

The Building as Temple

II. - The Collective Temple

“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

In the last issue we discussed the individual temple. We saw that within our spirits we have a worship center which is typified by the temple and its predecessor—The Tabernacle in the Wilderness. Basically the Tabernacle was a type of Christ. This is made very clear in Hebrews 8, 9 and 10. In the last issue, when we considered the individual temple, we discussed the symbols of Christ represented in each of the furnishings. The Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies is a type of Christ as the propitiation for our sins. The Table of Showbread or “Bread of the Presence” is a type of Christ as the Bread of Life. The Seven-Branch Lampstand, of course, is Christ the Light of the World. And the Altar of Incense is Christ as the Intercessor between ourselves and God. When we have Christ within our spirits, we have a worship center which is continually in touch with God, in spite of whatever may be taking place in the fleshly circumstances around us. The human flesh, which is the vehicle for the Spirit of God is, nevertheless, quite limited even in its efforts to worship God from a mental and emotional perspective. That is one reason there is so much division in the Church. It is the failure to recognize the limits of the flesh and take them into account as we seek to relate to one another.

And so we have our worship centers as individual temples of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus’ words to the woman at the well come into focus. In Jesus’ words—*“They that worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”*

But how does this fit into the concept of the collective temple? The furnishings which are symbolic of our individual worship can also be applied collectively. In the larger sense, the entire structure is involved in the symbolism of the Body of Christ where you have the courtyard as well as the structure that housed the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The construction of these elements was according to a very carefully prescribed pattern, including a precise specification of materials as well as colors and dimensions. This precision was picked up in Hebrews—*“See that you make it according to the pattern which was showed you on the Mount”* (8:5).

The entire Tabernacle and the later Temple were primarily types of Christ. But we have the liberty to apply this to the Church—the Body of Christ—by Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2, where he says that the building is fitted together and “growing into a temple of the Holy Spirit.” In chapter four he describes the building as a “habitation of God in the Spirit.” It was the place of His Spiritual presence. Indeed, in the early Tabernacle you have the reference to the “*Shekinah* Glory.” *Shekinah* is a form of the Hebrew word, *Shakan*, which means “to dwell.” God met His people at the Mercy Seat—the place of forgiveness. Where does the God of the universe meet this tiny mite upon the earth? At the Mercy Seat—the place of forgiveness. God elects to forgive His errant humans. We know we are forgiven, because we want to be. If the Spirit of God were not with us we would not seek forgiveness.

This, of course, is on an individual level, but it is also collective. Moses brought the basin of blood to the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat for the entire family of God. And it is, of course, the Crucifixion and Resurrection that binds the body of believers together today. It is symbolized for us in the celebration of communion. Perhaps nothing in all of the observances of the Church binds the believers together more deeply than the symbolizing of the atoning death of Christ. Although it is observed in a number of different ways and times, it has its universal meaning in the sacrifice of Christ.

As the furnishings of the Tabernacle had their symbolism in the individual center of worship, they had also their meaning in the collective sense. The body of believers is one in Christ. It is joined together across the continents and geographical divisions; across races and ethnic lines; across the variables of practice and precept. We are one building—one temple—one worship center in the Spirit. As Jesus told the woman of Samaria—*“It is neither here nor there, but in the Spirit. It is in Spirit and truth.”*

In spiritual symbolism, the believers are surrounded by Christ in their temple of worship. The very hangings and materials of the Tabernacle typify Christ. The material with which the worship center was surrounded reflected the glory of Christ—fine linen, ram skins died red, tapestries of blue and purple and scarlet, fittings of gold and silver—all spoke of Christ.

And so the believers today as they meet in the Spirit, are immersed in the Spirit of Christ. There are of course many fleshly activities that tend to obscure the reality of the presence of Christ, but even these do not prevent His Spirit from integrating the body of believers worldwide at the spirit level. Where worship is seen at the level of observances and practices and emotional experiences, it is a fleshly thing. Where Christ is seen to be glorified by grand buildings and elaborate programs, this reality is often obscured.

We are collectively, then, a temple—a worship center in the Spirit. Human structures and fleshly observances can neither enhance nor detract from the reality of the presence of His Holy Spirit uniting the body of believers as one.

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