



Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church

Lesson 3: The Temple of the Holy Spirit

INTRODUCTION

People give all kinds of reasons not to join a church:

- “The church just wants my money.”
- “I’m too busy to be a member of a church.”
- “Why should I join the church when I don’t know if I’ll still be living here in five or ten years?”
- “Membership is just a needless formality. What matters is that I’m serving in the church.”

1. What are some other reasons you’ve heard people give for not joining a church or maybe have given yourself? _____

MAIN IDEA

The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit—a joined-together, growing, holy dwelling place for God. Therefore, every Christian should be a member of a church and should seek the unity, holiness, and growth of the church.

DIGGING IN

In Ephesians 2, Paul joyfully proclaims the riches of God’s saving grace in Christ. In the first ten verses Paul teaches that we are individually saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ, not by works. In the rest of the chapter, Paul explains that through Christ, Gentiles and Jews now constitute one new people.

Ephesians 2:19–22

1. List the different images and metaphors in these verses that Paul uses to describe the unity that Jews and Gentiles have in Christ (some of them overlap): _____

In this study we are going to focus entirely on the last metaphor Paul uses—the church is the temple, the dwelling place, of God.

Under the old covenant, the temple was the place where God made His presence felt. It was the place that God publicly identified Himself with. And it was the place where people came to worship and offer sacrifices that maintained their relationships with God.

Now, through Christ's death and resurrection, Christ Himself has become the temple. He is the "place" where God's wrath was propitiated and where people are reconciled to God (see John 2:19–21). Not only that, everyone who is united to Christ by faith becomes God's temple. God's Holy Spirit dwells within us and God publicly identifies Himself with His church.

2. What is the "foundation" Paul describes in verse 20? Why is this foundation essential for the life and health of the church? _____

3. In verse 21 Paul describes the whole of God's people when he says that "the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord." This means that now, the entire people of God are the dwelling place of God, which He will perfectly and permanently indwell one day (see Rev. 21:3–4; 21:22).

Yet in verse 22 Paul says "you also"—meaning the church in Ephesus—"are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." This means that the local church is a joined-together, built-together temple of God. All its members are joined together, interlocking with one another and with Christ the cornerstone (v. 20).

Do you think that a Christian is living in line with this reality if he or she is not a member of a local church? Why or why not? _____

4. If you were talking to a Christian who thought that he or she didn't need to join a church, how could you use this passage to encourage this person to become a member of a sound, gospel-preaching church? _____

5. When Paul writes that the church is being "built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22), he is likely referring to both numerical and spiritual growth. People are becoming Christians, and everyone is growing in holiness and maturity.

By what means does this growth take place? (Feel free to consult other New Testament passages such as Acts 2:41 and Ephesians 4:15–16.) _____

6. According to verse 22, who builds the temple that is the church? _____

7. In whom does he build it? _____

8. For whom does he build it? _____

9. Why should these last three points encourage Christians? _____

10. In 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 Paul writes, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

And again, in Ephesians 2:21, Paul writes that the church is growing “into a holy temple in the Lord.”

The church is a holy temple, because God possesses it and because the Holy Spirit dwells in its members. How should the church’s identity as God’s holy temple impact:

a) How a church goes about receiving new members? _____

b) Whether a church should seek to actively oversee the lives of its members? _____

c) How a church should respond to a member who refuses to repent of sin? _____

11. Because the church is growing into a holy temple, the church is also called to grow in holiness (v. 21). How should this mandate for holiness impact:¹

a) The things we discuss when we meet with other church members? _____

b) How we listen to sermons? _____

c) What we look for in the church’s corporate gatherings? _____

d) What we desire to get out of the church’s corporate gatherings? _____

e) How we respond when others sin against us? _____

¹ Bobby Jamieson, *Built upon the Rock: The Church*, ed. Mark Dever, 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 23–26.