

Our Building Is Not Our Church

Text : I Corinthians 3: 5-17

INTRODUCTION :

A. What would we do if we didn't have this building for our assemblies ?

1. There was a time when this congregation didn't have a building ?
 - a. In its infancy the congregation met in a rented space above a photo studio.
 - b. Was it a real church at that time ? Does a congregation have to have a building ?
2. We should be very grateful that those who came before us provided this place for us.
 - a. One member donated the lots for both the building and the parking lots.
 - b. The men of the congregation built the building. (*It was small, but adequate.*)
 - c. As the church continued to grow, the next generation added to the building.
3. Other members were so concerned that we continue having this building that they left money in their estates to provide for it to be maintained years into the future.

B. Though it wasn't always so, in our time believers place a high value upon having a church building and upon the appearance of the building.

1. When asked to describe a church, most people start by describing their building.
2. Unsaved people most often form their opinions of a church by its building.
3. When unconverted people begin looking for a church, the building is a factor.

C. In most instances, the single largest expenditure a church makes is it's building.

1. Today it's not unusual to hear of a congregation spending a million dollars to build.
2. Many congregations must constantly be raising funds to support their building.
3. Indebtedness on buildings prohibits many congregations from doing evangelism.
 - a. The primary function of a congregation (*or Christian*) is to convey the gospel.
 - b. Evangelism should be the single largest expenditure in a congregation's budget.

Note : Paying a local preacher is not evangelism. To maintain systematic evangelism :

- 1) – There must be ongoing maintenance to keep the congregation healthy.
- 2) – Ideally, that's the work of the elders, but in today's church preachers do it.
- 3) – Therefore, the preacher's salary is not rightly part of the evangelism budget.

D. A building program can either divide or unify a congregation or do BOTH.

1. This is such an important topic that colleges course are taught specifically about it.
 - a. Church leaders can go to seminars to be taught how to manage building programs.
 - b. Significant research has been done resulting in many books being written about it.

2. Building programs can divide a congregation.
 - * *One of my teachers called a building program a “division sandwich,” i.e., a brief period of unity sandwiched between two slices of division.*
 - a. The first great hurdle is getting everyone to agree that a building is needed.
 - b. The second hurdle is where to put the building. (*cheap, hidden, public, etc*)
 - c. There will be a debate about whether to go big or keep it small, but expandable.
 - d. Always a debate about what kind of building is needed. (*Go first class or go cheap*)
3. Once the actual work starts, the project tends to pull everyone together.
 - a. Building requires lots of activity. ... There’s a job for anyone who wants it.
 - b. The needs are tangible, clearly identifiable and easily understandable.
 - c. Everyone is working toward a common goal and feels a part of it.
 - d. There’s a sense of mutual sacrifice, a common struggle forges a bond.
4. Once the new building is completed, disharmony and discontent often follows.
 - a. Brethren who were very much involved suddenly have nothing to do.
 - b. Many feel the goal is accomplished so it’s time to lean back and enjoy the success.
 - c. Some time after completion a feeling of disappointment begins to set in.
 - 1) Buildings are often promoted on the false premise of “If you build it, they will come.”
 - 2) An inadequate building can inhibit growth, but a building doesn’t convert people.
 - 3) Frustrated brethren have to blame someone so they often get a new preacher.
 - * *Old preacher’s advise : “Son, when they decide on a new building, update your resume and quietly start exploring possible places to relocate.”*

Even so, in today’s America, when all is said and done, having an adequate church building is pretty much essential to the success of a congregation.

I. However, the congregations mentioned in the N.T. did not have church buildings.

- A. The largest congregation in the N.T. met in the building of another religion.
 1. The congregation in Jerusalem started with more than 3000 members. **Acts 2: 41**
 - a. They had daily additions to their number.
 - b. The number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem. **Acts 6: 7**
 - c. Compare : **Acts 9: 31, 12: 24**

2. This mega-congregation assembled in an attachment to the Jewish temple.
 - a. **Acts 5: 12** – At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. Cf - **Acts 3: 7**
 - b. "Solomon's portico" was part of the temple complex. ... **John 10: 20**

B. Smaller congregations met in the homes of members.

1. One congregation met in the home of Prisca and Aquila.
Rom. 16: 3-5 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, **4** who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; **5** also greet the church that is in their house.
2. There was a congregation that met in the house of Nympha.
Col. 4: 15 – Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in his house. (*Nympha =pronounced Numfas = bridegroom*)
3. Paul refers to a church meeting in the house of Philemon
Philemon 1-2 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, **2** and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

C. About 168 A.D. the church was still meeting in homes. The following is an ancient account of Justin Martyr's trial which resulted in his being martyred.

The Roman prefect interrogated Justin Martyr and his associates: "What sort of life do you lead? What are your doctrines? You admit that you are a Christian?"

To each question, the Christian philosopher made a direct reply.

Then the prefect, Rusticus, demanded: "Where do you meet?"

"Wherever it is each one's preference or opportunity," said Justin. "In any case, do you suppose we can all meet in the same place?"

Rusticus pressed him, no doubt for information that might compromise others: "Tell me, where do you meet? In what place?"

Justin said, "I have been living above the baths of [text corrupt] for the entire period of my sojourn at Rome ... and I have known no other meeting place but here. Anyone who desired could come to my residence, and I would give to him the words of truth."

At the close of this interrogation, Rusticus passed sentence on Justin and his companions, obtaining for Justin his appellation: Martyr.

The proceedings of Justin's trial, just prior to A.D. 168, reveal some things about the location of early Christian worship and teaching.

D. So, the N.T. mentions house churches, but nowhere mentions a church building.

1. Historically, the church continued to meet in houses for hundreds of years.
2. Therefore, the place in which a church assembles is irrelevant.
 - a. House churches are real churches.
 - b. The churches that meet under a big tree are also real churches.
3. Objections to a churches meeting in small groups have no foundation in scripture.

II. Those who espouse doctrines about church buildings are false teachers.**A. Jesus said that the worship of such people is worthless.**

1. **Matt. 15: 9** – But in vain do they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.
2. Since Christian church buildings are not mentioned in the N.T.
any commandments about them are “**the commandments of men.**”

B. Christians do not have the authority to make laws; to do so is rebellion.

1. The Pharisees were strongly condemned for making laws where God did not.
2. The Apostle Paul warned that we are limited to only what is written.
I Cor. 4: 6 – Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to
myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may
learn not to exceed what is written, ...
3. To make doctrines where God did not is to usurp HIS authority, i.e., rebellion.

C. All Christians have opinions and elders can make decisions about expediencies.

1. No one has the right to make rules about what a church building should look like.
 - a. Some denominations have a standard design for their buildings. **Their rule only.**
 - b. Buildings are made by men for men so they should accommodate man’s uses.
 - c. God does not live in the building and He does not have a special presence there.
2. No one may make doctrines about how a church’s building is decorated.
 - a. For example, some rail against having a steeple, but other demand one.
 - b. Others make an issue about anything hanging on the wall. (*I don’t like flags.*)
 - c. All have personal preferences but they can never be advocated as right or wrong.
3. No one has the right to make rules about how a congregation uses its building.
 - a. The building was built by the congregation for the congregation. (**They decide.**)
 - b. The members are the church; the building is just a tool for them to use to serve.

III. Failure to use the church's most expensive investment is poor stewardship.

A. The mission of the church is to take salvation to the world.

1. We must use every means at our disposal to accomplish that assignment.
2. We cannot reach people who do not even know that we exist.
3. For most congregations their building gives them more exposure than anything.

B. It's good stewardship for a church to use its building at every opportunity.

1. There are no biblical grounds to forbid any legal activity in the building. (*opinion*)
 - a. Volunteer it for community meetings. (*Legal reasons not to allow weddings in building*)
 - b. Those with no church affiliation become prospects as they use a church's building.
 - c. Bringing people in is good P.R. and great advertising.

* *People are more apt to respond to an invitation to a place they've been before.*

2. The church's building is a tool to be used, not an idol to be worshipped.
 - a. Member scolded a visitor whose kid made a mess with a cookie; never returned.
 - b. A church stopped a very successful bus ministry because of handprints on walls.
3. Older people complained because teenagers were eating lunch in a classroom.

Note : *There's nothing in the N.T. that even hints that eating in the building is sinful. That old custom came from the same place as women not setting with men.*

- 1) – There are zero commands about things NOT to do in a church building.
- 2) – There is no passage in the N.T. that says eating in a church building is sin.
- 3) – Proof-text : **I Cor. 11: 23-34** ... This does not address a church building.

Any text taken out of context is nothing more than a pretext.

- 4) – It addresses the assembly and specifically partaking of the Lord's supper.
- 5) – To try to apply this to a church building is a total abuse of scripture.

* (*I would be the first one to object if food (even pie) was added in the assembly.*)

- 6) – In **Acts 20**, The Apostle Paul ate in the church building. (*After midnight*)

C. Enough chasing rabbits, the point is that we should be using our building for God.

1. It needs to be equipped to accommodate the life of the body of Christ that uses it.
2. BUT MORE THAN THAT .. it needs to be a headquarters from which to evangelize.
 - a. It should be an inviting place for visitors.
 - b. Everyone in this city needs to know where it is located.
 - c. Great numbers of people need to have been inside the building.
3. The objective is to get them to know us so we can get them to know GOD.

IV. A church's building reflects its attitude toward the God they worship in it.

A. When God designed a place of worship, He designed the very most beautiful.

1. God gave the pattern for the tabernacle and commanded they follow it :

Exodus 25: 1-9 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. ³ This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, ⁴ blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, ⁵ rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, ⁶ oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁷ onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. ⁸ Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. ⁹ According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.

2. The tabernacle was the most glorious tent every constructed.

3. Why would God require such an elaborate worship center ?

Because it communicated attitude toward God. Glory, awe, splendor, holiness, etc.

B. When Solomon built the temple, it was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

1. David dedicated Solomon's inheritance to the construction of the temple.
2. The value of the gold alone approaches a trillion dollars.
3. Why did David and Solomon spend so much ? *Their attitude toward God.*
4. When you see an obviously cheap or rundown church building, what do you think ?

C. A church building cannot teach anyone how to be saved, but it can communicate to the world and to ourselves the attitude we have toward the God we worship.

CONCLUSION :

A. Our current project is both expensive and inconvenient, but it's HIGHLY COMMENDABLE because of what it communicates about our hearts.

B. This building is not a holy place, but :

1. The God we worship in it is holy.
2. Those who assemble in it have been made holy by that holy God.

INVITATION :

That same God will make you holy if you surrender your life to Him.

Lesson Text :

I Corinthians 3: 5-17

5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. **7** So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. **8** Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. **9** For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. **11** For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **13** each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. **14** If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. **15** If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? **17** If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.