With Whom We Build the Temple of the Lord

With the Lord's help we will speak about the significance God gives to the Church, seen as the Body of Christ. We begin by exploring how God describes His relationship with His people, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

We begin with Leviticus, chapter 26, where, starting at verse 11, we read: *"And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people."* These are promises God made to the Jewish people, and they concern us today as well.

We continue with Exodus, chapter 29, verses 42 to 46, where we find these words: *"This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the LORD their God."* Here God speaks of the tabernacle of the congregation, which came before the building of the Temple, the place where the ark and the altar stood. God restates here His promise to dwell among the children of Israel.

There are references to these things in other parts of Scripture too, including 2 Corinthians 6, but we will not go deeper in that direction just now. Instead, let us turn our attention to Deuteronomy 23, to keep exploring how important this is for us. In ancient times God dwelt among His people, and today He continues to be present in the lives of believers, each of whom has a personal relationship with Him. Still, the question arises: is there a specific place where God dwells among His people?

We will look at the passage in Deuteronomy, chapter 23, verses 9 to 14, which gives us instructions about cleanness in the camp: *"When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing. If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp: but it shall be, when evening cometh on, he shall wash himself with water: and when the sun is down, he shall come into the camp again. Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad: and thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee: for the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee."* Amen.

These verses underline how important holiness is in the place where God dwells, bringing to mind the verse in Psalm 93:5: *"holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever."* God, who is the same *yesterday, and to day, and for ever*, wants His dwelling place to be free of all uncleanness.

Next, in the book of Joshua, chapter 7, verses 10 to 13, we are told of an incident in the camp of Israel which shows the consequences of disregarding holiness: *"And the LORD said unto Joshua… Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff."* This account shows us that keeping the camp clean is essential if God is to remain among His people.

"Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." Amen.

"Neither will I be with you any more," He tells us in verse 12, *"except ye destroy the accursed from among you"*, or, we might say: if you do not make the camp clean, I will no longer be with you; the Lord will turn away from you.

This time we will go to Zechariah to read a prophecy. We read from Zechariah chapter 2, verses 10 and 11: *"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee."* Amen. So it is a promise for the Gentiles as well. *"I will dwell in the midst of thee… and shall be my people."* It is a very beautiful prophecy.

We will also read from Zechariah chapter 6. This time it is a prophecy about the Church, about the Temple of God, a Temple not made of stone but of hearts of flesh. Looking at the text from verse 12 onward, we notice the importance God gives to His dwelling, the holy place where He makes His home. We could say that God dwells there with a particular purpose. As we find in the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 4, the purpose is the growth and the perfecting of the saints.

So we read from verse 12, where we find these words: *"And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."* Amen.

If we look closely at this verse, we see that it points to Matthew 16:18, where the Lord Jesus declares that He Himself will build the Church: *"upon this rock I will build my church."* There will be perfect unity between Him and His Body, the Church. If we think of a human body, there

is a perfect connection between the head and the rest of the body. When that connection is intact, the body works normally.

The moment there is a mismatch between the commands the head sends and what the body carries out, problems arise, such as paralysis or other disorders, or various diseases. This can be seen as a form of disobedience. Further on, the passage says, *"he shall build the temple of the LORD"*, He being the Lord Jesus. *"And shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne."* We have read about the promise God made to the Jewish people, how He freed them from slavery in Egypt and sanctified Aaron and his sons to be priests.

In this context, the Lord Jesus will be a priest upon His throne, He will reign, and there will be perfect unity between Him and the Church, the Temple of the Lord. According to verse 15, this prophecy in Zechariah goes further and says: *"And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you."* This refers to those who were once far off and are now near, as Scripture also says: *"ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh."*

In the New Covenant, God's extraordinary work is brought out especially clearly. We will not go to Matthew 16, which we mentioned earlier; instead we will turn our attention to 1 Corinthians, chapter 3. Here it is important to realise that the Lord Jesus takes an active part in building the Temple. In 1 Corinthians chapter 3 we see the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, in verse 9: *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."* Amen.

Holy Scripture uses several terms to describe the Church, the Temple of God. Here it is described as God's husbandry, His field, and also as God's building, and elsewhere in the epistle as the house of God. So we believers are identified as God's house, God's building.

We can say without error that we are the Temple of God. And who dwells in this Temple? According to Scripture, *"I will dwell in them… and I will be their God, and they shall be my people,"* or my children. God Himself takes care of His children, that is, of us.

Going on to verse 10, it is essential to note that Paul stresses that he and Apollos (or we) are fellow workers with God. Even though people may come from far away to help build the Temple, we are all called to be labourers together with God. Paul says: *"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon."*

It is essential that each one takes heed how he builds, because *"other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* So the foundation of the Church, of the spiritual building, is the Lord Jesus, and no one can lay any other foundation.

It is of overwhelming importance that we recognise the value of the Church and think about how much importance we give to it, to His Temple. Let us think seriously about the fact that God puts all His effort and all His work into this spiritual building.

Our part in God's work is essential, but we must understand that this is not about personal salvation; it is about the quality of the work we do in His body, the Church of Christ. If our work is burned up, we will not necessarily lose our salvation, but rather the reward for that work. Because this is not about sin but about our work of building, the Word of God assures us that, although the work may be lost, salvation remains, as it is written: *"he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."*

The apostle Paul reminds us that each of us has a work to do, a mission entrusted to us by God, and that not all works are the same. In verses 16 and 17 of 1 Corinthians 3 we are reminded that we are the Temple of God and that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. This truth obliges us to live in holiness, for if anyone destroys the Temple of God, the Body of Christ, God will destroy him, because the Temple of God is holy.

In the Old Testament the camp had to be holy because it was God's dwelling place. In the same way we, as God's Temple, must be holy, because the Holy Spirit dwells in us. It is possible for us to destroy the Temple of God by the way we live, and the Word warns us that God will destroy whoever does this.

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, from verse 19, we are reminded that our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us and whom we have received from God. We do not belong to ourselves; we have been bought with a price. Therefore we are called to glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are His. We read: *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* Amen.

So our body is regarded as the Temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Knowing this, we must conduct ourselves seriously and act with great care, aware that the Holy Spirit lives in us and that we have been redeemed at a great price, as the Word of God teaches us.

Let us turn our attention to the Epistle to the Ephesians, to understand why God puts such emphasis on the cleanness of His dwelling, insisting that it be free of all uncleanness. In the first chapter, verses 17 to 23, the extraordinary work God does with us human beings is described.

Here the apostle Paul prays: "*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*" Amen.

The Lord Jesus has been made head over all things to the Church, which is His Body. This calls for great care and responsibility when we speak about the Church, about the Body of Christ, because He is the head over all things to the Church.

He is building this Church, as we will also read in chapter 2 of the Epistle to the Ephesians, starting at verse 19: "*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God*." Here we can recall the verse in 1 Corinthians 3:16 (we are the Temple of God), and we read on: *"and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."*

So He builds, and He is the head of the Body, the head over all things to the Church, and according to verse 10, we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. It is an immense investment that God makes for our growth and perfecting, and of course to ensure perfect unity between the One who builds, the Lord Jesus, and us, the Church.

Reading Ephesians chapter 4, verses 4 to *6*, we see that there is one body: "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*"

As an aside, in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 we are told that by one Spirit we have been baptised into one body. We remember the promise made by the Lord Jesus and by John the Baptist that we would be baptised with the Holy Spirit. We have been baptised by one Spirit to form the body of Christ, in which we must grow.

Coming back, we read again from Ephesians 4, verses 11 to 16: "*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children.*"

A child, by nature, does not know everything and has not yet reached full maturity; he is still in childhood. *"When I was a child, … I thought as a child,"* says the apostle Paul elsewhere. Children are easily swayed, tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine.

When we are children, grown-ups can play with us and tell us things we believe are true when in fact they may be lies. But in the Church the Lord has given workers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, that is, of His Temple.

We are called to build together to form a holy Temple in the Lord, and the building must be tightly joined, fitly framed together, as we read further on: *"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in

love."* Amen.

What follows from what we have read so far is that in this building there are no tares. Can there also be people in it who are not children of God? Many claim that the tares live together with the wheat, the children of darkness together with the children of light.

Yet the Word of God is very clear: God desires, and requires, that the Body of Christ be clean. When we are faced with filth, it is essential to act to remove it. Spiritually, this means cleansing and keeping whole the Church, that is, the members who are in the Body of Christ.

Going further, in Colossians 1:13 we read: "*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*", and we ask ourselves: *"If the Church, the Body of Christ, is so important to God, how important must it be to us?"*

We continue with verse 15, where we learn that the Lord Jesus is "*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*"

And in Colossians 2:9-10 we read: *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."* This underlines once again that He is the head over every part of the Church.

Then we read from verse 18: "*Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.*"

This warning is relevant for many of us. We must hold fast to the Head, from whom the whole body is nourished. But who nourishes it? The apostle Paul tells his spiritual children: *"I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it."* So the body is nourished from the Head, who is Christ, by means of the joints and bands, and it grows with the growth that God gives.

The body is knit together and holds fast to the Head, who is Christ, from whom the whole body is nourished. We will also read in Ephesians to make this extraordinary work of God clearer. In Ephesians chapter 5, verse 29, it says: *"For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."*

So Christ nourishes and cherishes the body. When a member falls ill, the Lord Jesus takes part in its healing, because we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

Verse 32 reveals to us: *"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."* We are only fellow workers; the architect, the leader, the director, the head is Christ. The Lord is

not Peter, George or John.

We will now read from 2 Corinthians chapter 6, to understand better why the Lord commands us to keep the body clean. He is the One who works in us, in His body, caring for it and nourishing it. As it is written, there must be no unclean thing in the camp, *"that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee."* In Joshua 7 we saw God and Joshua working together to cleanse the camp, which now stands as a picture of cleansing the body, the house that is the Temple.

We cannot leave filth in the house of God and expect Him to stay alongside our filth. We read from 2 Corinthians, from chapter 6, verse 14, to chapter 7, verse 1: *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"*

These questions underline how incompatible the two natures are: light and darkness, Christ and Belial, believer and unbeliever. Each feeds from different sources and is cared for in a different way. The Lord Jesus lovingly cares for the members of His body.

Next, the text asks us: *"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."*

These verses urge us to separate ourselves from uncleanness and to live in holiness, as sons and daughters of God. "*Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*"

What is God telling us through the apostle Paul? Darkness and light cannot exist together, nor can the tares with the wheat. Many say that the tares may live together with the wheat until the end, and that God will step in then. Yet God wants cleanness now, because He cannot dwell in a filthy place. *"Touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."* He is in our midst, and that is why the camp must be clean.

I will keep reading from the Word of God so that we understand better what God has invested and why light must be separated from darkness. Contamination is real; filth cannot exist alongside God, or else we are left on our own. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 24, we are told: *"Let us consider one another."* But why should we watch over one another?

According to Hebrews 12, verses 15 and 16: *"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person."*

If we do not watch, bitterness can bring trouble and many can be defiled. The apostle Paul warns us that after his departure deceitful workers and false teachers would creep in. In

Revelation chapter 2 there are many warnings about this.

The church in Laodicea, the church in Thyatira, the church in Sardis are examples showing that sin can exist in the Church and that God does not tolerate it. If sins appear in a congregation, there is a great danger that, if that congregation belongs to Christ, the light will be withdrawn from it. And when the light is withdrawn, darkness settles in.

According to verse 18 of Revelation 2 and the verses that follow: *"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."* Amen.

In Thyatira, where people had once pleased God and followed His plan, sin crept in, as these words show us: *"Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols… And I will kill her children with death."*

Sin leads to death. It is essential to understand that our relationship with God is not a game; it is a serious relationship into which God puts everything. The Lord Jesus died for the Church, for His body, to cleanse it and present it before God clean and holy, without wrinkle and without spot. We are called to work together with the Lord Jesus in this holy work, and it is our responsibility to keep watch so that the body, the Church, stays clean. Amen.

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