



## [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#)

(16) Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (17) If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

*King James Version*

Suppose you lived during the time that the Temple in Jerusalem was in operation. As a faithful Levite, you were given stewardship to maintain the Temple and its grounds. How would you take care of that responsibility, knowing it was God's earthly dwelling place? Would you approach it in an irreverent, slap-dash, careless, lackadaisical, "I am too busy with other things" manner? Or would you be highly respectful and orderly and do whatever your hand found to do with all your might?

Spiritually, [God](#) has already given us this responsibility. In fact, it is a double-edged responsibility, both personal and corporate. In [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#), Paul uses "temple" as a synonym for "church," referring to the whole body of believers. This is clearly an extension of his earlier use of the building metaphor. By it, he illustrates that each person, as part of the building, has some effect on the quality of the whole building by how he conducts his life. This metaphor ties all of us together as a team with the specific responsibility of doing all we can to build up and strengthen the church. Undoubtedly, the ministry bears the greater burden, but every member is involved.

Paul begins in verse 6 by giving himself and Apollos as examples. The King James Version makes the first part of verse 8 unclear: "Now he who plants [Paul] and he who waters [Apollos] are one." The Revised Standard Version clarifies this: "He who plants and he who waters are equal." They are not one as if they are identical or bound together like a set of Siamese twins. He means that they are equally important to the result.

Paul frequently emphasizes the team aspect. He writes in verse 9, "We are God's fellow workers." In verses 10-15, 17, he refers to "each one" and "anyone" frequently. No one

has any room to think that it does not matter what he or she does or fails to do to make the body spiritually healthy. A great, dominant theme of Paul's teaching is the individual's personal responsibility for his life and that—somehow, somewhere, sometime—each will have to give account to God for what he has done.

How can Paul say the various parts of the body bear equal responsibility? This thought harkens back to the [Parable of the Talents](#). The master does not expect his three servants to produce the same quantity, but he expects each to be equally faithful in what he entrusted to their stewardship.

In verse 17, Paul uses "destroy" twice (see margin). It is a strong warning to those committing the sins named in other parts of the epistle—advocating false [doctrine](#), strife, jealousy, sexual immorality, and other permissive compromises—that God would hold them responsible despite how matters appeared at the time. He would destroy them because the church is holy because it belongs to God, and He has separated it from [the world](#). Through their false doctrines or sinful conduct, whether they were aware or not, they were seeking or being used to destroy the spiritual health of the church. Each member bears responsibility for keeping himself holy and therefore spiritually healthy.

To understand this, perhaps we need nothing more than a deeper awareness that, despite the way things may presently look on the surface, our worldview—how we look at life and all its jumble of events—is quite narrow compared to God's. Once we see things from His perspective, we can see we bear a major responsibility to the body of [Christ](#) because God has included us in His great purpose.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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