

SESSION 2

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

IN THIS SESSION, WE WILL SEE what it means for the church to be called “the temple of God”—the people in whom God resides. In the Old Testament, the temple referred to a place. In the New Testament, the temple refers to a people. Christ is the foundation of this sanctuary where the Spirit lives. As Christians, we are being built together as God’s residence—a beacon of light and hope to the world.

STEPS TO PREPARE

1. Read the main passages for this lesson, recording your insights and questions:
 - ▷ 1 Corinthians 3:9-17; 6:19-20
 - ▷ Ephesians 2:19-22
2. Review the Teaching Plan (pp.17-20).
 - ▷ Refine the lesson plan based on your group’s particular needs.
 - ▷ Adjust the plan if necessary.
3. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp.21-26).
 - ▷ Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
 - ▷ Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
4. Pray for the Lord’s guidance as you lead your group through this material.

LESSON OUTLINE

AS THE TEMPLE OF GOD, CHRISTIANS...

- 1. Have Christ as their foundation (1 Cor. 3:9-17).**
- 2. Are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20).**
- 3. Are being built into God’s residence (Eph. 2:19-22).**

SESSION 2

TEACHING PLAN

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

CONNECT

OPTION 1

Begin by commenting on details of various temples around the world—size, design, significance (p.21). Consider ways to put before your group images of various temples (print out images; display on screen).



What comes to mind when you hear the word 'temple'?



What do temples represent? What is their purpose?

Explain how Herod's temple in Jerusalem was a massive structure that would one day fall, but the One greater than the temple has come. Then summarize the lesson—in Christ, we are the temple of God (pp.21-22).

OPTION 2

For this option, show students the video *The Foundation* by the Skit Guys as a way to illustrate the importance of having a firm foundation (you can find this video online). After the video, ask students the following questions before moving to the transition part of the lesson.



How important is it to build things on a solid foundation? What are some examples of things that need a strong foundation? What are some examples of things that people turn to as a foundation for their lives?

TRANSITION

In the previous section, we saw that the church is the body of Christ. If Christ is the new temple, the dwelling place of God, and if we are His body, then it stands to reason that we are the temple as well.

In this session, we will consider who we are from the perspective of our role as the temple of God—the people in whom God resides. In the Old Testament, the temple referred to a place. In the New Testament, the temple refers to a people. Christ is the foundation of this sanctuary where the Spirit lives. As Christians, we are being built together as God’s residence—a beacon of light and hope to the world.

NOTES:

WEAK FOUNDATIONS AND LEANING TOWERS

While foundations are important for construction, they are also important for the church. The church is built on the greatest foundation, Jesus Christ. And just like a foundation is important to the strength of a building, the church is only as strong as its foundation. Another way of saying it is that Jesus is the center of the church. Trying to remove Jesus as the center of the church would be like trying to build a skyscraper on sand. It won't work. Jesus and His work are at the center of who we are as believers.

► *Why do you think some groups lose sight of Jesus being the foundation of the church?*

TREASURE BOX

As believers in Christ, we have a great treasure within us. The Holy Spirit resides in those who know Christ. Just like my mom's box held a great treasure, we too house one inside of us. The difference is that we are not supposed to hide that treasure from others, but instead we are meant to share that treasure with the world.

► *Why is it important to have the Holy Spirit in us?*

CONVEY — AS THE TEMPLE OF GOD, CHRISTIANS...

1. HAVE CHRIST AS THEIR FOUNDATION.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-17. Then allow a couple of minutes for group members to reflect on the passage and sketch their understanding of the foundation and building described in the passage. Emphasize the importance of a building's foundation with the urban legend of a library sinking (p.22).



At this point, consider using the story “Weak Foundations and Leaning Towers” in the Personal Study Guide (p.21) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.



What is the purpose of a foundation in architecture and construction? What implications do you think this image will have as we think about Christ as our foundation?

Make the point that we as Christians and the church as a whole need a strong foundation in order to survive in this world, and that foundation is only Jesus Christ—His life, death, and resurrection (p.23).



What are evidences that the foundation of your life is faulty?



What are some faulty foundations churches can be built upon? What are the results of these foundations?

2. ARE INDWELLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. *Then allow a couple of minutes for group members to reflect on the passage and sketch their understanding of the building described in the passage.* Communicate the significance of Solomon's temple as a testimony to the nations (p.24).



At this point, consider using the story “Treasure Box” in the Personal Study Guide (p.22) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.



What ideas and beliefs are communicated by a temple to those on the outside? How can this apply to other buildings as well?

Explain the concept behind the word *sanctuary* and connect it to holiness and sanctification. Then show how we as individuals are a temple of the Holy Spirit, so we should be distinct from our surrounding culture (p.24).



What should our identity as God's temple communicate to those who see us?



How can you personally begin to redeem this representation in your family, school, and community?

3. ARE BEING BUILT INTO GOD'S RESIDENCE.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22. Then allow a couple of minutes for group members to reflect on the passage and sketch their understanding of the foundation and building described in the passage. Point to the idea of castles as being “fit for a king” in form and function (p.25).



At this point, consider using the story “Building Big” in the Personal Study Guide (p.25) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.



What are some adjectives you would use to describe the dwelling place of royalty? Which of these do you think relate well to the idea of the church as God's dwelling place? Why?

We as the church are God's castle. Set the context of the passage by explaining the unity God has established for the church. Then note that this temple isn't finished yet, but we are being built together (p.26).



God is the One building the church together. That said, how might we make ourselves more receptive to this work?

BUILDING BIG

Can you imagine taking millions of Lego pieces and making a huge piece of art? Believe it or not, this has been done. Just like Legos are linked together to form one structure, God has linked us together in Christ to become the structure of the church. While it is impressive to see what Lego artists can build with plastic blocks, it pales in comparison to the work that God does in linking together different people together as one body.

► Why is it important for the Holy Spirit to be involved in the building of the body of Christ?

NOTES:

[illegible]

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COLLIDE

As with the previous session, this lesson helps us further our understanding of the church by giving us another word picture. By referring to God's people as a temple, we can show students exactly what this means for them and how they are supposed to understand themselves in this light.

There is no shortage of points of application here. Elaborate on the practical importance of having Christ as one's foundation for life, and the implications that follow from having the Holy Spirit dwell within a person.



What does it look like to have Christ as the foundation of your life? How does (and how should) it make you feel knowing that the Holy Spirit dwells within you as a believer? What comfort does this bring?

Knowing your own group, feel free to go in whatever direction of application you seem fit. One that may not immediately stand out, and perhaps could be well suited to your group, has to do with the emphasis given to God's residence within His people. The reason this is important for students is due to the sad reality that many of them tend to question their worth. For various reasons, students often see little value in themselves, if any at all.

What a great opportunity to impress within them the biblical view of self, expelling faulty views they adopt from culture! While not denying the damaging effects of sin within us or our continuing need to be more like Jesus, how great it is to be able to encourage students who need to hear that they are not worthless! Rather, they are loved and sought after by the God of this universe.



How great is it to hear that we are not worthless, but rather loved and sought after by the God of this universe?



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

SESSION 2

by Geoff Ashley

EXPANDED LESSON CONTENT

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

AS THE TEMPLE OF GOD, CHRISTIANS HAVE CHRIST AS THEIR FOUNDATION, ARE INDWELLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND ARE BEING BUILT INTO GOD'S RESIDENCE.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION AND DISCUSSION STARTER



The world is filled with glorious temples. Walking within the ancient complex of Angkor Wat in northern Cambodia, the largest religious monument in the world, can feel overwhelming. Standing in the shadow of the “Great Buddha” in Japan can make one feel small and insignificant, if only for a second. You can literally climb into the statue and stand within an idol in front of a traditional shrine. Most temples are breathtaking and beautiful, a recognition of the significance they hold within their respective religions.



What comes to mind when you hear the word “temple”?



What do temples represent? What is their purpose?

The disciples experienced awe and wonder in Jerusalem. Staring at the beauty of King Herod's temple, these men were amazed at the profound size and scope of the temple complex (Matt. 24:1-2). Even the solitary stones that encircled the grounds were incredible (Mark 13:1-2). Seeking to win influence with the Jews, Herod had spared no expense in decorating the center of Jewish life and worship.

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

The church is the temple of the living God...built on the foundations of the prophets and apostles, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone.¹

—Michael Bird

FURTHER COMMENTARY

Paul exhorts believers, all of whom have a part to play in the church's gospel-promoting mission, to prepare for a future evaluation of their service to Christ (3:10-17; 4:5). Love for Christ means that we should not depend on ordinary building materials (such as worldly wisdom, boasting, or human strength) as we build on the 'foundation' of His work; rather, Christ deserves the 'gold, silver, [and] precious stones' of which temples are made—that is, a mind-set and lifestyle devoted to God's glory, wisdom, and power [3:12]. At the day of judgment, the Lord Jesus will wisely and justly remove from our work anything that honors human contributions above His own...Despite its serious warning, the text displays several aspects of God's grace: (1) God not only reveals the threat of 'loss' (3:15), but a path of repentance by which we may avoid such loss; (2) whatever 'reward' (3:14) we receive in the end will honor 'the grace of God' (3:10) by which we labored; and (3) ability for faithful labor comes from our new identity as 'God's temple' (3:16).²

—C. D. (Jimmy) Agan

AS THE TEMPLE OF GOD, CHRISTIANS...

1. HAVE CHRIST AS THEIR FOUNDATION (1 COR. 3:9-17).

The apostle Paul spoke of the church in various ways: the body of Christ, God's field, God's building. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul continued with the building analogy by speaking of Christ as the foundation:

For we are God's coworkers. You are God's field, God's building. According to God's grace that was given to me, I have laid a foundation as a skilled master builder, and another builds on it. But each one must be careful how he builds on it. For no one can lay any other foundation than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on that foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become obvious, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one's work. If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, it will be lost, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire. Don't you yourselves know that you are God's sanctuary and that the Spirit of God lives in you? If anyone destroys God's sanctuary, God will destroy him; for God's sanctuary is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Cor. 3:9-17)

One of my favorite urban legends is about a college campus where the library is slowly sinking. The architect planned for the wood and concrete, for the desks and chairs and windows, but not for the weight of the thousands upon thousands of books the library would house. As a result, his foundation was insufficient and the library slowly began descending into the soil.

I don't know if there's really a library like this, but the story reminds me of the importance of a foundation. Without a sufficient foundation, whatever is built will surely suffer. As the saying goes, "You are only as strong as your foundation."



What is the purpose of a foundation in architecture and construction? What implications do you think this image will have as we think about Christ as our foundation?

The church in Corinth was a mess. People were picking their favorite apostles. A man was sleeping with his stepmother. Members were suing each other and getting drunk at the Lord's Table. Husbands and wives were confused, gifts were abused, and sins were excused. The church was disordered and divided, and Paul wasn't amused!

But the apostle never gave up on the church. Too much was at stake. After all, this was Corinth, a major crossroads of the Mediterranean world.

Paul had spent more than a year there laboring for the sake of the gospel (Acts 18:11). He had revisited them and written various letters. In these things, he went back to the basics and started again with the foundational truths of the gospel.

When Paul wrote about the church as a temple of God, he did what any good builder does—he laid a foundation. The foundation is the first and most important part of any building project. If the church is to survive, it must have a strong, solid, and sustaining foundation. Thankfully, we have just such a foundation in Christ Jesus.

Paul described himself as a skilled master builder. This was no arrogant boast but rather a reference to his apostolic passion, gifting, and authority. Paul’s goal, his mission and purpose in life, was to lay a foundation of faith in Jesus Christ.

There are many things we can build our lives on: our abilities, relationships, money, leisure, or other passions and purposes. But only one foundation will truly stand. No matter who you are or what you do, you cannot lay a faultless foundation apart from faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote, “No one can lay any other foundation than that which has been laid down” (1 Cor. 3:11).

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the center of the good news of God’s kingdom—stands as the only foundation that will withstand the shifts and storms of life. If our lives are to be built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, then the same should be true of our churches. After all, the church itself is the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

Without Jesus, our churches will be unable to stand and weather the cultural storms ahead. Unless we are grounded in the reality of the gospel, we offer nothing distinct to the world around us.



What are evidences that the foundation of your life is faulty?



What are some faulty foundations churches can be built upon and the results of these foundations?

2. ARE INDWELLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (1 COR. 6:19-20).

We’ve seen how the people of God are God’s building, and Christ is the cornerstone. But what kind of building are we? What is inside this holy place? Paul spoke to this question too. Watch how he described a Christian as a temple, a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit:

Don’t you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

God wants worshipers before workers; indeed the only acceptable workers are those who have learned the lost art of worship.³

—A. W. Tozer

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

Let us not merely cling to Christ, but let us be cemented to Him, for if we stand apart, we shall perish.⁴

—John Chrysostom

FURTHER COMMENTARY

Paul has already described the whole congregation as God's sacred temple in [1 Cor. 3:16-17]... Here Paul applies the corporate imagery to the individual believer, with particular reference to the believer's body. Every phrase underlines the need to flee sexual immorality (v. 18a). Naming the indwelling Spirit as Holy carries the implication that the privilege of being God's temple carries with it the obligation not to desecrate (or destroy; 3:17) the temple. Jewish history had been marked, and would continue to be so, by appropriate and inappropriate behavior in the temple of God. The purpose of the temple was to bring glory to God and to sanctify His name. The fact that the Holy Spirit resides in the believer's body adds further weight to the responsibility not to sin against that body.⁵

—Roy E. Ciampa
and Brian S. Rosner

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

Those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God's new Temple. They are, individually and corporately, places where heaven and earth meet.⁶

—N. T. Wright

Both the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple of Jerusalem included a particular place in which God's glory rested in a unique and distinct manner. Above the ark of the covenant, at the heart of both the tabernacle and the temple, God's presence was manifested.

Can you imagine the elaborate process of building the temple? This was no weekend building project; it was a tedious task marked by the dedication and sacrifice of an entire nation. First built by Solomon during Israel's Old Testament history, the temple was profoundly beautiful. By itself, it was certainly majestic, but even more so in what it signified. It was the dwelling place of God, not the so-called gods of the surrounding pagan nations, but the God of all creation. The God who created and sustains all things showed His presence in a unique way within the temple as a testimony to the nations.



What ideas and beliefs are communicated by a temple to those on the outside? How can this apply to other buildings as well?

When the Scriptures speak of the church as the sanctuary or temple of the Holy Spirit, it communicates the idea that in some distinct and meaningful way, the omnipresent God dwells within His particular people. There are numerous implications of this precious and powerful gospel truth, but perhaps the most immediate is that there is an inherent call upon our lives toward holiness. God's sanctuary is holy, and that is what you are (1 Cor. 3:17).

The English word *sanctuary* shares the same root as *sanctification*, the process of being made holy. A sanctuary is a holy place, a place (or people, in this context) that has been "set apart" for the worship of God (1 Pet. 2:1-5). The church is "a holy priesthood" (2:9). As such, we are called into the glorious work of proclaiming the praises of our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15). As the external beauty of Solomon's temple communicated the majesty of God, so now the internal beauty of the church communicates His glorious grace.

We saw earlier how Paul spoke of the church as the sanctuary of God. Now we see him saying that the Christian's body is a sanctuary of the Spirit. As a result of the indwelling presence of the Spirit and the redemption accomplished through Christ, we are urged toward sanctification. The Spirit who testifies of Christ conforms the church to the image of Christ.

Since God's glory rests in us, it should flow out from us. This means that our choices and actions matter not only on a corporate level but also as individuals. We glorify God by the pursuit of holiness. Compelled by love, we die to ourselves and live for Christ, seeking sanctification by the Spirit.

Unfortunately, holiness is not always a visible mark of many who would call themselves Christians today. If you were to ask one hundred random strangers the first adjective that comes to mind when they think of Christians, how many would say "holy"? If we're honest with one another, we'd probably

admit that “holy” is not the first word that comes to our minds when we think of ourselves either.

And yet holiness is fundamental to our identity. Because God is holy and dwells within us, we are to be holy in all of our conduct. We are to be set apart, sacred, different, and distinct from our surrounding culture.



What should our identity as God’s temple communicate to those who see us?



How can you personally begin to redeem this representation in your family, school, and community?

3. ARE BEING BUILT INTO GOD’S RESIDENCE (EPH. 2:19-22).

We’ve seen that Jesus is the cornerstone of the church—the temple of God. We’ve seen that the Spirit of God has taken up residence in us, both individually and corporately. And now we see how God is building us together as His dwelling place. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul made this point clear:

So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. The whole building, being put together by Him, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord. You also are being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22)

What image comes into your mind when you think of a castle? Perhaps it’s Buckingham or Windsor, royal domiciles for the British monarchy. Those familiar with medieval lore might picture moats and drawbridges and walls and towers. People from the East may think of parallel walls, gardens, and shrines.

Castles have played a major part of our entertainment culture. One considers the image of Dracula’s castle, dark and gloomy and perched upon an impregnable mountain. Others think of the castles from Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella, creations of Disney patterned after Neuschwanstein in southern Germany. Though originally designed primarily for defensive fortification, castles always had a sense of nobility. They were truly “fit for a king” in form and function.



What are some adjectives you would use to describe the dwelling place of royalty? Which of these images do you think relate well to the idea of the church as God’s dwelling place? Why?

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

Why do we have the Holy Spirit living within us to strengthen us toward holiness? It is because we are alive to God. We are now living under the reign of God, who unites us to Christ and gives us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us.⁷

—Jerry Bridges

FURTHER COMMENTARY

God’s new family is not only a new nation, but also a new building with a distinctive foundation. The ‘apostles and prophets’ in their unique relationship to Christ, exemplified by the authoritative teachings they communicated to the church, are the ‘foundation.’ Paul proclaimed Christ Jesus as the ‘cornerstone’ of the foundation...The description of a building under construction is indicated by the word ‘grows’ (v. 21). It conveys the idea of a dynamic church in the process of expansion. The major theme of union with Christ reappears in Paul’s conclusion to this chapter. Paul declared that God’s abode is not in the Jerusalem temple but in the church, which is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit who indwells the new believing community.⁸

—David S. Dockery

FURTHER COMMENTARY

As we talk about the church as the dwelling place of God, remember that the church is a people and not a place. We are not talking about the sanctuary or auditorium or living room in which you meet but rather the body of Christ as we discussed in the previous section. Though there is some sense of sacredness to the buildings and rooms in which we meet (since they are “set apart” for that purpose), it is ultimately the people of God who are the sanctuary to which the New Testament Scriptures speak.

REFERENCES

1. Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 717.
2. C. D. (Jimmy) Agan, *Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 1533–34.
3. A. W. Tozer, *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment*, comp. James L. Snyder (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread Publishers, 1997) [eBook].
4. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 8.7, quoted in *1–2 Corinthians*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VII in *Ancient Christian Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 32.
5. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 264.
6. N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2006), 129.
7. Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 63.
8. David S. Dockery, *HCSB Study Bible*, 2032, n. 2:20; n. 2:22.

God is the King who dwells among His people. We are His castle!

In the passage above, Paul used the metaphor of the body of Christ to build an understanding of the church’s role as God’s royal residence. Having established the foundation of one body comprised of both Jew and Gentile in verses 11-18, the apostle wrote of the church as being a united household—a dwelling place for God (v. 22).

Stop and think about the implications of this incredible statement: The church is the residence of God. The Creator of all things, the Great I Am, the Lord, King, Savior, and triune God lives within and among His people.

But this temple isn’t finished yet. We are “being built together.” As individual bricks and stones make up a castle’s walls, so individual Christians are being built together to form the dwelling place of our King. This should provide great hope to us who look around and see division and distrust and disorder in the church. God is not yet finished accomplishing His purposes.



God is the One building the church together. That said, how might we make ourselves more receptive to this work or cooperate in it?

CONCLUSION

From the Old Testament to the New, the Lord God is a God who dwells among His people. God has a royal residence, but it is not a sanctuary of humankind’s own making (Acts 17:24). It is a dwelling place formed by God Himself—the body of Jesus Christ: “The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

And now God dwells in us. Who are we? We are the temple of God. We are the sanctuary and dwelling place of God, built upon the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ for the glory of our great King.

As God’s temple, we look forward to the day when the whole earth is filled with the presence of God.