

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXV : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4:1-16)

Ephesians 4:4~6 —

beynge one body and one sprete even as ye are called in one hope of youre callynge. Let ther be but one lorde one fayth one baptism: one god and father of all which is above all thorow all and in you all. (Tyndale's New Testament, 1524)

There is one body, and one Spirit, euen as yee are called in one hope of your vocation. There is one Lord, one Faith, one Baptisme, One God and Father of all, which is aboue all, and through all, and in you all. (Geneva Bible, 1599)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (King James Version, 1769)

one body and one Spirit, according as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in you all, (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (Revised Version, 1885)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (American Standard Version, 1901)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (New King James Version, 1982)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (New American Standard Version, 1995)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (New International Version, 2011)

There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (English Standard Version, 2011)

ἓν σῶμα καὶ ἓν πνεῦμα καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν· εἷς κύριος μία πίστις ἓν βάπτισμα εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν ὑμῖν. (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY — Paul had just expressed the unity of those within the Lord's congregations by using the term 'the unity of the Spirit.' He now emphasizes that unity through a series of seven acclamations of oneness. These seven acclamations fall into two groups of three, concluding with an acclamation of the one God with its own fourfold repetition of the word 'all.'

ONE BODY — ἓν σῶμα [hen sōma]

'ONE BODY' UNDERSTOOD BY ALL TO BE THE CHURCH — Whatever differences believers may have as to what Paul is referring, all are united in believing this to be a reference to the church. *"The first phrase 'one body' recalls 2.16; Col 3.15; Rom 12.5, and there can be not doubt that [Paul] understands it to refer to the church and not to the Eucharistic or physical body of Christ.* It suitably heads the list since what follows relates to the church and life within it. Normally when [Paul] speaks of the body he makes a close reference, if not a direct one, to Christ, so that the body is identifiable as his (cf 1.23; 2.16; 4.12, 16; 5.23, 30); the absence of such a reference here probably arises from the use of tradition." [Best, 366f]

NOT AN EXHORTATION BUT A DECLARATION — *The unity Paul is expressing is a unity based upon truth. 'One body...' is not an exhortation but a declaration. "The meaning is not, 'Let us be united in one body,' or in soul and body; but, as the context requires, it is a simple declaration."* [Hodge, 143]

BODY = NOT JUST UNION BUT ENERGY + OPERATION — "Here as always the imagery of the Body suggests not only union but united energy and operation. Its frequent recurrence emphasizes its importance and significance. Vital union with Christ, by the Spirit, is the one true secret of holy growth and action, alike for the individual and the community. The 'one' is highly emphatic." [Moule, 104f]

ADMITTEDLY MOST APPLY THIS TO THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH — It would not be a problem showing those who believe this body to be the universal-invisible church:

“The sevenfold use of ‘one’ emphasizes unity. First, there is one body, which refers to the universal church already discussed (1:23; 2:16; 3:5-6). Briefly, this consists of the body of believers, an entirely new concept in the NT, never envisioned in the OT.” [Hoehner, 514]

“One body. One mystical body of Christ (the spiritual church or kingdom, cf. 1:23; 2:16).” [Robertson, Word Pictures]

“*The body* is the invisible Church, the mystical body of Christ.” [Vincent, Word Studies]

“There are not several bodies of Christ in different locales, but one body of Christ, and each local congregation is representative of that body. Behind the one body — one Spirit language is the theology of 2:16-18 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, in which Christians are joined into one body by the Spirit and given access together to God.” [Snodgrass, 198]

Other quotes could easily be multiplied but this should suffice. I am not trying to say there are no proponents of this ‘body’ as being the universal-invisible church; quite the opposite. But I do question whether that interpretation fits the context.

DOES THE UNIVERSAL-INVISIBLE CHURCH FIT THE CONTEXT? — If one accepts the universal-invisible church interpretation of this passage then what exactly is Paul saying? What are we to get out of this passage?

To those with the universal-invisible church interpretation Paul means the following:

one body = all believers, the universal-invisible church

one Spirit, one hope, one Lord = no real disagreement on these points although there may be minor differences of emphasis dependent upon one’s view of the church

one faith = as we will see in later lessons, it is difficult to decide whether Paul is referring to the faith as our body of doctrine or the faith of our salvation. Most of those taking the universal-invisible church interpretation typically lean towards the ‘faith’ being that which was exercised at salvation since that would go hand-in-hand with their incorporation into the invisible body of Christ.

one baptism = the universal-invisible church people again says this refers to the moment of salvation when we were ‘spiritually baptized into that one universal-invisible body of Christ.’

Let us tie this together then with what we have studied so far in this chapter:

“Live worthily of the calling with which you were called,

with humility, gentleness, patience,

bearing with one another in love,

striving and being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond which is peace.’

If we accept the universal-invisible church interpretation given above, then what is Paul saying? Why are we to strive and work zealously to maintain the unity? *“Because all believers are united with one another in one spiritual church. We are all brothers and sisters. We are all saved by the same faith. We are all baptized into one spiritual body. THEREFORE we are to strive to keep the unity with one another, to keep peace with one another.” Does this mean we are to accept all who profess Christianity regardless of differences in doctrine? If Paul’s emphasis here is upon the spiritual unity found in the universal-invisible church then how are we to argue against ecumenism? Are we wrong to place doctrine above unity? Are we wrong to fight to keep our church autonomous?”*

*But if Paul’s emphasis is upon the local assembly of believers (the definition of the ecclesia) then Paul is saying we are to strive to keep the peace and unity with one another within our own local body. This is a much more difficult command than to keep the unity with the spiritual family of God, most of whom we will never meet this side of eternity and most of whom we will never have to rub shoulders. As was quoted in our first lesson: “For many [the local church] is all too literal and imperfect and visible. It is much easier to live in a dream church than in a real one.” [B. H. Kaze, *The Church and the Ordinances*]*

THE CHURCH IS NOT OURS TO RE-DEFINE — *The New Testament tells us how the ecclesia is to function. We are not at liberty to re-define the church but rather we are under obligation to make sure our churches operate as close as possible to the precepts as set forth in the Scriptures.* “Applying it as we may and must to the time institution he established, it overturns the claims of all human institutions affecting equality with God’s institution, or assuming the right to be recognized as a branch thereof. Applying it as we may, and as Paul does, to a particular church, the only expression of the institution, it excludes all so called churches not modeled after the New Testament pattern in its terms of membership, polity, doctrines, ordinances, and officers.” [Carroll, 142]

WHAT PAUL WRITES TO ONE ECCLESIA HE WRITES TO ALL EACH — “The unity of the Spirit is maintained as the members of the body function together harmoniously for the well-being of the whole. This is taught in 1 Cor. 12:12-26 in relation to the local church; here the principle is applied more generally. It was, in any case, never envisaged as applicable to one local church only: *wherever the people of Christ were found, there was his body*, of which they were individually members.” [Bruce, 336] Excellent comments from F. F. Bruce, who is a strong believer in the universal-invisible church.

ONE SPIRIT — ἓν πνεῦμα [hen pneuma]

THE REFERENCE IS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT — With very few exceptions, all accept this reference to be to the third Person of the Trinity and not the ‘human spirit’ in the sense that there is a ‘unanimity of feeling’ amongst believers.

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVE UNITY AND LIFE TO THE BODY — The ‘one Spirit’ brings unity and cohesion to the body by his indwelling and animating activity. It is the Holy Spirit who not only indwells the body but gives it life and rules that one body. [O’Brien, 281; Alford, 114; Abbott, 108] Note v. 3, ‘endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ (Eph 4:3 NKJV) where we understood this to be the unity created and given by the Holy Spirit. A couple quotes from lesson 18c:

“The unity mentioned is not then the spiritual unity of those who think and act in the same way, or of those who elevate the spiritual above the material and believe forms and rites do not matter. It is the unity which the Spirit creates and preserves.” [Best, 365]

“‘The unity of the Spirit,’ i.e. the unity which the Spirit has given us. The Spirit unites those who are separated by race and customs.” [Abbott, 107]

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CONNECTED WITH THE BODY ELSEWHERE — It is not surprising for Paul to speak of the Holy Spirit in close association with the body, he connects them in other places as well:

‘For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.’ (Rom 12:4,5 NKJV)

‘For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.’ (1 Cor 12:13 NKJV)

‘and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.... For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.’ (Eph 2:16,18 NKJV)

Note as well the variety of gifts which exist in the body that come from the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor 12-14.

THE DESTRUCTION OF UNITY GRIEVES THE HOLY SPIRIT — Since this unity is being created and given by the Holy Spirit, any attitude or actions which work to break this unity grieves the Author of this unity. *“[T]he consideration of [the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives] should engage to unity, because a contrary conduct must be grieving to the Spirit of God, unsuitable to his genuine fruits, and very unlike the true spirit of a Christian.”* [Gill, Commentary on Whole Bible] *“All sins against unity are, therefore, sins against the Holy Ghost. They disserve that which he binds together. Our relation to Christ as members of his body, and our relation to the Holy Spirit, who is our life, demands of us that we love our brethren and live at peace with them.”* [Hodge, 144f]

IS THERE A NEED TO GO FARTHER? — In the context of unity, the fact that Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit is really all we need to know. After all, the basis of what Paul is saying is that *‘we should eagerly strive to keep the unity because there is one body and one Spirit. There is no disunity in either.’* But considering the near unanimity amongst commentators to make immediate application to the universal–invisible church, I believe it proper to continue and provide balance with a look at these verses in relation to the local church.

COULD THERE STILL BE A LOCAL CHURCH CONTEXT? — As repeatedly stated in these lessons, I am first taking a local church, ‘ecclesia = assembly’ application unless the context demands otherwise. Is that still the case here? Before answering that question, let us first admit the obvious.

THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN BELIEVERS — The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is used in various ways in the Scriptures. All of those pressing for the universal–invisible church interpretation here makes the obvious reference to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at salvation. This is a wonderful truth and one I would never deny nor decry:

‘That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.’ (1 Tim 1:14 NKJV)

‘And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, Abba, Father!’ (Gal 4:6 NKJV)

‘But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.... But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.’ (Rom 8:9,11 NKJV)

‘In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.’ (Eph 1:13, 14 NKJV)

‘Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.’ (1 Cor 6:19, 20 NKJV)

Therefore it is an incontrovertible truth that the Holy Spirit indwells believers at the moment of salvation and remains. The verses above describe Him as the 'down-payment' and guarantee of our future glorified inheritance. To remove any possibility that the Holy Spirit is only given to some, Paul states that to not have the Holy Spirit is evidence of not belonging to Christ!

THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH — But is the indwelling and presence of the Holy Spirit limited to individual believers? Does Scripture also give testimony of the Holy Spirit indwelling the organized collection of believers, the ecclesia? We first note there are several examples / types / indirect statements given in Scripture.

THE SHEKINAH GLORY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT — We read of the 'Shekinah Glory,' the visible presence of Jehovah over Israel's tabernacle and temple.

"The word 'Shekinah' itself is not found in the Biblical texts, but the concept clearly is. The word most certainly is derived from 'shakan,' and whoever first used the word 'Shekinah' coined it as a substantive (noun form) from the verbal forms used to describe the 'abiding, dwelling, or habitation' of the physical manifestations of YEHOVAH God described in Exodus 24:16, 40:35 and Numbers 9:17-18 — and various other places where 'shakan' is used. Note that the word is also used to describe the mystical 'Shekinah' presence in the Tabernacle and later in the first and second Temples. The word 'mishkan,' (mshkn), a derivation of 'shakan' (shkn), is often translated 'tabernacle.' The Hebrew for tabernacle is more often simply 'ohel,' 'ohel,' or tent. 'Mishkan' means 'dwelling place' — that is, THE 'DWELLING PLACE' OF 'HIM WHO DWELLS' OR 'SHEKINAH.'" [http://hope-of-israel.org.nz/glory.htm, July 1, 2016]

This Shekinah glory or manifestation of the glory of God's presence which first appeared when Israel was set free from Egypt:

'So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.' (Exod 13:20-22 NKJV)

While the Shekinah Glory may or may not have always been present in the beginning, the Lord did manifest Himself at the completion of the Tabernacle and remained throughout the forty year wanderings:

'And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.' (Exod 40:33-38 NKJV)

It is during the time of the wilderness wanderings and as Israel entered the Promised Land that the Lord said He was with Israel:

'Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel.' (Num 35:34 NKJV)

Centuries later after Solomon had built the Temple, God again showed forth His presence and acceptance of the Temple:

'Then the word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying: Concerning this temple which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, execute My judgments, keep all My commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform My word with you, which I spoke to your father David. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel... And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.' (1 Kings 6:11-13; 8:10-11 NKJV)

But Israel rebelled and the glory of the Lord departed, said by some historians to have occurred during Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem. The Lord first moves from above the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the Temple:

'Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory.' (Ezek 10:4 NKJV)

From thence the glory of the Lord moved to the East Gate of Jerusalem:

'Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.' (Ezek 10:18,19 NKJV)

Then we read of the actual departure of the Shekinah Glory from the Mount of Olives:

'So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city.' (Ezek 11:22,23 NKJV)

After Ezekiel records the departure of the Shekinah Glory from Israel, he also records the return of this glory in chapters 40-43. The Ammilenialists consider this a reference to the New Testament (universal-invisible) church; those with a dispensational bent consider this still to be the Temple to be rebuilt for the Millenium. For our purposes, the important thing is that the Lord dwelt amongst His people.

JESUS IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE — We are all familiar with the promise of Jesus: *‘For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.’* (Matt 18:20 NKJV) I should note that this is not necessarily refer to a church, although it would include a church setting. With my beliefs of the local church, two or three Christians gathering together to fellowship does not define an ecclesia. But the principle of the presence of Christ is still pertinent.

THE GREAT COMMISSION — Another very familiar promise of the presence of Christ may be found in the Great Commission: *‘And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.’* (Matt 28:18-20 NKJV)

AS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL, A CHURCH CAN SO SIN SO AS TO HAVE THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST DEPART — Revelations chapters 2 & 3 are letters to first-century ecclesias. Many believe some of the warnings given by the Head of the Church speak of the removal of His presence: *‘Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place — unless you repent.’* (Rev 2:5 NKJV) Some may differ from my understanding but I firmly believe (and this is confirmed from Christian history) that the Lord will remove His presence and His glory from a local church and while it may continue outwardly for a time, it is dead while performing ritualistically and will eventually disappear.

THE MOST DIRECT STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLING THE CHURCH — The best direct, clear statement of the Holy Spirit indwelling His churches is enigmatic; not because Paul is not clear but because so many Christians misunderstand the verses in their context.

‘Do you not know that you [plural, the members of the church at Corinth] are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.’ (1 Cor 3:16,17 NKJV)

Most understand this chapter by immediately focusing on the Judgment Seat of Christ, rewards being wood or precious gems, loss or gain when we stand before our Lord. By not carefully observing the context, what Paul is really saying is overlooked.

The over-all context of the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians is divisions within the local assembly:

‘Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ.’ (1 Cor 1:10-12 NKJV)

Paul’s main argument in chapter three is that all Christian leaders are merely servants of God and it is all God’s work:

‘Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.’ (1 Cor 3:5-7 NKJV)

Paul continues by using the metaphors of farming and building to illustrate each minister’s responsibility to build upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ in a scriptural fashion, verses most misinterpret to refer to the Judgment Seat of Christ for individual believers. ***Can these verses be used as an illustration or application of the individual believer’s time before the Judgment Seat? Maybe, but it is more important to understand the contextual meaning of verses before making application to other truths. It should also be remembered that if there are no other verses to contextually support our ‘application’, we should be very careful in our use of applying verses out of context.*** But having said that, I do believe it safe to use these metaphors to relate it to our own individual judgment before the Lord.

After giving warnings to ministers about being careful to minister in scriptural manners, Paul gives a much more direct and heavy warning; contextually first to ministers but it appears he also widens the scope to include any who would sin as he describes. ***Make no mistake about this: the context of these verses is the local church!***

Another reason some misunderstand these verses is Paul’s use of the metaphor of the temple. As we saw above in 1 Cor 6:19, Paul used the metaphor of the temple to apply it to individual believers. But the context here forbids that understanding of his use of the metaphor. This is obvious by the reflective ‘punitive warning’ in v. 17 (I have underlined the important words to consider):

‘If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him.’ (1 Cor 3:17 ESV)

‘if any one the sanctuary of God doth waste, him shall God waste’ (1 Cor 3:17 YLT)

The exact same word (*the exact same word!*) is used twice in that sentence: *‘if you destroy the temple, God will destroy you.’* Not only is the context that of ministries but it would make no sense to have this refer to the individual believer. Yes, believers are the

'temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor 6:19; different phrases, different context) but if that was Paul's reference here, Paul would be saying, 'if you destroy yourself, God will destroy you;' or, 'in the manner in which you destroy yourself, God will destroy you.' That makes no sense! But since the reference is to the ministry or to the church being the temple of God, Paul was warning, 'if you hurt the local church, in the manner in which you hurt the church, God will hurt you!' A very sober warning!

Since this may be unfamiliar to many, I have selected quotes from able bible students to support my thesis:

"The A.V. greatly mars the effect by translating the verb first 'defile' and then 'destroy.' The same verb is purposely used to show the just working of lex talionis in this case: one destruction is required by another destruction.... Here the reference is to unchristian faction, which destroyed, by dividing, the unity of the Church: a building shattered into separate parts is a ruin. But all sin is a defiling of the Temple and is destructive of its consecrated state." [A. T. Robertson & Alfred Plummer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 67]

lex talionis — noun, 'the law of retaliation, whereby a punishment resembles the offense committed in kind and degree.'

"In 2:12 Paul claimed that the leaders of the church have 'the Spirit who is from God.' Here he tells the Corinthians that God's Spirit dwells in your midst, or 'among (all of) you.' It is a stunning affirmation of their identity and status before God, recalling Paul's reference to them as 'those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people' in 1:2. Given their behavior it sits somewhat uncomfortably, but Paul is determined to deal with the Corinthian faults that threaten to defile God's temple and compromise its holiness. That is what he sets out to do from 4:18 onward.... **With the repetition of the words 'if anyone,' v. 17 intensifies v. 12. According to vv. 12-16, 'if anyone builds the church in a certain way, they will receive reward if their work endures.' In v. 17, the stakes are raised, and not only is their reward in jeopardy, but their very person: 'If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person.'** ... **What is clear in v. 17 is that the punishment fits the crime: 'if anyone destroys the temple, ... God will destroy that person.'** **The measured appropriateness of God's judgment is a constant and comforting theme in the Bible to anyone concerned about the justice of God. The reason God will destroy anyone who destroys the church concerns the holy status of the church: 'for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.'** **To call the church 'holy' (cf. 1:2) is a way of underscoring its value to God; it is special because it belongs to him and is put to such valuable use as bringing him glory.**" [Roy Ciampa & Brian Rosner, *Pillar NT Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 160f]

"Paul switches to direct address and a third metaphor that now depicts the church as God's temple. His question, 'Do you not know that you are the temple of God?' asserts indirectly that they are indeed the temple of God. The 'you' is plural, and Paul speaks of the community gathered in Christ's name — not individuals — as the dwelling of the Holy Spirit.... Since this community building is the temple of God, where the Spirit of God dwells, Paul introduces a new, more serious threat. While some builders may do a lousy job of building on the foundation and their work will be consumed, some work moves beyond mere shoddiness and becomes destructive. Paul assumes that the community can be destroyed by insiders, not by outsiders.... It is a severe warning. He has real destruction in mind, and those who destroy God's temple will also be destroyed." [David Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1 Corinthians*, 120ff]

"The theme of building carries Paul further. *Do you not know* (a Pauline expression; it is implied that they ought to know, perhaps that Paul himself had told them) *that you are God's temple, and the Spirit of God dwells in you?* There is no logical connection, but it may be taken that the building erected on the one foundation of Jesus Christ is a meeting-place for God and man, a setting in which man offers to God the glory due to him. This building is not made of bricks and mortar, but consists of those who do so glorify God by believing and obeying him.... **Here, however, he does not think of the individual Christian as the shrine inhabited by God, but of the church; this is the theme of the context as a whole....** [N]o Corinthian Christian (however inadequate his understanding of the Spirit's work) doubted that his church was the home of the Holy Spirit, and Paul is therefore free to draw the necessary inference at once. *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him* (v. 17). Paul's thought has shifted since verses 12-15, where the fault in mind was not that of destroying the holy building (and of being destroyed in punishment), but that of putting unworthy material into its construction (and of losing one's pay as a builder in consequence). Perhaps Paul himself found it hard, in the situations with which he had in practice to deal, to distinguish between the two possibilities. Judaizing Christians, for example, (and these, in the 'Cephas-group', Paul probably has in mind here), might introduce certain Jewish customs into the church, or at least plead for their retention, without committing an intolerable offence; their observance of *kosher* food regulations, for example, could be tolerated by better instructed consciences, though they added nothing of value to the structure of the church. But an attempt to import legalism wholesale would be, not an undesirable and unnecessary addition to Christian faith and practice, but a destruction of the whole sacred building, a complete transformation of it, which would leave no church, no meeting-point between God and man, at all. This would be the destruction of the church, and must lead to the destruction of the offender also, not as an act of vindictive retribution but because he has already in his offence rejected the possibility of salvation. It seems better to understand *destroy* in this way than to suppose that Paul is already thinking of the scandals to be mentioned in chapters 5 and 6. **It is sometimes said that Paul's verb cannot be translated 'destroy', because the church, God's temple, cannot be destroyed. In a sense this is true: even the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18). It must be remembered, however, that Paul is thinking of a local manifestation of God's temple, a local church: and it is a matter of fact that local churches have, under various pressures, including that of heresy, simply gone out of existence.** [C. K. Barrett, *Black's NT Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 90f]

The following is an excellent, extended quote from Gordon Fee, a well-known and respected Bible expositor: *“The imagery of the church as temple would have been easily understood by the Corinthians as well, although perhaps not with its rich OT overtones. As practicing pagans (see 6:9; 8:7) most of them would have frequented the many pagan temples and shrines in their city. Indeed, some of them were arguing for the right to do so still (see chaps. 8-10). But now Paul is calling their attention to the fact that since there is only one God, he can have only one temple in Corinth, and they are it. They became that new temple by the fact that ‘God’s Spirit lives in you.’ Most likely Paul meant by this not that the Spirit dwelt in each of them, true as that would be for him (cf. 6:19), but that the Spirit of God ‘lives in your midst.’ That is, Paul is here reflecting on the church as the corporate place of God’s dwelling, who, when gathered in Jesus’ name, experienced the presence and power of the Lord Jesus in their midst. Again, as in 2:10-13, the Spirit is the key, the crucial reality, for life in the new age. The presence of the Spirit, and that alone, marks them off as God’s new people, his temple, in Corinth.*

*“If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person.’ ... [T]his has all the earmarks of a ‘sentence of holy law,’ in which the lex talionis and chiasm combine to express the fearful judgment of God.... One can scarcely circumvent the awful nature of the warning.... **This passage has endured a long history of unfortunate interpretation in the church.***

Because the imagery of the temple is reapplied in 6:19-20 to the individual Corinthian who was going to the prostitutes, many have read that usage back into this passage as though it were a word of warning to individual Christians as to how they are to treat their bodies or live out their individual Christian lives. Both the context and the grammar disallow such interpretations, even by ‘extended application.’ This is all the more unfortunate because 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.

“One of the desperate needs of the church is to recapture this vision of what it is by grace, and therefore also what God intends it to be. In most Protestant circles one tends to take the local parish altogether too lightly. Seldom does one sense that it is, or can be, experienced as a community that is so powerfully indwelt by the Spirit that it functions as a genuine alternative to the pagan world in which it is found. It is perhaps not too strong to suggest that the recapturing of this vision of its being, both in terms of its being powerfully indwelt by the Spirit and of its thereby serving as a genuine alternative (‘holy’ in the most holistic sense) to the world, is its single greatest need.” [Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the NT: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 147ff]

Therefore while it is undeniable that all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we lose an important truth if we do not also recognize the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in His churches!

Chiastic structure, or **chiastic** pattern, is a literary technique in narrative motifs and other textual passages. An example of chiastic structure would be two ideas, A and B, together with variants A' and B', being presented as A,B,B',A'.