

Truth for Today

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The Church of Christ: The House of God

When we speak about the house of God, many of us think of a building such as a church or a chapel, something tangible that we can see and enter. This was the case in Old Testament times, when God dwelt among His people. God came down firstly to the tabernacle that Moses set up in the wilderness, and then many years later to that glorious temple that Solomon built. But now the house of God is a spiritual thing, not bricks and mortar but people. When the apostle Paul spoke to the men of Athens on Mars Hill in Acts 17:24, he said, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands". There may be many lovely buildings which have been set up to the glory of God and set aside for his service, but we must remember that actually the house of God today is composed of every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22 tells us: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit".

While these verses do speak of a building and a temple, we must understand that it is a spiritual building being referred to. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon those believers who were there together and made them into one body, connected with a living Head who was in heaven. They became what we call today the church or the assembly. From that moment onward, there was a company on earth in whom God dwelt in the power of the Holy Spirit. That same divine Person today is building a spiritual temple, the foundation of which is the teachings of the apostles, and Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone. This temple although being built today, will not be complete until every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ has either been raised from the dead or caught up to be with the Lord in heaven. At that, time, it will be a temple in which, during the thousand years reign of Christ, God's glory will be displayed. But the last verse of Ephesians 2 is a present building; it is always complete, being composed of every believer alive in the world at any given time. Here it is called an habitation of God through the Spirit. So we conclude that, today, God dwells in a spiritual house composed of every believer.

The term, the House of God, is only found three times in the New Testament. If we read them we shall see immediately that each refers to a certain aspect of the church. In Hebrews 3:6 we read, "But Christ as a son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold, fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. There is an 'if' here that often causes trouble. There is always the possibility that we are not what we say we are. This is called our profession. The reality of our profession will be seen in our holding fast and continuing. If we give something up then there is, sadly, the possibility that we never really had it to begin with.

1 Peter 4:17 says, "For the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" This verse is saying that when God starts to deal in judgement, He starts with those who are nearest to Him. We must however remember that this has nothing to do with the judgement of our sins; that was settled at the cross. Here it is rather God's thoughts about our behaviour. Again this verse makes it clear that the apostle is talking about our being God's house.

Thirdly, in 1 Timothy 3:15: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth". Here the apostle actually uses the word "behaviour" in God's house. Surely in any proper household today, the owner of the house has a right to lay down the rules so that his house may be run in an orderly manner so that all should feel at home there, particularly himself. If any are disorderly, the atmosphere of the house is disrupted; there is trouble and tension, peace is destroyed. We must bear this idea in mind as we think about the House of God.

Putting these three scriptures together, we have, firstly our profession, secondly God's judgement and, lastly, our behaviour. This means that God's house today has to do with our responsibility. I want, mainly, to think about 1 Timothy, because it was written to instruct Timothy how he should try to maintain what Paul had taught the Ephesians. I want to take up five things which characterise the House of God. The first of these we read in 1 Timothy 1:3-6: "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly

edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling". Then in the following four verses he lists things that ought not to be seen in God's house, ending with the words, "and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust". So Paul is telling Timothy to test everything by this standard. Is it according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God?

There is rule in God's house; it is an ordered house. Everything that is done must be according to the standard that God has laid down. There are two great principles demonstrated in the Gospel. First the righteousness of God has been upheld in every way; God must always be righteous in what He does. If He is to forgive the sinner, then it must be upon a righteous basis. That was done when Jesus died for our sins on the cross. But at the same time, we see the marvellous love of God which was prepared to give the Lord Jesus, His only Son, so that we might be forgiven.

It is easily understood that what goes on in a man's house, in many ways shows what sort of person he is. This is true of God's house. Everything in His house must be in accord with Himself. If the Gospel has declared His righteousness and His love, then everything in His house must do the same. This has a very practical consequence. We, as forming God's house today, must always act in a way that is in accord with God Himself. I wonder if it is always so?

The second characteristic is found in 1 Timothy 2:3: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time". In the House of God there must be a witness to the truth that the owner of the house is a Saviour God, who wants all men to be saved. Not just certain people, He wants everyone to believe the gospel and to be saved on that basis. To prove this, Christ Jesus gave Himself to pay that awful debt that we could never pay.

Let us ask ourselves the question, "Does everything I do and say demonstrate the fact that God is a Saviour God, who without any distinction offers His salvation to everyone who believes? Do I plainly declare that there is no other way of salvation?" We hear today of so many other religions, and that we should have respect for what other people may believe. Yet the Bible makes so plain that there is only one way of salvation with God. There is only one mediator between God and men and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. In Acts 4:12, Peter said to those who were examining him and John. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

So the house of God testifies to the fact that He is a God who wants to be the Saviour of anyone who believes, but also that there is no other means whereby men can be saved. Despite what many others may say, the Bible says that there is only one way, that is through the death of the Lord Jesus. Let us be careful in our testimony that we do not weaken the clear truth of God's word. Remember, we have a responsibility to do this; God will discipline us if we do not. Our behaviour must be in accord with it.

A third feature of the house of God is in 1 Timothy 2:8: "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting". The Lord Jesus said, "My Father's house is a house of prayer for all nations". This verse makes it clear that this is a very important part of the house of God.

A Christian should pray and a Christian household should pray, because God's house is a house of prayer. But this verse does not limit us to praying at home or when we go to church; it says "every where". Each day of our lives should be characterised by prayer. But notice it says, "holy hands". We do so much with our hands, but are they sometimes contaminated by doing wrong things? If so, we cannot be free to pray to God. Likewise if we lose our tempers and get angry with people, sadly this will affect our prayers. And lastly prayer must be always in faith. The Apostle James in James 1:5-6 says, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord".

In God's house not only should men but women also conduct themselves in this way. The rest of this chapter lays down the way that He requires women to live. Sadly we live in a world of women's 'lib'. The distinction that God has made in creation is being turned away from and in its place is being practised what is thought to be up to date, or more to our liking. We cannot after what God has said by what we think should be. God established an order in creation which the House of God has to recognise. "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God". That is a verse of scripture which I believe. It is as true today as when Paul wrote it to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:3. The verses following make it plain also that a woman should cover her head when she prays. We may think these things are old fashioned and unimportant, but God does not think so. In His house a conduct of behaviour is required and I am failing in my responsibility if I neglect that rule.

The fourth characteristic is found in 1 Timothy 3:16: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory". The great mystery of piety is known in the House of God. If the previous verse tells us that the House of God is the pillar and ground of the truth, then this verse tells us what that truth is. The idea of a pillar in Scripture is a witness and that of a base is support. Thus in Rome pillars were erected to bear witness to famous victories which had been won.

So the house of God bears witness to and supports the wonderful fact that God has been seen in the person of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit was the power of everything that the Lord Jesus did right from His conception until that moment when by the eternal Spirit He offered Himself to God. Our minds go back to the time when He was baptised by John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit descended and abode upon Him. This was the first time in the entire history of mankind that that had happened. Everything He did was in accord with the holiness of the Spirit of God. The angels saw their Creator for the first time. So great was the blessing that He brought that it went far beyond the confines of Judaism; it was preached unto the Gentiles and this testimony was believed on in the world. Finally, as a Man He was taken up into glory. Many of these truths may be questioned today, but as forming God's house each one of us has the responsibility to stand for them.

Lastly, we read in 1 Timothy 4:1, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith". This is followed by a long list of things this will lead to. So we understand that the voice of the Holy Spirit is heard in God's house. I do not mean literally but that, through the Scriptures being understood in the power of the Holy Spirit, the mind of God for the moment is made known. I do not think that God speaks to us orally today. That day has passed, but through the Bible God can guide and direct His people, difficult and trying though the circumstances may be. We have to maintain conditions in God's house so that the Holy Spirit is not grieved or quenched. We must not allow our own minds to dictate what we think is right and certainly not allow our will to dominate. In subjection and in patience, we need to await God's time and will in all things.

The verses we have read tell us that in the latter times things will get very difficult as some depart from the faith of Christianity. I believe we are in the latter times now, but the Bible is all we need in these difficult times. There is guidance and instruction for every circumstance of life. The last verse of this chapter is the warning that Paul gave to Timothy when faced with men who wanted to turn away from what was right in the sight of God, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee". Our only security today is to be careful in all things and to make sure that everything we do and say is in accord with Scripture, and to persevere. We must not give up or turn aside for this verse assures us that we shall be saved from failing in our testimony, and that we shall be able to encourage others as well.

Let us end by reminding ourselves that the house of God, is the church, composed of every believer in the world at this moment, but viewed in relation to what we profess. That house is subject to the judgement of God who sees everything that we do. We then have a responsibility to behave correctly in God's sight. God is able to give us all the grace we need to do this.

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