



"Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing yet had been done."
—C.S. Lewis

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Worshipping the Temple (Part One)

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed the scattering of the church of [God](#) from one corporate organization into hundreds. Only a small percentage of the former membership can be found following shepherds who have held onto the doctrines of the Bible. Surveying the wreckage, no end to this scattered condition appears in sight—and in fact, it seems to be continuing. Though we cannot personally reverse the scattering (see [Ecclesiastes 7:13](#)), we can still do our part to be in alignment with God so that, as He works out His purpose, we can follow Him.

The patterns of the Bible are invaluable in helping us consider why this happened in the first place, and how we can keep from making it worse. In [Deuteronomy 4:23-27](#), God promises to scatter His people and leave them "few in number" if they provoke Him to anger through idolatry. Since we find ourselves in a comparable scattered condition, it is reasonable to conclude that the church was scattered as a result of some form of idolatry. [Jeremiah 18:15-17](#) reiterates the same principle, adding a phrase that is synonymous with idolatry: "Because My people have forgotten Me . . . I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back and not the face in the day of their calamity."

While there are many ways to commit idolatry, there is one peculiar form for which God castigates His people—one that we can recognize in recent church history. Israel and Judah were guilty of turning the Temple into an idol, allowing it to become more significant to them than God.

Similarly, we may have been guilty of making the church an object of greater desire and delight than the God it was intended to glorify. Maybe we were more interested in fellowshiping with others in the Body of [Christ](#) than fellowshiping with Christ. Our source of trust and confidence may have been in an organization rather than in the God who led it. Perhaps our sense of security derived from being members of a church, rather than from knowing God Himself.

If so, we are not alone. Israel and Judah led the way in this regard thousands of years ago:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Speak to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, your arrogant boast, the desire of your

eyes, the delight of your soul; and your sons and daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword." (Ezekiel 24:20-21)

God promised to profane His own sanctuary! He promised to break and pollute His holy place—His own Temple. What would prompt God to destroy His own habitation on earth?

The words He uses to describe His sanctuary give us a clue as to what aroused His jealousy. In verse 21, God describes the Temple as "*your* arrogant boast, the desire of *your* eyes, the delight of *your* soul." These are strange descriptors, as the Temple was supposed to be *His* house, *His* dwelling place, and a place of sacrifice to *Him*. Yet what God emphasizes is the perspective of the people. In verse 25, He further describes the Temple as "*their* stronghold, *their* joy and *their* glory, and that on which they set their minds."

Their focus was entirely wrong. Their boast, the desire of their eyes, the delight of their soul, their stronghold, their joy, their glory—all of these should have been God! They were supposed to be setting their minds on God—not on the physical Temple! The Temple was a means to facilitate the proper worship of God, and as such, it was extremely important. God commanded it to be built, and commanded it to be rebuilt after He caused it to be destroyed. But the Temple was not supposed to become more admired than God or to be the source of their security.

In the same way, God founded the church—the spiritual Temple—to be a community of called-out believers, given His Spirit. It is a spiritual organism, not contained within the confines of a physical organization. Its purpose is to "perfect [or, *complete*] the saints"—to foster spiritual growth into the [image of God](#). The church—and the corporate organizations into which the believers are gathered—serve a vital role, for God does nothing on a whim.

Yet, like Israel and the Temple, either other believers or the individual organizations can become larger in our minds than God. Because they are visible and tangible, they can receive more of our attention than God, causing us to forget Him—even if only slightly. If regarded or used improperly, these things transform from being the means to an end to the end itself. As the example of Israel shows, God is quite willing to dismantle violently what He has commissioned to be built if it ends up drawing His people away from Him. The church of God is not immune to this.

Next week, we will look at the sense of security—false though it was—that the kingdom of Judah derived from having the Temple in their capital city.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Government \(Part Three\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Our spiritual transformation (conversion) gives us the capacity to see Christ and other people, the self, institutions (such as churches or governments) in their true light. Things we formerly deemed important (money, pleasure, and power) become less important and other things (love, duty, and

service) become more important. Our attitude toward government must be one of submission—including to human government. The church cannot perform its function without the cooperation of the unconverted state governments.

From the Archives: Featured Article

['T'll Never Follow Another Man!'](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

This is an oft-repeated refrain in these days of distrust of the ministry. But is it a proper, Christian attitude? What does the Bible say about human leadership in God's church?

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