

We continue our series on First Corinthians as we celebrate the birthday of the church. Paul mentions the work of the Holy Spirit in 2:6-16 and also in 3:16. We focus on the latter verse, the role of the Spirit in the church.

The church was 'established' in AD 33 by the coming of the Holy Spirit. We've heard Paul's strong criticism of the church in Corinth. There was much wrong in that church – and yet the Holy Spirit is there (see also chapters 12 and 14)!! They are the temple of the Spirit. So what does that mean?

In writing as he does, Paul relativises the importance of the temple in Jerusalem. The Spirit now lives in the local churches. Sacrifices were no longer required. God would soon abandon the temple in Jerusalem; it was destroyed in AD 70.

There are basically three things to say about the church as temple of the Spirit.

1. The Holy Spirit lives in us, in each believer – and He works via us in the world. He does not live in the world, but he can work there through the agency of the church. (Cf. the clip of J. John). Remarkably, the Spirit even lived in the Corinthian church, despite their weaknesses. Even more so He lives in each of us! This is great to know. We don't need to doubt the presence of the Spirit! That's the beauty of Pentecost. In other temples there always was an idol, an image; in us it is the Holy Spirit.
2. There is only one temple; see the 'you together' in verse 17. Paul is not thinking of many individual temples here. [That is different in 6:19, where the focus is on the individual. Here Paul looks at the collective.] Together we are the one temple of the Spirit. Each of us is a (living) stone. Are you a fitting one? Are you a member of the church? Well joined with bitumen or mortar?

In the song 'Breathe on me, breath of God' we sang that we want to love what He loves and do what He does. That does not happen automatically, it is not natural for us! It requires the 'behavioural alteration' that J. John mentions in his clip.

3. Any temple, our temple
 - is a symbol of unity
 - is a holy place; it is not to be violated
 - is a beautiful place – are we beautiful in the eyes of onlookers?
 - reflects, radiates the nature / glory of the deity who lives there
 - is not necessarily large. Solomon's original temple was much smaller than many people think; hardly larger than our own building
 - is now potentially worldwide; God has 'embassies' in every country and village, as the work of the Spirit continues.

We thank God for sending his Spirit! We thank Him that we are his temple. We thank God for his international agency in which we serve, which (as J. John said) does hospitals, justice, reconciliation and even behavioural alteration.