



"When you look at yourself from a universal standpoint, something inside always reminds or informs you that there are bigger and better things to worry about."

—Albert Einstein

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Worshipping the Temple (Part Three)

In the last two editions, we saw that Israel and Judah both improperly regarded the Temple, esteeming it higher than the [God](#) for whom it was built, and putting their confidence in the fact that they had the Temple in their city. As a result, they considered themselves to be "untouchable." There are clear, modern-day parallels with the way a church member views the spiritual temple. The record of the breakup of the [Worldwide Church of God](#) proves that this form of idolatry certainly can be committed by members of the Body of [Christ](#).

However, the temple can become an idol in another way, one that should make us stop and consider. It is more subtle, but in principle, it is exactly what Israel and Judah did:

Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. . . . Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD." ([Jeremiah 17:5](#), 7)

Jeremiah reiterates that we are blessed when our trust and confidence is in God. On the flip side, we are cursed when we trust in man or his abilities or his work, or when our heart becomes set on anything other than God. The contrast is between trusting in the eternal God and trusting in any man—living or dead. In comparison to God, man will always fall short.

This does not mean that men can never be trusted or that God does not work through men. The physical Temple served an honorable purpose, and it was a fine thing *as long as people did not ascribe more to it than was warranted*. The same can be said of any man or organization.

In the New Testament, God's church is not the only spiritual temple of God. The *individual Christian* is also called the "temple of God" in [I Corinthians 3:16](#): "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" In type, we are each a temple—an instrument for worshipping and glorifying God.

Because of this, the accounts in [Ezekiel 24:21](#) and [Jeremiah 7:4-12](#) take on additional gravity. The "man" in whom one can trust in [Jeremiah 17:5](#) does not have to be somebody else—it can just as easily be oneself! To put it another way, if our trust or confidence is in *ourselves* as the temple of God, we are following the same destructive path as Israel and Judah.

In this light, God's testimony against His people in [Ezekiel 24:21](#) applies with even greater weight. We have the potential to boast—arrogantly or subtly—about ourselves rather than God. We could be the "desire of our own eyes," considering ourselves pleasant to look upon—perhaps not in a physical way but spiritually. We are supposed to be pointing people to God, not to ourselves. Perhaps we delight in ourselves, just as Ezekiel castigates Israel for delighting in the Temple at the expense of delighting in God. The prophet also refers to the Temple as Israel's "stronghold" (verse 25), and we can likewise make our strengths and abilities our source of confidence. Ezekiel says that the Temple was "that on which they set their minds." Applying this to the New Covenant temple, it would indicate self-centeredness and self-absorption, in which all attention and consideration is focused on the self rather than God and fellow man.

Jeremiah's admonition adds even more ([Jeremiah 7:4-12](#)). The people of Judah put their trust in the Temple, as their source of security and confidence, but they ended up sacrificing their relationships with their neighbors. Similarly, if our trust and confidence is in ourselves—or with a group that constitutes the empirical self—rather than God, the pattern shown in Jeremiah 7 predicts that we will be unable to evaluate and discern properly, with disastrous effect on our relationships. Putting our trust and confidence in ourselves will result in various forms of oppression, personal injury, stealing, killing, unfaithfulness, and dishonesty.

Moreover, if we place our trust and focus on ourselves, we will simply be unable to [see God](#). If we cannot see God in a spiritual sense, it will be impossible for us to come to know Him. If we do not know God, we cannot have eternal life ([John 17:3](#))!

None of this is to say that a church organization, or the individual Christian, is superfluous or inherently bad, any more than the physical Temple was. It is what the individual does that determines whether an organization—or an individual—becomes an idol. However, if we regard the church or ourselves as ancient Israel regarded the Temple, it is not surprising that God would respond in the same way in both instances. If God sees a church organization or an individual as competition with Himself in the hearts of the members, it should go without saying who will win that contest.

The physical Temple of God, like the Tabernacle before it, served an honorable and necessary role for God's people. The spiritual temple—whether the individual or the whole body of believers—is likewise fundamental to what God is working out. But God's testimony and deeds, both anciently and presently, show that a proper regard for the Temple of God, keeping it in the right perspective, is essential to having a right relationship with Him.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Self-Government and Responsibility (Part One)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

A major distinguishing characteristic of mankind is his free moral agency, presenting him with choices and the right to make decisions. We need free moral agency to be transformed into God's image. The volition to do right has to come from the core of our character or nature. Paradoxically, the way to maximum freedom is to yield to God's way of doing things. Unless one has the Spirit of God, he cannot exercise the necessary internal control to be subject to the government of God. Even though the church is not the government of God (John 18:36; I Corinthians 15:50), we need to respect the ministry as well as lay members, being subject to one another (I Corinthians 11:1). The operation of God's government absolutely depends upon each person governing himself, never going beyond the parameters of the authority God has given him.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Overcoming (Part 9): Self-Exaltation

by Martin G. Collins

Self-exaltation was one of the sins that got Satan in trouble—and we certainly do not want to follow his lead! Conversely, we are to humble ourselves so God can exalt us in due time.

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