love*. Just listen...

“And you are God’s field. You are God’s building. <sup>10</sup> Because of God’s grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. <sup>13</sup> But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person’s work has any value. <sup>14</sup> If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. <sup>16</sup> Don’t you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? <sup>17</sup> God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. – 1 Corinthians 3:9b-17 (NLT)

Today, I want us to look at the whole idea of the connection between our relationship with God and our relationships with each other from a bit of a different angle—from the angle of Paul’s warning: **IT IS SERIOUS BUSINESS WHEN ANYONE ATTEMPTS (CONSCIOUSLY OR NOT) TO DESTROY THE TEMPLE OF GOD!** What did Paul say, once again, in the last verse for today (1 Cor. 3:17, NLT)?

“God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God’s temple is holy, and *you* [italics mine] are that temple.”

Let’s begin here today: **IT IS OUR CHOICE HOW WE CHOOSE TO PREPARE FOR WORSHIP.** Verse 16 reminds us, “Don’t you realize that *all of you together* [italics mine] are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?” We’ve heard this truth, but now what are we going to do with that truth?

Here's a short Greek lesson today, for all of you scholars out there. *The Greek word in this passage for destroying the temple literally means to 'corrupt' or to 'mar.'* There will be no 'marring' going on here, O.K.? That's what Paul is saying...

The Corinthians lived in a culture filled with pagan temples, which were highly respected by their society. Anyone caught writing graffiti on the walls or chipping away at stones in the wall received an instant death sentence. No questions asked. This, folks, was a serious crime in Paul's day...

I saw a modern-day version of this on a television show the other day called 'This Ol' House.' They were working on a house in Los Angeles, needed some supplies, so went to the location of the vendor. When they got to the small building that the vendor worked out of, they discovered that it was a former church building. And when the crew from 'This Ol' House' pulled in, they discovered that this business still had the name of the church written on the side of the building. One of the crew asked the business owner why? Why did they still have the name of the former church on the side of their building? His answer was brilliant...

As he explained it, *it is a felony in this area of Los Angeles to graffiti a church building.* In order to protect their business from vandals, they chose to leave the name of the former church on the side of their building *for protection!* They were using the reality of churches being protected to their advantage...

So, what was Paul doing here? Paul was working with the reality of *his* day—a death sentence to anyone 'marring' a temple. How much more then, Paul argues, will God deal with those who 'mar' His temple, for *that is what you are!*

The problem is, in reality, *we do that very same thing any time we come to our corporate gatherings of worship, still harboring negative feelings toward others* (or acting on those feelings with hurtful words or actions). We, too, have been guilty of 'corrupting' or 'marring' the temple into which God is trying to build us! *Even if it is not a conscious choice, we can still unknowingly* destroy the temple by hanging onto grudges and treating others in less than Christ-like ways. No 'marring' allowed ... is what Paul is saying to the Church; *no graffiti on this building!* But, the choice is still ours...

After several decades of being a Christian now, I've finally come to realize that on this side of eternity I'll never see eye-to-eye with everyone in the Kingdom of God! Has anyone else had that rude awakening yet in your life? The truth is—BIG PICTURE—that being in complete agreement with all in the Kingdom of God is of very little consequence. What really matters, folks, is this: ***that I understand that Jesus paid just as much for those who don't agree with me ... as he did for me!***

Once God brings us to this very important realization—this new way of thinking, my perspective on things quickly changes. But, I can still make the choice—whether we are in 100% agreement or not ... to walk in love & unity with YOU! Regardless of our

differences, we can still choose to walk in love and unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ! That, folks, is our choice—a very critical one... Because,

**IT IS ONLY WHEN WE CHOOSE TO BE RECONCILED TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST THAT WE CAN TRULY BE READY TO WORSHIP GOD!** Here are the verses that I've been speaking of, casually, over the past couple of weeks—Jesus' words from Matthew 5:23-24 (NLT):

“So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.”

Again, what does all this have to do with WORSHIP? Did you see it? **FIRST**, be reconciled to whoever it is that you are holding something against ... **THEN**, come and offer your gift (worship)! **HERE IS THE TRUTH THAT WE ALL NEED TO HEAR TODAY: Once our earthly relationships are in order, then—and only then—can we truly offer worship to God!** 'Any grudges being held? 'Any rifts still between you and someone else ... that *you* are responsible for feeding? Jesus is very clear here that he wants us to get these straightened out *before* we come to worship him.

WHY is it so important to not only know this truth, but to live it? Let's turn to the Apostle John for a moment. John is even stronger than Jesus when it comes to his treatment of this subject—this inter-relational truth about worship. Here's what he says in 1 John 4:20 (NIV)...

“If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, *cannot* [italics mine] love God, whom he has not seen.”

Now, this verse—I believe—is particularly distressing, at least for those who don't take God's word seriously. This verse doesn't say that if we don't love our brother or sister, then we *might not* be able to love God. What it says is that if we don't love our brother or sister, we *cannot* love God! Again, using the cross before us as our example, if our horizontal relationships with one another are not in proper order, we *cannot* enjoy the vertical relationship with God! The two are intrinsically connected...

Let me close with this visual for you: In his book about worship called *The Adventure of Worship*, author and teacher Gerrit Gustafson suggests imagining two pictures (but I'm going to help your imaginations out today, as you look to the screen). He says this:

“The first is a field of scattered stones; the second is a picture of those same stones built together into a beautiful temple. Now ask yourself, which picture better describes where you are?”

Think about your answer carefully today, because it's of utmost importance to the future of *this* congregation—God's Kingdom right here in SW Wisconsin...

- If we're going to allow God to build us into that worshiping temple, then it's going to take LOVE like never before ... including honesty and cooperation on our part.
- Too frequently, congregations resemble the first picture though—the scattered stones, remaining scattered and refusing to allow God's very best for their lives, to be built into 'a spiritual building,' as the Apostle Peter would put it...

ALLOW ME TO BE INTENSELY PRACTICAL FOR JUST A MOMENT, WOULD YOU? Perhaps what you've heard this morning has been an eye-opener for you. Perhaps you've just been reminded that you need to go to someone and repent for inappropriate words or actions toward a sister or brother in Christ. Or, perhaps you've said or done *nothing* wrong; maybe you've simply missed a chance or two to do something right—a sin of omission rather than commission. Whatever it may be today, allow the Holy Spirit to have his way with you, would you? Allow the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction and change in your life as needed ... and let these words guide your future, as we ready ourselves to worship Christ today:

"If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels (and manage all other sorts of other incredible victories or accomplishments in my life), *but didn't love others*, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

Folks, *whatever it takes* ... should be our attitude today; *whatever it takes* to be ready to worship God should be what we're about. **Whatever the cost to make things right, it's worth it!** Let's willingly be a temple right here at Trinity-Lomira that truly honors God and is a place for unified, blessed worship...