**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 CORINTHIANS-006**. **TEMPLES OF GOD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?"*

*1 Corinthians 3:16*

The great purpose of Christianity is to make men like Jesus Christ. As He is the image of the invisible God we are to be the images of the unseen Christ. The Scripture is very bold and emphatic in attributing to Christ's followers likeness to Him, in nature, in character, in relation to the world, in office, and in ultimate destiny. Is He the anointed of God? We are anointed--Christs in Him. Is He the Son of God? We in Him receive the adoption of sons. Is He the Light of the world? We in Him are lights of the world too. Is He a King? A Priest? He hath made us to be kings and priests.

Here we have the Apostle making the same solemn assertion in regard to Christian men, Know ye not that ye are--as your Master, and because your Master is--that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?'

Of course the allusion in my text is to the whole aggregate of believers--what we call the Catholic Church, as being collectively the habitation of God. But God cannot dwell in an aggregate of men, unless He dwells in the individuals that compose the aggregate. And God has nothing to do with institutions except through the people who make the institutions. And so, if the Church as a whole is a Temple, it is only because all its members are temples of God.

Therefore, without forgetting the great blessed lesson of the unity of the Church which is taught in these words, I want rather to deal with them in their individual application now; and to try and lay upon your consciences, dear brethren, the solemn obligations and the intense practical power which this Apostle associated with the thought that each Christian man was, in very deed, a temple of God.

It would be very easy to say eloquent things about this text, but that is no part of my purpose.

**I. Let me deal, first of all, and only for a moment or two, with the underlying thought that is here--that every Christian is a dwelling-place of God.**

Now, do not run away with the idea that that is a metaphor. It was the outward temple that was the metaphor. The reality is that which you and I, if we are God's children in Jesus Christ, experience. There was no real sense in which that Mighty One whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain, dwelt in any house made with hands. But the Temple, and all the outward worship, were but symbolical of the facts of the Christian life, and the realities of our inward experience. These are the truths whereof the other is the shadow. We use words to which it is difficult for us to attach any meaning, when we talk about God as being locally present in any material building; but we do not use words to which it is so difficult to attach a meaning, when we talk about the Infinite Spirit as being present and abiding in a spirit shaped to hold Him, and made on purpose to touch Him and be filled by Him.

All creatures have God dwelling in them in the measure of their capacity. The stone that you kick on the road would not be there if there were not a present God. Nothing would happen if there were not abiding in creatures the force, at any rate, which is God. But just as in this great atmosphere in which we all live and move and have our being, the eye discerns undulations which make light, and the ear catches vibrations which make sound, and the nostrils are recipient of motions which bring fragrance, and all these are in the one atmosphere, and the sense that apprehends one is utterly unconscious of the other, so God's creatures, each through some little narrow slit, and in the measure of their capacity, get a straggling beam from Him into their being, and therefore they are.

But high above all other ways in which creatures can lie patent to God, and open for the influx of a Divine Indweller, lies the way of faith and love. Whosoever opens his heart in these divinely-taught emotions, and fixes them upon the Christ in whom God dwells, receives into the very roots of his being--as the water that trickles through the soil to the rootlets of the tree--the very Godhead Himself. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

That God shall dwell in my heart is possible only from the fact that He dwelt in all His fulness in Christ, through whom I touch Him. That Temple consecrates all heart-shrines; and all worshippers that keep near to Him, partake with Him of the Father that dwelt in Him.

Only remember that in Christ God dwelt completely, all the fulness of the Godhead bodily was there, but in us it is but partially; that in Christ, therefore, the divine indwelling was uniform and invariable, but in us it fluctuates, and sometimes is more intimate and blessed, and sometimes He leaves the habitation when we leave Him; that in Christ, therefore, there was no progress in the divine indwelling, but that in us, if there be any true inhabitation of our souls by God, that abiding will become more and more, until every corner of our being is hallowed and filled with the searching effulgence of the all-pervasive Light. And let us remember that God dwelt in Christ, but that in us it is God in Christ who dwells. So to Him we owe it all, that our poor hearts are made the dwelling-place of God; or, as this Apostle puts it, in other words conveying the same idea, Ye 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 ... for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

**II. Now then, turning from this underlying idea of the passage, let us look, for a moment, at some of the many applications of which the great thought is susceptible. I remark, then, in the second place, that as temples all Christians are to be manifesters of God.**

The meaning of the Temple as of all temples was, that there the indwelling Deity should reveal Himself; and if it be true that we Christian men and women are, in this deep and blessed reality of which I have been speaking, the abiding places and habitations of God, then it follows that we shall stand in the world as the great means by which God is manifested and made known, and that in a two-fold way; to ourselves and to other people.

The real revelation of God to our hearts must be His abiding in our hearts. We do not learn God until we possess God. He must fill our souls before we know His sweetness. The answer that our Lord made to one of His disciples is full of the deepest truth. How is it, said one of them in his blundering way, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself to us? And the answer was, We will come and make Our abode with him. You do not know God until, if I might so say, He sits at your fireside and talks with you in your hearts. Just as some wife may have a husband whom the world knows as hero, or sage, or orator, but she knows him as nobody else can; so the outside, and if I may so say, the public character of God is but the surface of the revelation that He makes to us, when in the deepest secrecy of our own hearts He pours Himself into our waiting spirits. O brethren! it is within the curtains of the Holiest of all that the Shekinah flashes; it is within our own hearts, shrined and templed there, that God reveals Himself to us, as He does not unto the world.

And then, further, Christian men, as the temples and habitations of God, are appointed to be the great means of making Him known to the world around. The eye that cannot look at the sun can look at the rosy clouds that lie on either side of it, and herald its rising; their opalescent tints and pearly lights are beautiful to dim vision, to which the sun itself is too bright to be looked upon. Men will believe in a gentle Christ when they see you gentle. They will believe in a righteous love when they see it manifesting itself in you. You are the secretaries of God's praise, as George Herbert has it. He dwells in your hearts that out of your lives He may be revealed. The pictures in a book of travels, or the diagrams in a mathematical work, tell a great deal more in half a dozen lines than can be put into as many pages of dry words. And it is not books of theology nor eloquent sermons, but it is a Church glowing with the glory of God, and manifestly all flushed with His light and majesty, that will have power to draw men to believe in the God whom it reveals. When explorers land upon some untravelled island and meet the gentle inhabitants with armlets of rough gold upon their wrists, they say there must be many a gold-bearing rock of quartz crystal in the interior of the land. And if you present yourselves, Christian men and women, to the world with the likeness of your Master plain upon you, then people will believe in the Christianity that you profess. You have to popularise the Gospel in the fashion in which go-betweens and middlemen between students and the populace popularise science. You have to make it possible for men to believe in the Christ because they see Christ in you. Know ye not that ye are the temples of the living God? Let His light shine from you.

**III. I remark again that as temples all Christian lives should be places of sacrifice.**

What is the use of a temple without worship? And what kind of worship is that in which the centre point is not an altar? That is the sort of temple that a great many professing Christians are. They have forgotten the altar in their spiritual architecture. Have you got one in your heart? It is but a poor, half-furnished sanctuary that has not. Where is yours? The key and the secret of all noble life is to yield up one's own will, to sacrifice oneself. There never was anything done in this world worth doing, and there never will be till the end of time, of which sacrifice is not the centre and inspiration. And the difference between all other and lesser nobilities of life, and the supreme beauty of a true Christian life is that the sacrifice of the Christian is properly a sacrifice--that is, an offering to God, done for the sake of the great love wherewith He has loved us. As Christ is the one true Temple, and we become so by partaking of Him, so He is the one Sacrifice for sins for ever, and we become sacrifices only through Him. If there be any lesson which comes out of this great truth of Christians as temples, it is not a lesson of pluming ourselves on our dignity, or losing ourselves in the mysticisms which lie near this truth, but it is the hard lesson--If a temple, then an altar; if an altar, then a sacrifice. Ye are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, that ye may offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God--sacrifice, priest, temple, all in one; and all for the sake and by the might of that dear Lord who has given Himself a bleeding Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, that we might offer a Eucharistic sacrifice of thanks and praise and self-surrender unto Him, and to His Father God.

**IV. And, lastly, this great truth of my text enforces the solemn lesson of the necessary sanctity of the Christian life.**

The temple of God, says the context, the temple of God is holy, which (holy persons) ye are. The plain first idea of the temple is a place set apart and consecrated to God.

Hence, of course, follows the idea of purity, but the parent idea of holiness is not purity, which is the consequence, but consecration or separation to God, which is the root.

And so in very various applications, on which I have not time to dwell now, this idea of the necessary sanctity of the Temple is put forth in these two letters to the Corinthian Church. Corinth was a city honeycombed with the grossest immoralities; and hence, perhaps, to some extent the great emphasis and earnestness and even severity of the Apostle in dealing with some forms of evil.

But without dwelling on the details, let me just point you to three directions in which this general notion of sanctity is applied. There is that of our context here Know ye not that ye are the temple of God? If any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, and such ye are.

He is thinking here mainly, I suppose, about the devastation and destruction of this temple of God, which was caused by schismatical and heretical teaching, and by the habit of forming parties, one of Paul, one of Apollos, one of Cephas, one of Christ, which was rending that Corinthian Church into pieces. But we may apply it more widely than that, and say that anything which corrupts and defiles the Christian life and the Christian character assumes a darker tint of evil when we think that it is sacrilege--the profanation of the temple, the pollution of that which ought to be pure as He who dwells in it.

Christian men and women, how that thought darkens the blackness of all sin! How solemnly there peals out the warning, If any man destroy or impair the temple, by any form of pollution, him with retribution in kind, him shall God destroy. Keep the temple clear; keep it clean. Let Him come with His scourge of small cords and His merciful rebuke. You Manchester men know what it is to let the money-changers into the sanctuary. Beware lest, beginning with making your hearts houses of merchandise, you should end by making them dens of thieves.

And then, still further, there is another application of this same principle, in the second of these Epistles. What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Ye are the temple of the living God.

Christianity is intolerant. There is to be one image in the shrine. One of the old Roman Stoic Emperors had a pantheon in his palace with Jesus Christ upon one pedestal and Plato on the one beside Him. And some of us are trying the same kind of thing. Christ there, and somebody else here. Remember, Christ must be everything or nothing! Stars may be sown by millions, but for the earth there is one sun. And you and I are to shrine one dear Guest, and one only, in the inmost recesses of our hearts.

And there is another application of this metaphor also in our letter. Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you? Christianity despises the flesh; Christianity reverences the body; and would teach us all that, being robed in that most wonderful work of God's hands, which becomes a shrine for God Himself if He dwell in our hearts, all purity, all chastisement and subjugation of animal passion is our duty. Drunkenness, and gluttony, lusts of every kind, impurity of conduct, and impurity of word and look and thought, all these assume a still darker tint when they are thought of as not only crimes against the physical constitution and the moral law of humanity, but insults flung in the face of the God that would inhabit the shrine.

And in regard to sins of this kind, which it is so difficult to speak of in public, and which grow unchecked in secrecy, and are ruining hundreds of young lives, the words of this context are grimly true, If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy. I speak now mainly in brotherly or fatherly warning to young men--did you ever read this, His bones are full of the iniquities of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust? Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?'

And so, brethren, our text tells us what we may all be. There is no heart without its deity. Alas! alas! for the many listening to me now whose spirits are like some of those Egyptian temples, which had in the inmost shrine a coiled-up serpent, the mummy of a monkey, or some other form as animal and obscene.

Oh! turn to Christ and cry, Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the ark of Thy strength. Open your hearts and let Christ come in. And before Him, as of old, the bestial Dagon will be found, dejected and truncated, lying on the sill there; and all the vain, cruel, lustful gods that have held riot and carnival in your hearts will flee away into the darkness, like some foul ghosts at cock-crow. If any man hear My voice and open the door I will come in. And the glory of the Lord shall fill the house.