

“Warning: Don’t Touch the Temple!” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

In 1889 a most unusual structure was built. When it was first built for an international exhibition the citizens of the city called the structure “monstrous.” They demanded it be torn down as soon as the exhibition was over. Yet, from the moment its architect first conceived it, he took pride in it and loyally defended it from those who wished to destroy it. He knew it was destined for greatness. Today it is one of the architectural wonders of the modern world and stands as the primary landmark of Paris, France. The architect was Alexandre Gustave Eiffel, the creator of the Eiffel Tower.

In the same way, we ought to be struck by Jesus Christ’s loyalty to another structure—the church. Jesus entrusted His church to an unlikely band of disciples, whom He defended, prayed for, and prepared to spread the gospel. Today Jesus remains loyal to disciples like you and me. Although we make many blunders and are weak and foolish, Jesus, the architect of the church, knows His structure is destined for greatness when He returns.¹

Do these sentiments sound like pie-in-the-sky optimism? Does this seem a little far-fetched to you? If so, I can understand where you are coming from. But I need to ask you an important question: Have you ever contemplated how much God loves the church? In 1 Cor 3:16-17,² Paul is going to inform us that God dwells in the church and values the church like no other entity. God says, “*Long live the church!*” We must join His chorus and shout, “*Long live the church!*”

1. We should value the church because God dwells within it (3:16). Our passage begins with the phrase, “**Do you not know?**” This phrase appears ten times in 1 Corinthians³ and serves as a common literary device to pose a rhetorical question. It is one of Paul’s favorite expressions and he invariably uses it of something his listeners should know but don’t. Typically, “do you not know” even refers to something Paul has previously personally told the Corinthians. So here is something that ought to have been a matter of common knowledge, but they had either forgotten it or rejected it. (This phrase is the equivalent to our “come now!”) The question Paul asks is, “**Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**” The Corinthians presume to be wise (3:18-23), yet Paul must ask, “Can it be that you who boast in ‘wisdom’ do not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” This question is a stinging rebuke⁴ that centers on the failure of the Corinthians to recognize who they are. These “wise guys” should have had this down pat, but they did not grasp this elementary truth.⁵

In this context Paul is not talking about the individual Christian; instead, he has in mind the local church. Two primary reasons support this. First, the context concerns the local church. The previous section concerns the judgment seat of Christ (3:10-15). It speaks about how God holds us responsible for the quality of workmanship and materials we use to build His church, upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. Those who build on the *right* foundation with the *right* materials will receive a reward, but those who build sloppily will suffer loss and find their work burned up at the judgment seat of Christ. The loss will not be the loss of salvation, for 3:15 promises that the person himself shall be saved, but it will be serious, for such a Christian will be saved so as through fire.

Not only does the context support the view that Paul is speaking of the local church, the grammar does as well. The word “you” in this verse is plural in Greek. In English the word “you” is ambiguous—one cannot always tell whether it is a singular “you” or a plural “you,” for both are spelled the same. People from the South, of course, have removed that ambiguity. When they mean more than one person they say, “ya’ll.” Well, here in 3:16 Paul uses the Greek word for “ya’ll.”⁶ Literally it reads, “Do ya’ll not know that ya’ll are a temple (singular) of God and the Spirit of God dwells in ya’ll.” Clearly ya’ll, the passage before us concerns the local church.

Paul states that the local church is a “temple of God.” There are two⁷ primary words for temple in the Greek New Testament.⁸ One signifies the entire temple, including the outer courtyard, which even Gentiles could enter. But the other word denotes just the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, which could not be entered by Gentiles or sinful Israelites, or anyone, for that matter, except the High Priest, and him only once a year on the Day of Atonement. The word “temple” (*naos*) used in 3:16-17 is this latter word. Paul is saying that the group of believers at Corinth, who constituted the church in that city, was a sanctuary of God, a holy of holies.⁹ This was true not only of the church of Corinth; this is also true for our church and every other church. Imagine that! We are a temple of God.¹⁰ God Himself has called us holy and significant. “*Long live the church!*”

Paul goes further in 3:16 and states that the Holy Spirit “dwells”¹¹ in the church. This verse is telling us that when believers gather together for corporate worship and fellowship the Holy Spirit is there in a *unique* way, creating unity, confirming truth, and ministering to needs. The Spirit of God is here right now, not just because I’m here or just because you’re here, but because a believing church is here.¹²

Tragically, many Christians dismiss the importance of the local church. They argue from verses like Matt 18:20 that when two or three are gathered together in Jesus’ name, He is present; therefore, I don’t need to attend church. I can “have church” at home or at work if I am with at least one other believer. The only problem with this proof-text is that this verse is not talking about public worship; instead, it is dealing with church discipline. The two or three witnesses are gathered for the purpose of confronting an erring Christian! This verse is not implying that Christians do not need to attend church. Far from it!

Church attendance and participation is critical.¹³ Although your salvation is not dependent upon your church attendance, your Christian maturity is. The Bible is clear that it is impossible to be obedient and fruitful apart from the local church. We need to keep this tension in the forefront of our minds. The following key principles will help you increase your commitment to the local church.

- ***Commit to attend church every Sunday unless you are sick.*** Unless you make a commitment upfront that you will attend church every single Sunday, you will not. It’s really as simple as that. Your commitment to attend church has to be every bit as strong as your commitment to go to work or feed your children. Without this type of commitment there will always be an excuse to not attend church. Does that mean you cannot go out of town on vacation? Of course not! We all need to get away from the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. But when you do take a vacation do not take a vacation from the people of God. Instead, when you go out of town on vacation find a church where you and your family can worship. It is helpful for you and your family to see how other Christians worship. It also provides a great source of encouragement to the pastor and the people of the church that you visit. And it teaches your children that church is a serious priority in your life and should be in theirs as well. Moreover, it pleases the heart of God when you include Him in your vacation plans. “*Long live the church!*”
- ***Refuse to speak critically about the church.*** When you are tempted to say something derogatory about your church or any other church, pause for just a moment and imagine that Jesus Christ is standing next to you. If He was standing next to you, what would you say?¹⁴ If you are like me you would bite your tongue. When another Christian says something critical about your church or another church, how should you respond? We should consider responding the very same way that Jesus Christ would respond—with holy agitation! Jesus died for the church and He doesn’t appreciate it when the church is unduly criticized. Instead of kicking the church we should be crying out, “*Long live the church!*”

[Paul has just informed us that God dwells in the church. The question that begs to be answered is: Just how serious is God about His church? In 3:17, Paul will open our eyes to some sobering realities.]

2. We should value the church because God values it (3:17). How much does God value the church? More than we can possibly imagine. The church is so important and of such a high priority that God will go to any lengths necessary to protect and preserve it. This is conveyed to us by means of a threat. Paul writes, “**If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him.**”¹⁵ This is not just a theoretical and hypothetical warning, for the kind of grammar Paul uses here makes it clear that this is a real possibility; in fact, he assumes it is happening right now.¹⁶ Someone is in the process of destroying the temple at Corinth—the body of believers. It is also worth noting that the word translated “any man” (*tis*) in the NASB is not speaking specifically of the male gender. The term includes all mankind and should be translated “someone” (NET) or “anyone” (ESV, NIV, NKJV). So women, you’re not off the hook. You can’t tune out just yet. You need to recognize that Paul is writing to you as well.

Now the natural question is: Who are these temple destroyers? Many scholars believe that these temple destroyers must be unbelievers. The problem with this view is that only Christians are mentioned in the immediate context (3:5-17).¹⁷ Furthermore, there is no indication that Paul has transitioned to speak of unbelievers. The natural interpretation of this verse is that believers are under consideration.¹⁸ This ought to disturb all of us! Paul is saying that it is possible for true Christians to destroy local churches. This means that the greatest threat to our churches comes *from within*, not from without. The greatest enemies of the church are insiders, not outsiders.¹⁹ Nevertheless, *long live the church!*

How does one go about destroying a local church? There are countless ways—far too many to expound upon. Thus, the specific cause of the ruin must be found in the present context (1:10-4:21). If we were to whittle down the cause of church destruction into two words, they would be “worldly wisdom.” The whole thrust of 1:10-4:21 is to dismantle worldly wisdom and its various expressions.

- ***A church can be destroyed by divisions*** (1:10-17; 3:5-8). In Corinth most of the divisions stemmed from preaching cults. Everyone had his or her favorite preacher and they weren’t bashful in saying so. This resulted in “divisions” (1:10) in the body of Christ.²⁰ These verbal wars undoubtedly led to other sins, like gossip and slander. In every church there are some who sow seeds of discontent; whenever they have a chance to badmouth some program or some leader in the church, they do it. That’s how temple destroyers get their kicks. Yet, you and I must see ourselves here. All of us to one degree or another have said things about others that are sinful.²¹ We can’t continue to tolerate these verbal sins. Even though they may seem relatively innocent they are capable of destroying a church. After all, divide and conquer is a strategy of Satan.

Alan Redpath (1907-1989), a well-known British pastor and author, once formed a mutual encouragement fellowship at a time of stress in one of his pastorates. He asked his people to subscribe to a simple formula applied before speaking of any person or subject that was perhaps controversial. T—is it True? H—is it Helpful? I—is it Inspiring? N—is it Necessary? K—is it Kind? If what I am about to say does not pass those tests, I will keep my mouth shut! And it worked!²² May we follow this simple acrostic and honor Christ with our tongues.

- ***A church can be destroyed by bad theology and methodology*** (1:18-25; 3:18-23). If someone individually chooses to begin to live according to the wisdom and the practice of the world, he begins to corrupt and damage the church. He is building with shoddy material, with wood, hay and stubble, which will not stand the test of the fire, and therefore he is marring the building of the church. When someone seeks to make the church impressive and powerful by the methods and the standards of the world, he is corrupting and damaging the church. If someone becomes consumed with a particular doctrine and emphasizes this theology above all others, destruction is imminent. Down throughout time churches have split over both theology and methodology. Having right theology and methodology is important, but we must not divide over non-essential issues. God values His church and doesn’t want us unnecessarily divided.

It is worth noting that pastors can also frequently destroy churches. One way is to preach false doctrine. Another way is to lull people to sleep spiritually by telling them just what they want to hear. Pastors can also destroy churches by riding hobbyhorses. They can get into the spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, Calvinism/Arminianism debate, and end times. Pretty soon they become known as experts and their entire ministry revolves around their area of interest. Watch out!

- ***A church can be destroyed by indifference and non-involvement*** (3:12-15). Paul noted that some of the Corinthian builders were building with worthless building materials (i.e., wood, hay, straw). Consequently, the building was rickety even though the foundation was flawless. This is a dangerous trend. Many churches have died on the vine because no one was willing to carry on the ministry. Thus, it is imperative that every member serve in at least one capacity. Are you serving your church today? What would your church be like if every member was just like you?

Those who are dividing the church are destroying it.²³ This is because the church of Jesus Christ is a living organism, not just an organization. You can divide a pie into six pieces without destroying it; you are just preparing to serve it. This is because a pie is an organization. But if you divide a dog in two you have destroyed him, because he is an *organism*. The Corinthian church was being divided into four cliques or parties (1:12). Thus, it was in danger of being destroyed.²⁴

Is destroying the local church really that serious? Paul apparently thinks so. In 3:17, he goes on to say that if anyone destroys the temple of God, **“God will destroy him.”** Notice that the punishment fits the crime: destroy and you will be destroyed. Does this mean eradication, extermination, or eternal punishment in hell? A quick look at the word translated “destroy” in a lexicon informs us that it means “to desecrate, harm, corrupt, or spoil,” not to exterminate. It is never used by Paul to refer to destruction in hell.²⁵ It can, however, refer to judgment upon the believer.²⁶

The following bullet list suggests four ways that God’s discipline can strike a Christian who is in the process of destroying the temple—the local church.

- ***Excommunication:*** In the Old Testament, one of the penalties for defiling God’s dwelling (whether the tabernacle or the temple) was separation from the nation. The Lord spoke this word to Moses and Aaron: “But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person must be cut off from among the community, because he has polluted the sanctuary of the LORD; the water of purification was not sprinkled on him, so he is unclean” (Num 19:20 NET). God takes the holiness of His dwelling seriously. The Israelite that fails to recognize this will suffer the consequences of excommunication. This also occurs in the New Testament in 1 Cor 5:5.
- ***Sickness:*** Of particular interest is the account of Uzziah, who succumbed to pride after gaining various military successes and then went into the temple (*naos*), the Holy of Holies, and was punished with leprosy. In the New Testament, when the Corinthians are guilty of abusing the Lord’s Supper the Lord disciplines them with weakness, sickness, and eventually death (11:30).
- ***Physical Death:*** Throughout the Old Testament, temporal death was the penalty for defiling the material temple (Exod 28:43; Lev 16:2).²⁷ The Lord commanded Moses, “Thus you are to set the Israelites apart from their impurity so that they do not die in their impurity by defiling my tabernacle which is in their midst” (Lev 15:31 NET). Sins against the Jerusalem temple were taken very seriously in Judaism. Examples of God sending divine discipline on His people for defiling His tabernacle include: Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-3); Uzzah (2 Sam 6:6-7); and Uzziah (2 Chron 26:16-21).²⁸ God also executed death sentences upon Christians in the New Testament. In Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:30 (see also 1 Tim 1:18-20; Jas 5:19-20; 1 John 5:16-17).

- **Eternal loss:** The word “destroy” (*phtheiro*) is a future active indicative verb, which indicates that God’s response will be *after* their offense. However, the future tense *could* also suggest that God’s destruction has an eternal component. Contextually, it seems that this is a reference to the last day (3:13). We know from the preceding verses (3:13-15) that the builder in question will not lose his salvation, but he will lose his reward. Thus, in addition to physical ruin or death, God’s destruction may also include the complete obliteration of the Corinthian destroyer’s life’s work at the final judgment. We must always bear in mind that the end result for a temple destroyer is shame and remorse at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10-11; 1 John 2:28). Many believers need to reconsider *why* they are suffering. It may be that the consequences of their actions have caught up with them. We must never underestimate the value that God places on relationships and unity in our local churches. He is dead serious about His temple.

There is a bumper sticker that reads: “If you value your life as much as I value this truck, DON’T TOUCH IT!” That is what God is saying to His church: “You touch My temple and you will have Me to deal with. And you don’t want to have to deal with Me. I take it seriously when you are involved in destroying My temple...so seriously that I will destroy you!”

When I was growing up I participated in some pranks. Some of the things my friends and I did were not very cool. Fortunately, we had some boundaries and common sense. Whenever we saw a “No Trespassing” sign we stayed away. We would not go near that person’s home. We knew that whoever lived there was not playing games. We were afraid that if we messed with that person, we’d be messed with. In the same way, God has posted a “No Trespassing” sign on His church. Those who choose to ignore this sign do so at their own peril. God promises us that if we destroy His church, He will destroy us. Yet, God says, “*Long live the church...and the Christian!*”

Why does God get so “ticked” about someone destroying His church? First, the church is the place where His name is revealed. We must be reminded that when the world considers God it typically looks at God’s temple—the church. When the world sees a destructive temple it then draws its own erroneous conclusions about the character of God—based solely on what it sees in God’s people. In the process God’s reputation is damaged. While Satan can never destroy God’s character he certainly tries to damage His reputation, and he does it through the people of God.

Second, the temple of God is holy. The irrefutable reason why God’s judgment falls is given at the end of 3:17: **“for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”** It’s hard to refute God’s reasoning here, isn’t it? If God’s temple is holy, and if we are that temple, then it only stands to reason that God, who cannot tolerate sin, must judge those who sin against His church. I think the local believing church deserves a great deal more respect than it gets from many Christians today.²⁹

In the Old Testament, the Holy of Holies was so sacred that anyone caught desecrating it or even touching forbidden objects was summarily judged. Well, the local church is also holy to the Lord. If God judged the desecration of His temple in the Old Testament, do you think He will overlook the desecration of His temple in the New Testament? We don’t have any sacred objects that can’t be touched and we shouldn’t have any sacred cows that can’t be butchered, but we do have a sacred task to perform.³⁰ Therefore, we must be holy in both our conduct and our calling.

Far too many of us are like the Susan B. Anthony dollar of a bygone day. The Susan B. Anthony dollar failed to catch on. One of the primary reasons being that it looked and felt too much like a quarter. People couldn’t tell the difference, so the Anthony dollar fell into disuse and was soon taken out of active circulation. A lot of us Christians are like that. We are worth a dollar, but we look like a quarter and live like “chump change.”³¹

This past Monday America was rocked by the deadliest shooting in U.S. history. Cho Seung-Hui, a senior English major at Virginia Tech, killed 33 Virginia Tech students (including himself) and wounded 15 others. Liviu Libresku, a Romanian Holocaust survivor teaching at the university, stood in the doorway while students were exiting from the second story windows, and he ended up losing his life so that others could be saved.

It should be obvious that both of these men shared one thing in common—they were both “insiders”—one was a student at Virginia Tech and the other was a professor. Unfortunately, that is where the similarities end. The contrasts, however, are glaring: one was selfish, the other was unselfish; one hated his school, the other loved his school; one took lives, the other saved lives.

In the church of Jesus Christ every member is like one of these two people. We are either destroying the church or building the church. There is no middle ground. God says, “*Long live the church!*” We must join His chorus and shout, “*Long live the church!*”

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Scripture Reference

1 Corinthians 3:16-17
2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1
Ephesians 2:19-22
Numbers 19:20
Leviticus 10:1-3
2 Samuel 6:6-7
2 Chronicles 26:16-21

Study Questions

1. What really bugs me about my church? How am I currently helping to solve these weaknesses? What am I most thankful for about my church? How have I encouraged God's work in this area? Overall, what is my view of the church? Is my view fleshed out in my attitudes, words, and actions?
2. How much time do I spend thinking about my identity in Christ? Do I regularly reflect on God's optimistic view of the church? What impact does this have on my perspective and attitude? How can I bolster my excitement and commitment level to my church? Who can help me in this pursuit?
3. Please read the following quote from Elton Trueblood: "The church or something like it must be cherished, criticized, nourished and reformed. The Church of Jesus Christ, with all its blemishes and its divisions and its failures, remains our best hope of spiritual vitality. However poor it is, life without it is worse." Do I agree with this assessment? Why or why not?
4. Do I really believe that God will "destroy" some Christians? How does this make me feel about God? How can I ensure that I don't bring such temporal discipline upon myself?
5. What does practical holiness look like to me? How much time and energy do I put into growing in holiness? Where is my passion for purifying my heart and mind from every fraction of an ounce of sin's poison? Read 2 Corinthians 7:1.

Notes

¹ Craig Brian Larson, editor, *Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 31.

² First Corinthians 3:16-17 forms one unit of thought and must be treated as such. This is recognized by most English translations, which set 3:16-17 apart in a distinct paragraph. Yet, commentators Robertson and Plummer point out, “This section is linked with 3:9-15 both by the opening words, which imply some connection, and by the word ‘temple’ (*naos*), which is doubtless suggested by the building of 3:9-15.” Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *I Corinthians: International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 65-66. Therefore, a proper interpretation of these two verses will see this paragraph as a single unit that fits into an immediate context. Rosner argues convincingly that 1 Cor 3:16-17 should be read with 1 Cor 5:1-13. Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, & Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 75-80.

³ See 1 Cor 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24 and only one time elsewhere (Rom 6:16; cf. Jas 4:4).

⁴ See Paul’s use of similar rhetorical questions (1 Thess 2:1, 5; 3:3-4; 4:2; 5:2) that suggest an accusatory tone. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 146.

⁵ Thiselton offers the translation: “Surely you know *this!*” Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 315.

⁶ The fact that the Greek uses the second person plural *humin* (“you”) is indicated in the footnotes of the NET, ESV, and NRSV. The NIV brings this out in its translation, “Don’t you know that *you yourselves* are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (Emphasis mine)

⁷ Paul also uses the term *eidoleion* (“an idol’s temple”) in 1 Cor 8:10. This word is a NT *hapax legomenon* (i.e., only appears once).

⁸ In the Greek NT, there are two words for “temple:” *hieron* and *naos*. In Paul’s letters the word *hieron* appears once (1 Cor 9:13) and *naos* appears a total of eight times (1 Cor 3:16-17 [3x’s]; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16 [2x’s]; Eph 2:21; 2 Thess 2:4). Paul uses the analogy of the physical temple in 1 Cor 9:13-14 to address the issue of whether “those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” He uses the word *hieron* to indicate the place where the priests offered up animal sacrifices on the altar, which was situated in the outer court (see Exodus 27-29, 40). In contrast to this is Paul’s use of *naos* to refer to the abominable act of the “man of lawlessness” in God’s temple—the word that designates the place of the deity’s presence (2 Thess 2:4). In the other seven Pauline passages, *naos* is used metaphorically—to depict a human habitation for the divine Spirit. In one instance the temple image is used to describe the individual believer’s body (1 Cor 6:19); in every other instance *naos* depicts the church.

⁹ It seems that the *naos* in 1 Cor 3:16 is referring to the Jerusalem temple. Though certainly the Corinthians were familiar with pagan temples, it can also be shown that they were likely familiar with the temple that stood in Jerusalem. Acts 18:11 records, “And he [Paul] settled there [in Corinth] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” “The word of God” likely refers to the OT. At this point in the church, it is unlikely that either the Corinthian church or Paul had any Scripture available to them other than the OT. That Paul expected the Corinthian church to be familiar with the OT can be seen from the many quotations that Paul includes in this letter (1:19, 31; 2:9, 16; 3:19-20; 5:13; 6:16; 10:7, 26; 14:21; 15:27, 32, 45, 54-55). Paul expected that they would understand the OT background to 10:1-13 and assumed they were familiar with the saying “[Do] not to go beyond what is written” (4:6) in reference to the OT. Their expected familiarity with Judaism can also be seen in his reference to the Passover (5:7), a distinctly Jewish tradition. During Paul’s lengthy stay in Corinth, in which he taught out of the OT, it is likely that the temple in Jerusalem would have been a subject of his teaching.

If not the majority, at least some in the Corinthian church were certainly familiar with the temple in Jerusalem. True to his pattern, upon arriving in Corinth he went first to the local synagogue. “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). The result of his preaching was that at least some of the Jews were converted, as can be seen from Acts 18:8: “Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard [Paul’s preaching] believed and were baptized.” It is also important to note that Paul’s audience at the synagogue included not only Jews, but also Gentiles. Gentile God fearers were often Paul’s most fruitful harvest field, and it has been suggested that many in the Corinthian church had been synagogue attendees. Thus, while the majority of the church consisted of former pagans, at least some among his number attended the local synagogue before their conversion and were familiar with the Jewish temple.

¹⁰ Why did Paul not use the term *ekklesia* (“church”)? Gerald Hawthorne explains, “In addition to his use of the important term *ekklesia* (“church, congregation”), Paul employs many significant images and metaphors of God’s people in Christ. These images are not always synonymous or coterminous with *ekklesia*. For example, the body metaphor can refer to Christians generally in their relationships in Christ, without suggesting that they are members of the same *ekklesia*. But often in his letters the apostle applies these images to the same entity as the *ekklesia*—for example, the congregation at Corinth. These metaphors have different or nuanced connotations, and therefore it is important to ask what point is being conveyed or taught through the image. More than a hundred are used in the NT generally.” G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, and D.G. Reid eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, c.1993, 1997), Electronic Ed.

¹¹ The Greek verb *oikei* (“dwells”) is in the present tense and indicates a continuous reality.

¹² Michael P. Andrus, “What God Thinks of Temple Ruins” (1 Cor 3:16-23): Unpublished sermon, 1/13/1985.

¹³ Augustine said, “He cannot have God for his father who does not have the church for his mother.” Martin Luther said, “Apart from the church, salvation is impossible.” This does not mean that the church provides salvation. Rather it means that you can’t fulfill what it means to be a disciple of Christ apart from the local church.” Bill Hull, *Building High Commitment in a Low-Commitment World* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1995), 109.

¹⁴ Of course, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit indwells each and every Christian (1 Cor 6:19), so practically speaking, God lives inside of you.

¹⁵ Contrary to popular opinion, destroying the temple is NOT a reference to suicide. As I previously demonstrated, in this context, the temple is the local church, not the individual believer.

¹⁶ Mitchell argues that the destruction in view refers to the actual destruction of the Corinthian church community. See Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 103. This occurs by factionalism (Robertson-Plummer 1914:67; Barrett 1968:91).

¹⁷ “Any man” (*ei tis*) can apply to either an unbeliever or a believer (cf. 3:18). See Paul’s other usages in Rom 13:9; 1 Cor 7:12-13; 8:2; 10:27; 11:34; 14:37; 16:22; 2 Cor 5:17; 10:7; 11:20; Gal 1:9; Eph 4:29; Phil 2:1; 3:4; 4:8; 2 Thess 3:10; 1 Tim 3:1; 5:16; 6:3; Titus 1:6.

¹⁸ This notion is also supported by the fact that the warning passages that follow seem to refer to the Corinthian believers (cf. 1 Cor 5:1-13; 6:1-11; 9:24-27; 10:1-11, et. al).

¹⁹ Garland 2003:120 reflects this same conclusion when he writes, “Paul assumes that the community can be destroyed by insiders, not by outsiders.”

²⁰ Schism is equivalent to profanation of the holy place, which in ancient society was a capital offense, executed by God Himself (cf. 1 Sam 5:1ff; 2 Sam 6:6ff; see also 1 Clem 2:6, “All schism was an abomination to you”).

²¹ Every Christian leader (and Christian) would benefit from reading Marshall Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1994).

²² Preaching Today citation: Alan Redpath in “A Passion for Preaching.” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 34, no. 11.

²³ Can God’s universal church ever be destroyed? Absolutely not! Jesus says: “I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matt 16:18). But can a local church be destroyed? Absolutely! Churches are plagued with factions. An estimated 10,000 churches split in North America every year. Oliver W. Price, “Seven Reasons for Praying Together.” *Revival Insights*, Vol. XV, No. 3. Many of these splits are the result of “destroyers.”

²⁴ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 221.

²⁵ There are nine instances of the verb *phtheiro* in the NT. Six of the nine occurrences of *phtheiro* occur in Paul’s letters. Two of the six are in our primary text. Of the four remaining examples, not one appears to refer to eternal destruction (1 Cor 15:33; 2 Cor 7:2; 11:3; Eph 4:22). The three non-Pauline usages offer another meaning. The first two references (2 Pet 2:12 and Jude 10) refer to the eternal destruction of unregenerate false teachers while Rev 19:2 refers to temporal corruption. If we take into consideration the LXX, we find the root *phtheiro* occurs 20 times. It is employed to describe the cutting off of hair (Lev 19:27), of seduction (4 Macc 18:8), of pride ruined (Jer 13:9), the corruption of morals (Gen 6:11; Hos 9:9), the withering of the earth (Isa 24:4), the destruction of the earth (Exod 10:15; 1 Chron 20:1; Isa 24:3), and of the destruction of enemies (Isa 54:16). In all, there is not one occurrence that connotes eternal destruction. This is also true in much of its extra biblical usage. In the extra biblical references that appear in BDAG, the verb *phtheiro* is commonly used to describe the infliction of severe damage, as, for example, grave financial loss, the seduction of a virgin, the degeneration of old age, and the violation of rules. See BDAG s.v. verb *phtheiro* 1a-d, Electronic Ed. This leads to the conclusion that the word *phtheiro* need not, in fact, for the most part does not, refer to the eternal destruction of the wicked.

²⁶ Commentary support for this view is sparse. Robert Gromacki 1977:50 suggests, “God’s destruction could refer to the chastisement of physical death.” Grosheide 1953:89 writes, “How God is going to destroy is not indicated. It is clear that the judgment of God is meant. This may refer to suffering loss (vs. 15) but also to the eternal punishment.” F.F. Bruce 1971:45 seems to concur when he writes, “The temple of God can be destroyed, or defiled (Gk *phtheiro*), by party-spirit and quarreling, so let him beware; the punishment for such sacrilege will fit the crime (cf. 11:30).”

²⁷ Moffat 1938:42 points out, “Desecration of a temple was a capital crime in the ancient world, which, it was believed the god himself might avenge.”

²⁸ Another intriguing example of temporal destruction is the Sennacherib invasion of 2 Kings 18-19. Rabshakeh came up to taunt God and “destroy” (*diaphtheiro*) the temple. As a result, God killed 185,000 Assyrians, including their king Sennacherib (19:35-37).

²⁹ Fee writes, “...this is one of the few texts in the NT where we are exposed both to an understanding of the nature of the local church (God’s temple indwelt by his Spirit) and where the warning of v. 17 makes it clear how important the local church is to God himself.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 149.

³⁰ Andrus, “What God Thinks of Temple Ruins.”

³¹ Tony Evans, *Are Christians Destroying America?* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 32.