

One Church of the City – The Dwelling of God

by David Orton

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Do you not discern and understand that you (the whole church at Corinth) are God's temple ... ?

1 Corinthians 3:16 AMP

God's purpose has always been to dwell with men. From the beginning of time to its culmination – from Eden to the New Jerusalem – this has been his singular desire.

In the Garden, it was God's habit to come down and commune with the first human community, most probably at the close of each day (see Gen 3:8). Adam, in his rebellion, ran from God forsaking this intimate communion, cutting himself off from the presence of God, and plunging his progeny into its present darkness.

With this tragic failure God intervened, calling Abraham and his seed, to whom he said, “...*have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them*” (Ex 25:8). Likewise, Israel rebelled time-and-again, forsaking the devotion of her youth, until finally her house (or temple) was left desolate (see Jer 2:2; Mtt 23:38).

But God, in whom there is no variance, pursues with passion his purpose to dwell with men. Through redemptive history he has lived a peripatetic life, moving from the Garden, and then from one dwelling to another looking for a permanent abode with men. As the Lord explained to David, “...*I have not dwelt in a house since the day that I brought up Israel to this day, but I have gone from tent to tent and from one dwelling place to another*” (1 Chr 17:5).

The God-Man

And so, finally, at the climax of history God declares of his own Son, the true Zion, “*This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it*” (Ps 132:14). The eternal word has finally found a permanent repose in human flesh and “*made his dwelling among us*” (Jn 1:14; ‘dwelling’ - Gr. *skunoo* ‘to tabernacle’). God, in Christ, has fulfilled all that the Old Testament dwellings foreshadowed. He is now the “dwelling of God”, made without hands, and we have beheld his glory (see Acts 17:24; Jn 1:14). The *shekinah* (Heb. ‘dwelling’) glory no longer dwells in temporary tents and earthly temples, but now abides eternally in the God-man, Jesus Christ. The glory of God's own presence has settled into a human breast.

The *eschaton* (the ‘last’) has been realised in Christ (Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13). He is God's final word. As the writer to the Hebrews declares, “*God in these last days has spoken to us by his Son*” (Heb 1:2). In his humanity he has become “*the radiance, the shining forth, of the Father's glory and the exact representation of his nature*” (Heb 1:3). He is the climax of all God's ‘outshinings’ and the full manifestation of all that he is—“*For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*” (Col 2:9). The man, Christ Jesus, has become the “*one mediator between God and men*” (1 Tim 2:5), remarrying the human and the divine.

Prototype of a new humanity

Nevertheless, the fullness of God is not found in Christ alone, but also in union with his body, the church:

... the church, which is his body the fullness of him ...

Ephesians 1:23 NIV

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead ... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

Colossians 1:18-19 NIV

The God-man, Christ Jesus, has become the firstborn of a new creation—in fact, the prototype of a new humanity: firstly, by dying as the *last Adam* he terminated, once-and-for-all, the failure of the Adamic race to maintain obedient communion with God the Father; and secondly, by rising, as the *second man* he became the beginning of a new order—a race of king-priests whose redeemed and perfected humanity becomes the dwelling place of God and the locale of his government on earth. Blazing the trail into the presence of God he has irrevocably joined, in himself, the human and the divine (Heb 2:10-14; 5:9-10; 2 Pet 1:4; Rom 8:29; 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:45-47; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 5:10).

And so, joined to him, his body now becomes the dwelling of God:

21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:21–22 ESV

The temple of the city-church

This brings us to the unity of the body. As the head of a new humanity Christ is not divided.

As underlined in the article *Apostolic Strategy*, the apostolic church knew nothing of denominational division. It was not denominated by theology or celebrity, but only by geography. Geographical boundaries and civil jurisdictions alone determined the church's boundaries. When the apostle wished to address a church he would speak to the whole church of the city; for example, the 'church of God in Corinth' (1 Cor 1:2). Evidently, the church, even in these large cosmopolitan cities, was functioning as one unified whole (also 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thes 1:1; 2 Thes 1:1; Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; Rom 1:7; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2).

Anything less was an aberration, provoking apostolic rebuke. Paul had clearly taught that " ... *all the parts, though many, form (only) one body, so it is with Christ ...*" (1 Cor 12:12; also v 20, 27; Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:16, 17; Eph 2:14-16; 4:4, 16, 25; 5:30). And so, when the church of God in Corinth violated this unity he wrote,

I appeal to you, brothers...that there be no divisions among you... One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Peter' ... Is Christ divided? ... Do you not discern and understand that you (the whole church at Corinth) are God's temple ... If any one destroys it, God will destroy him because God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 3: 10-13; 3:16-17 AMP (author's paraphrase)

Need we wonder any more at the destruction of the contemporary Western church! The scandal of our denominational divisions has invited the displeasure of God.

Now is the time to return to him: to repent of our pride and false value systems; and thus, to dismantle the mindsets and structures that are inimical to the spirit of Christ and the unity of his body. And together we will become a dwelling in which God is pleased to live.

All heaven will then erupt, declaring over our cities and nations:

... Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Revelation 21:3 NIV

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