

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (02)

January 13, 2008.

Introduction

Please turn to *1Cor.3:16-18a*. The apostle Paul said in *2Cor.10:8* that the ministry the Lord gave to him was for building up and not destroying. No one in Christ's church has been given the ministry for breaking down or destroying. It is the devil and his followers who seek to break down and destroy. The devil's followers who infiltrate the church are described as savage wolves (*Acts 20:29*), false apostles, deceitful workers (*2Cor.11:13*), evil workers (*Phil.3:2*), empty talkers and deceivers (*Tit.1:10*), and false teachers (*2Pet.2:1*). But they come to you dressed in sheep's clothing (*Matt.7:15*). They come to you disguised as angels of light and as servants of righteousness (*2Cor.11:14-15*). They come with smooth and flattering speech and persuasive arguments (*Rom.16:18; Col.2:4*). Beware of becoming one who breaks down and / or destroys in God's church. For instead of being a fellow-worker with God (*1Cor.3:9*), then you'll be a fellow-worker with the devil. (cf. *2Tim.2:23-26*).

Paul wrote *1Cor.3:16-18a*, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you. If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. Let no man deceive himself."

The expressions, "you are ... in you ... you are" are plural. Paul is dealing with the church, the local expression of the universal church. Very specifically, Paul was dealing with the church at Corinth. The church here is not a building or its meeting place. The word "**church**" refers to a called out and assembled group of people. The church at Corinth is those people who were its members. The church at Corinth is the temple of God. The church at Ephesus is the temple of God. The church in Philippi is the temple

of God. By way of modern day application, **The Reformed Evangelical Church** is the temple of God. **The Missionary Baptist Church of Tunapuna** is the temple of God. **Patience Baptist Church** in St. Lucia is the temple of God. **Gravel Ground Baptist** in Jamaica is the temple of God.

The word “temple” is literally “sanctuary” and refers to the inner sanctuary of the Jewish temple. This inner sanctuary is the place where God dwelt. The Spirit of God dwelt in the church at Corinth. The Spirit of God dwells in **The Reformed Evangelical Church**. We, as a called out and assembled group of Christians, are the sanctuary of God and the Spirit of God dwells in us.

In *vs.17* Paul put both verbs side by side for emphasis. Paul wrote : “If anyone the temple of God he destroys, destroy this man will God.” The verb Paul used also means “to corrupt”. It is found again in *1Cor.15:33* where we read, “Do not be deceived : Bad company corrupts good morals.” The point is : the local church at Corinth could be corrupted and / or destroyed. **The Reformed Evangelical Church** can be corrupted and / or destroyed.

The warning in *1Cor.3:17* is severe and certain and you cannot circumvent the frightening nature of the warning. It is the law of Divine recompense or retaliation. Paul is stating very emphatically that God will do to you what you do to the church. This verse reminds us of the law set forth in *Gen.9:6*, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.” The reason for this severe law is : man is created in God’s image. This law upholds the dignity of the human being and the due regard and value that must be given to his person and life. Governments today have forsaken this law and they are reaping a horrifying harvest for forsaking this law. There is an increasingly diminishing respect for the dignity of the human being and the value of human life in almost every sphere of our world today. The result is the callous killing of human beings via murder, abortion and genocide. I have named only the three primary ones.

The reason for the severity of the law in *1Cor.3:17* is : “the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.” God is holy. God’s temple is holy. God dwells by His Holy Spirit in His temple. The word “**holy**” means that God’s temple is set apart unto Him. Peter says the church is God’s own possession. (*1Pet.2:9*). The word “**holy**” also means that God’s temple is morally holy. Very specifically, the church at Corinth, whether assembled or not assembled, is God’s holy possession and dwelling place. In *1Cor.1:2* Paul described the members of the Corinthian church as “sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling.” The verb “sanctified” and the noun “saints” are derived from the same Greek word that is translated “**holy**”. “Saints” is literally “**holy ones**”.

The Corinthian church was the most imperfect church you could find in those early years. There were all kinds of sins in the church and some were very horrible sins. Many members were also rebellious towards Paul’s apostolic authority. Yet Paul described them as “sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints (**holy ones**) by calling.” And so Paul is warning the members of the Corinthian church : Beware! Be very careful! Do not corrupt and / or destroy God’s holy temple. Do not corrupt and / or destroy God’s own holy possession. Because God will retaliate and do to you what you have done to the church.

The members of **The Reformed Evangelical Church** are “sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints (**holy ones**) by calling.” As a church we are imperfect. Those who want to point fingers will find things to point at. As individuals, there are also sins in us. But beware! Be very careful! The members of this church are God’s holy temple. The members of this church are God’s own holy possession. If you corrupt and / or destroy this church, God will destroy you.

The church cannot be separated from its individual members. The church is God’s temple. The individual Christian is also God’s temple (*1Cor.6:19*). The church is God’s own holy possession. The individual Christian is also God’s own holy possession. (*1Cor.6:19-20*). The Spirit of God indwells the church. The Spirit of God also indwells the individual Christian (*1Cor.6:19; Rom.8:9*). Some seek to corrupt and destroy the

church in a public manner. Others seek to corrupt and destroy the church by quietly corrupting and destroying the individual members of the church. Whatever approach the destroyer takes, the dire threat remains certain. This is why Paul added in *vs.18*, “Let no man deceive himself.”

Are you building up this local expression of God’s holy temple or are you breaking it down? Are you building up the members of God’s holy temple or are you corrupting them and / or breaking them down? Are you encouraging the members of God’s holy temple or are you discouraging them? Do you look out for only your own welfare or are you also looking out with genuine concern for the welfare of your Brother & Sister in Christ? Last Lord’s Day I asked you to take time to call six members of this church? Did you call any? Did you start the work of personal and corporate consolidation of the church in the last week? Those phone calls were meant to be the first small practical step in the direction of working together to consolidate the church. They were to be thoughtfully made each day and not in a rush on Saturday. Jesus said, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much.” (*Lk.16:10*). At the end of your notes you will find another table that I want you to use to call a different set of six members in the week ahead. That will be your second small step.

In our last study we looked at three major points : **1). A Pastor’s Resolutions. (2). The Middle Passage. 3). The Challenge to Consolidate.** I also placed a brief challenge to you to support missions. Let me add something here. Firstly, you may feel that you do not want to or cannot make a monthly commitment to missions. But you may be able to give special gifts as the Lord prospers you. Please follow the principle set forth by Paul in *2Cor.8:3* – give in the support of missions according to your ability.

The second matter is some historical information. I am following Paul’s example in *2Cor.8* to challenge you. Lord willing, I will deal with all these passages when I come to deal with the subject of giving to the Lord. When the **Baptist Missionary Society** was launched to send **Carey** to India, the times were very unfavorable. On the night the **Missionary Society** was formed, fourteen men were present. Twelve were pastors and

two were laymen. The pastors were described as pastors of obscure little village churches, men of no fame who were paid very very small salaries.

These fourteen men made pledges to support the work of missions. The total pledge collected to launch the work of missions was thirteen pounds, two shillings and two pence. If I am correct, that's just about **\$160.00 TT** at today's value. As one man noted, it was truly a day when God chose the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong. (*1Cor.1:27*). Their impoverished and weak beginning did not matter. They had God in it. My point is that your poverty and the weakness of your ability to give must not stop you from giving. God will be at work in the little that you can give. God will use your weakness to shame the things which are strong in this world.

The Church – God's Eternal Purpose.

We come now to begin our study of the Christian and the Church. I want to begin with two questions : **1)**. Why did you become a Christian? **2)**. Why did God save you? When we think of salvation in Christ, we think primarily of escaping hell and going to heaven. But when you think of salvation in Christ, you can't stop there. You need to move from the personal view to God's view. Far too often Christians are stuck at the question that deals with the personal view : why did I become a Christian?

There is no questioning the fact that salvation in Christ saves you from hell and gains for you entrance into heaven. There is no questioning the fact that sinners are under the wrath of God and using the language of John the Baptist, they must flee from the wrath to come. (cf. *Matt.3:7*). *Rom.1:18* makes it clear that God's wrath is already revealed from heaven against sinners. *Jn.3:36* tells us that the wrath of God is abiding on sinners. But there is a great day of Divine wrath coming. And when this wrath begins to be poured out, sinners will plead with the mountains and rocks to fall on them and cover them from this Divine wrath. (*Rev.6:12-17*). In *1Thess.1:10* Paul said, "Jesus ... rescues us from the wrath to come."

There is no question that sinners are perishing. In *Jn.3:16* we are told that God sent His Son into the world so that those who believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. *2Pet.3:9* says the Lord does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. **“Perishing”** makes it clear that the sinner needs someone to save him. In *1Tim.1:15* Paul wrote, “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

The answer to the question : **“Why I am a Christian?”**, is usually futuristic. The primary focus is on escaping hell and being able to go to heaven. The answer to the question : **“Why did God save you?”**, has a different focus. The focus is on the present, a present that works its way into the future.

So why did God save you? The answer is in two words : **the church**. God is not randomly saving sinners just so He could take them to heaven. Those who are saved and going to heaven are not a random ragtag group that is disconnected from each other. Most times Christians behave as if they are a random ragtag group that is disconnected from each other. They are making the same journey on the same narrow road to the same destination. But they are doing so with an astounding unbiblical disconnection from each other, a disconnection that is rooted in a selfishness that has not been dealt with and crucified.

Turn with me to *Eph.3:1-12*. (**read**). This is a great passage and rich with many amazing truths. Lord willing, we will study this passage in greater detail in our ongoing studies in Ephesians in our **Bible Study Hour**. Today I want to point out to you the truths that relate to our study. You would notice that the word **“mystery”** appears three times in the verses I read (*vss.3, 4, 9*). Paul said God made known to him **“the mystery”**. *Vs.9* tells us that this mystery has from eternity been hidden in God. In general, **“mystery”** refers to God’s hidden plan that He has now revealed or made plain. In this passage, the mystery is in a word, the church. And the church is the revelation of God’s eternal purpose. (*vs.11*). The church is God’s manifold wisdom. (*vs.10*).

The primary detail in this mystery is that Gentiles are included in Christ and in the church as equals with Jews. In the church Jews and Gentiles are brought together as “fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” (*vs.6*). Fellow-heirs, fellow-members and fellow-partakers are literally “**together-heirs, together-members, together-partakers**”. Prior to this we have no revelation from God that focused on Gentiles being accepted by God on equal footing with Jews.

There those who would have us believe that the Jews remain God’s primary plan and that the church is God’s contingency plan. They would have us believe that the church came into being only because the Jews rejected their Messiah. The church is the gap-filler until God picks up again His plan for the Jews. What Paul is making clear to us here is that the church is no divine contingency plan. The church is not a gap-filler in God’s dealings with the Jews. The church is primary. The church is God’s eternal purpose. All that God was doing from creation, from Adam, through Seth, through Enoch, through Noah, through Abraham, through the Jewish nation and through the early ministry of the apostles that focused primarily on the Jews, were in keeping with His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus of building His church.

Abel did not know that when he was murdered, that he was the very first martyr of God’s eternal purpose in Christ – the church. Noah did not know that when God spared him, God was doing so because of His eternal purpose in Christ – the church. Abraham did not know that when God called him, God’s purpose in calling him was God’s eternal purpose in Christ – the church. They did not know because this knowledge was not revealed to them. This knowledge was a mystery which from eternity has been hidden in God. (*Eph.3:9*). Did Adam and Eve know that their marriage would be foundational for illustrating the relationship Christ would have with His church? That knowledge was a mystery that is made known to us in *Eph.5:28b-32*. (**read**).

The church is here to stay because it is God’s eternal purpose in Christ. Let evil men attack it, persecute it, denigrate it, despise it, and seek to destroy it. The church is here to

stay because it is God's eternal purpose in Christ. Let men who claim to be Christians describe the church as passé, declare that the church has served its purpose well but it is now time to move on to other methods, and dismiss the church as archaic, irrelevant and unfit for this postmodern age. The church is here to stay because it is God's eternal purpose in Christ.

Look again at **Eph.3:8-10**. (**read**). Note the expression, "the manifold wisdom of God." The Greek word translated "manifold" is actually two Greek adjectives that are combined to make one word. This combination heightens the idea of multiplicity. "**Manifold**" may also mean "**richly diverse; variegated; very many sided.**" It was used to describe the intricately embroidered pattern of many-colored cloaks like Joseph's cloak. This is the word that is used to describe the richly diversified nature of God's wisdom.

God's manifold wisdom is being made known through the church. And it must be emphasized that this is in keeping with God's eternal purpose in Christ. **Peter O'Brien** wrote, "*In our present context ... this variegated wisdom has particular reference to God's richly diverse ways of working which led to a multiracial, multi-cultural community being united as fellow-members in the body of Christ.*" **O'Brien** added that the expression, "**through the church**" signifies that the very existence of this new multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body is the manifestation of God's richly diverse wisdom. Its presence is the means by which God Himself discloses to the powers His own richly diverse wisdom."

The reference to "the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" is a reference to angels, both good and bad. We know from **1Pet.1:12** that through the ages good angels have tried to decipher and understand God's plan but were unable to do so. There is no doubt that the devil and his hosts would have loved to know and fully understand God's plan in order to work against them more effectively. Well, God's plan was effectively carried out in our Lord Jesus Christ (**vs.11**) and now it has been

revealed. The point here is that the church is the showcase of God's manifold wisdom to all the heavenly hosts. And by implication, the church is the showcase of God's manifold wisdom to this world.

This is why wicked men who hate God, especially those who are rulers, have hated the church down through the centuries. Despite her many imperfections, they see accomplished in the church what they could never accomplish. They could never copy the peace and harmony and equality and love that exist in churches that consist of people of diverse races, colors, cultures, ages, education, jobs, and financial status. Communism tried to accomplish some semblance of this with military force but failed. And the communist leaders blamed their failure on the church in their midst and set about to obliterate it. But the church is God's eternal purpose in Christ and the showcase of His manifold wisdom and so, the communists could not obliterate it. Others are continuing to try to destroy the church but they will fail. And they will fail because of one factor : God and His eternal purpose in Christ.

The church may be weak but it is God's eternal purpose in Christ and the showcase of His manifold wisdom. The church may be hated and despised, but it is God's eternal purpose in Christ and the showcase of His manifold wisdom. Criticize the church all you want, find all the faults you can find with it, reject it as archaic and irrelevant, the church will remain God's eternal purpose in Christ and the showcase of His manifold wisdom.

I want this truth to grip you. The church is not something ordinary. The church is not a man-made idea. The church is not a nine-day wonder. The church is not like a meteor that will burn brightly, but it will burn out. The church is not like any earthly organization that man can devise. The church is God's eternal purpose in Christ and the showcase of His manifold wisdom. When you look at the church you are looking at God's richly diverse omniscience on display. When you begin to understand God's work in Christ for the church you will respond like the apostle Paul, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (*Rom.11:33*).

When God saved you, He made you a member of His church. He made you a member of a body that stretches back to the beginning of creation. You are a member in the body that Abel is a member of. You are a member in the body that Enoch is a part of. You are a member in the body that Noah is a part of. You are a member in the body that Abraham is a part of. You are a member in the body that Moses is a part of. You are a member in the body that Samuel is a part of. You are a member in the body that David is a part of. You are a member in the body that prophets, priests and kings are a part of.

You are a member in the body that an untold number of ordinary people like yourself are a part of. And there is a great and glorious day coming when every single member of this body called the church, beginning from creation to the second coming of the Lord Jesus, will together be made completely perfect and receive the fulfillment of all the promises God made to us in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. (*Heb.11:39-40*).

The Reformed Evangelical Church is no accident. In God's will this church is a part of God's eternal purpose in our Lord Jesus Christ. In God's will this church is a part of the showcase of His wisdom before principalities and powers and rulers. You are a part of that eternal purpose and showcase of Divine wisdom. *Eph.1* tells us that in accordance with His eternal purpose and the good pleasure of His will, God chose you in Christ from eternity and predestined you to adoption as His child through Jesus Christ. He who chose you and adopted you from eternity has put you here in this local expression of His eternal purpose and showcase of His wisdom. You are not a religious accident. And this church is not an accident.

God did not save you to take you to heaven, first and foremost. If that was His purpose the day He saved you, on that very day He would have taken you to heaven. God saved you to make you a part of His church in order to display in you His grace, His wisdom and glory. That which God purposed to do now He will also do for all eternity. *Eph.2:7* says, "so that in the (eternal) ages to come He might show (put on display) the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

God's church is not this building we are in. You are the church. The church is a living organism. The church is the people of God in Christ around this world. The church is local groups of people around this world who are bound together in Christ to assemble to worship God and to shine as lights for His glory before a crooked and perverse world. (*Phil.2:15*). There are various imageries that are used in the N.T. to describe the church. Lord willing, it is my desire to examine them and apply what we learn from them.

The church is pictured as a vine with branches. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. (*Jn.15*). The church is pictured as a building made up of living stones and Jesus is the chief corner stone. (*1Pet.2:4-8*). The church is a holy nation and we are the citizens of that nation. (*1Pet.2:9; Phil.3:20-21*). The church is a body and Christ is its head. (*1Cor.12*). The church is a bride and Christ is her bridegroom. (*Eph.5:22-33*). The church is God's family : we are the children of that family; God is our Father and Jesus is our elder Brother. (*Gal.4:4-6*). These are some of the more prominent imageries that are used.

As we shall see, the church is not a preaching center to which we come once a week to pay our respectful dues to God. The church is not the building in which we gather once per week to worship God and listen to a sermon. Whether we like it or not, these concepts are in our minds because they are prevalent in our society. We need to clean away these concepts from our minds. We need to pull up their roots from our minds and cast them out. These concepts make the church a social gathering that includes religious activity. For many the church has been and continues to be the place to make a fashion statement. The church is the place to catch up with people at the beginning of the week. The church is the place to hear the latest and to get the latest opinions on politics and sports, crime and natural disasters.

The problem in the last few generations is that Christians have had a very weak and very worldly view of the church. The result is that there are truths about the church we do not want to hear. But we need to hear them because God has revealed them and He wants us to know them. By God's grace, faithfulness to the church was never an issue for me.

From my youth the Lord placed in my heart a growing and deepening love for the church. Yet in my various church backgrounds the prevailing view was that church was optional, take it or leave it. What was important was that you were saved and baptized. What was optional is that you were present ever so often when the church gathered. When it came to your soul's salvation, you were expected to take that very seriously. But when it came to the church, you were not expected to take that very seriously. We were never taught that there is no salvation in Christ outside of the church because of Roman Catholic misuse of this vitally important truth.

The world sees that we do not take the church seriously and so it does not take us seriously nor does it take the church seriously. So the world plans and expects you to make the choice to say “yes” to the world's plans and “no” to the church. You are expected to love the world more than the church. You are expected to love the world's social events more than the church. You are expected to love the world's political events more than the church. You are expected to love the world's sporting events more than the church. You are expected to love the world's weddings and funerals more than the church. You are expected to love father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife and baby and any plan or activity they could come up with more than the church.

And so, when Tanti comes home to visit and requires that you attend her planned gathering on the Lord's day, Jesus can wait while you gather with Tanti. Offend Jesus but don't you dare offend Tanti! How dare you attend church when it is grandpa's and granny's wedding anniversary! Jesus can wait while you celebrate and toast grandpa and granny and their idols. Jesus can wait while, on the Lord's Day, you check out the chick going to the apostate church. “*Pastor,*” says the young man, “*she told me I had to attend her church before she would attend mine.*” Never mind that her church could send you to hell.

How seriously do we take it when we read in God's word, “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her”? (*Eph.5:25*). How seriously do we take it when we read, “the Son of God loved me and gave Himself up for me”? (*Gal.2:20*). How

seriously do we take it when we read, “the Father Himself loves you”? (*Jn.16:27*). I have a suspicion that we do not take these things very seriously; we do not meditate upon them and fill our minds with their meaning and their implications, especially the primary implication of loving Christ first and giving Him your uncompromising allegiance, first and foremost.

If we did, we would take *Heb.10:25* very seriously, “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Note carefully : the church is an “**assembling together**” of together-heirs, together-members and together-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. The word “**together**” emphasizes that we are bound together in Christ. Is it any wonder then that Paul said that we are to be of the same mind, maintain the same purpose, be united in spirit and intent on one purpose? (cf. *Phil.2:2*).

The context of *Heb.10:25* is not sickness, tiredness, social demands from relatives and / or friends, and such like things. The context of *Heb.10:25* was imprisonment and / or death for assembling together with the church. In those days, when a Christian was arrested and imprisoned, he also lost all citizen rights. The usual result was the seizure and plundering of whatever property he or she may own. The writer was saying to these Christians, absence from assembling together is not an option even if it means imprisonment and / or death. Why? Willfully absenting yourself opens the door to apostasy, as is shown from *vs.26* onwards. And apostasy is infinitely worse than imprisonment and / or death.

How often is absence from our assembling together rooted in a choice that fails to love Christ first, to choose Christ first and to put Christ first? How often is absence rooted in a choice that fails to say to the things of this world, “*take your place in line behind Christ and wait your turn*”? When you love something else more than Christ and choose that over Christ, that is idolatry. Assembling together with the Lord’s body on the Lord’s Day is not optional. This is the Lord’s command and the primary position we

must hold to. As Christians we need to learn, first and foremost, to take an uncompromising stand in this matter. Far too often we focus firstly upon working out the exceptions and the “**what ifs**” before working out what it means to obey Christ as Lord in this matter. Seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness and all these other things will fall into their rightful places.

In this verse you are also given a consolidating responsibility. You are called upon to identify those who are not assembling together as they should and encourage them. The verb is the same we met in our last study, *parakaleo*. You are to come alongside and encourage and exhort and, if it is necessary, rebuke. You are to show them the vital importance of assembling together with the church and the grave danger of failing to assemble together with the church.

I want to close with the following statements which we shall pick up and deal with in our ongoing studies. The problems with Christians today in their relationship to the church are as follows :

- 1). Christians today do not have the high view of the church that is rooted firmly in God’s high view of the church.
- 2). Christians today have not taken the time to study, understand the priority and appreciate the value God has placed upon the church.
- 3). Christians today do not love the church as God loves the church.
- 4). Christians today do not love the church as Christ loves the church.

My prayerful goal is that we will become a true showcase of God’s manifold wisdom before angels and demons and before a watching world.

