

ANSWER SEVEN: BEING A WISE BUILDER AND LABOURER WITHIN THE CHURCH

1 CORINTHIANS 03:10–17

Introduction: The Church

This passage pictures the building of the church. This is clearly seen in that Paul has just declared to the local believers in Corinth, “You are God’s building” (v. 9; cp. v. 16).

The church in Corinth was in severe straits. There were some *troublemakers* and *opinionated* cliques in the church who were about to destroy the church. Because of this they were endangering their eternal destiny, and they desperately needed to realize this. One of the answers to a divided church is for every believer to be a *wise builder and labourer within the church*.

- I. There is the master builder and the labourers (v. 10).
- II. There is the warning: let every believer be careful how he builds (v. 10).
- III. There is the only foundation: Jesus Christ (v. 11).
- IV. There is the structure: there are two possible materials — permanent vs. perishable (v. 12).
- V. There is the day of inspection (vv. 13-15).
- VI. There is the building identified: God’s temple, that is, the church (v. 16).
- VII. There is the seriousness of destroying the church: judgment and destruction (v. 17).

I. 1 Corinthians 03:10 The Master Builder and Labourers

There is the master builder and the labourers. The word “builder” (*archtektion*) means the superintendent or architect of the building project. Paul says that he was the one who planned the church at Corinth. He was the one who laid the foundation, who began and superintended the founding of the church. However, note three things.

1. Paul was an expert builder because of the *grace of God*, not because of any personal ability or merit. The word “grace” means far more than just being called to found a church; it means to be enabled, empowered and equipped to do the job. It was God’s power, God’s gifts, God’s abilities that were given to Paul to do the job. Paul was only the instrument through which God built the church.

Now note a crucial factor: Paul was not talking about a building. He was talking about people. The church was not a building; the church was a body of people who truly believed in Jesus Christ. God gave Paul the grace — the strength, power and ability — to reach people for Jesus Christ and to *assemble them together* into a body to worship God and to honour His Son, Jesus Christ. Where they met did not matter. They could meet in a home, a hut, a cave, a field, a back yard, a public building or a church building. What mattered was that they were one in their...

- trust in the Lord.
 - belief and worship of God.
 - purpose and mission to reach their neighbours and the world with the message of God's great love.
2. Paul said he was an “*expert* builder.” The word “*expert*” means skilful. He did not approach the task and project unthoughtfully. He thought long and hard; he kept his mind upon the task. He did not allow the pleasures of the world to distract him; nor did he allow the desires of his own flesh, which sometimes ached for less demanding work, to interfere. Paul knew what God had called him to do, to plan and establish churches all over the world, so he did it as an “*expert*” architect and building superintendent.
3. Others built upon Paul's work in Corinth. When Paul left Corinth, God raised up others to labour and to continue building the church. They would include...
- the ministers • the leaders • the teachers
 - the members who served and carried on the ministry of the church in order to build it. This should include all members of a church, for all members are certainly to be building the church through their witness and service for the Lord. Every member is either building or destroying the testimony and strength of a church.

Thought 1. Think about an amazing thing. Every church has had a person who was the master builder, the architect, the founder of the church. Someone surrendered himself to God and went forth for God. Someone gave himself up *to God to become a* master builder, an architect, a pioneer, a builder of churches for God.

The all-important question is: Where are the men and women today who will surrender their lives to God and be the master builders who go forth and build churches for God? People desperately need to be reached and assembled together under the love and mission of Christ.

Mat 16:15-18 “*But what about you?*” he asked. “*Who do you say I am?*” Simon Peter answered, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Jesus replied, “*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*”

Thought 2. Another important question is this: How many church members are building up the church? How many are building wisely and skilfully upon the foundation that has already been laid?

1 Pet 2:5 *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

II. *1 Corinthians 03:10 Every Believer Builds the Church*

There is the clear warning – let every believer be careful how he builds upon the foundation of the church. The foundation has been laid, and it is strong. It shall never be moved. It is now to be built upon, but everyone in the church, minister and layman alike, must be careful how he builds upon it.

Mat 6:1 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Mat 18:10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.”

Mat 24:4 Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you.”

Mark 4:24 “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more.”

Mark 13:9 “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.”

Mark 13:33 “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come [for the Lord’s return].”

Luke 8:18 “Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

Luke 11:35 “See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”

Luke 12:15 Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Luke 21:8 He replied: “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them.”

1 Cor 3:10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds [upon Christ, the foundation of the church].

1 Cor 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!

Col 4:17 Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.”

1 Tim 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

2 Pet 1:19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

III. 1 Corinthians 03:11 Jesus Christ, the Only Foundation

There is the only foundation, Jesus Christ Himself. All other foundations are as *sinking sand*. They cannot stand up against the storms of life. No man – no matter who he is – can lay any other foundation that can last. All other foundations will crumble and be destroyed forever. What does it mean to say that Christ is the only foundation?

1. It means that Christ Himself, His person, is the only foundation upon which men can build their lives.

Mat 7:24-27 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

John 3:14-16 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. That everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 8:24 “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one.”

John 10:9 “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”

John 14:6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

1 Tim 2:5-6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time.

2. It means that the teaching or doctrine of Christ is the only foundation upon which men can build their lives.

Mat 7:24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

John 3:34 *“For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.”*

John 6:63 *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”*

John 6:68 *Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*

John 7:16-17 *Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”*

John 8:26 *“I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.”*

John 8:28 *So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.”*

John 8:38 *“I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.”*

John 8:51 *“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”*

John 12:48-50 *“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”*

John 14:24 *“He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”*

John 17:8 *“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.”*

Mark 13:31 *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*

3. It means that Jesus Christ is the only foundation upon which men can build a true church.

Isa 28:16 *So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be dismayed.”*

Mat 16:15-18 *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”*

Acts 4:11-12 “He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Eph 2:20-21 Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

1 Pet 2:6 For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

IV. 1 Corinthians 03:12 False Teachers in the Church

There is the structure. It can be built out of two possible materials: either permanent or perishable materials. There may be only one foundation, and it may be laid by Christ and His apostles, but there are many different kinds of materials within the market of the world. And the believer must choose which material he will use to build his part of the church.

1. There are the permanent and valuable materials, the materials that are not corruptible and do not deteriorate and decay like the things of this earth. Permanent materials last forever; they are incorruptible and undefiled and do not fade away. Scripture says they can be compared to gold, silver and costly stones. What are the permanent materials? Scripture describes them in many ways. Several examples would be as follows.
 - a. They are the fruit of the Spirit, the spiritual qualities that last beyond this life. Again, these are the things that the believer is to use in building the church.

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

- b. They are the *things* which are to be added to our faith. They are the lasting things that are so desperately needed by the church, and they are the things that the believer is to use in building the church.

2 Pet 1:5-11 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

- c. They are the souls and lives of men, women, boys and girls who become living stones in the church.

1 Pet 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Mark 16:15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Mat 16:26 “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

2. There are the perishable and combustible materials. They are the materials and things of this earth that are corruptible: that rust, decay and deteriorate. Scripture says they can be compared to wood, hay and straw. What are the perishable materials? Again, Scripture describes them in many ways.

- a. They are the treasures, wealth and cares of this world.

Mat 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Mark 4:19 “But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”

- b. They are the works of the flesh, the acts of the sinful nature.

Gal 5:19, 21 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- c. They are the false teachings that are always dangerously floating around believers and the church.

Mat 7:15, 22-23 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves... Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers!’”

Mat 15:9, 13 “They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”... He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.”

Gal 4:9 *But now that you know God — or rather are known by God — how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*

Col 2:8 *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*

1 Tim 6:3-5 *If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.*

2 Tim 2:14-16 *Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.*

2 Pet 2:1-3 *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these [false] teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*

1 John 4:1-5 *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.*

V. 1 Corinthians 03:13–15 Day of Inspection; Rewards and Judgment

There is the day of inspection. The building of the church will be inspected. Note four points.

1. The day of inspection is sure to come. The building was started in order to be finished. When it is finished, the inspector, the Lord Jesus Christ, will come to either approve or disapprove it.

1 Cor 1:7-8 *Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

2. Every man's work, the work of *every believer*, will be manifested and declared. No believer will be exempted. Every single believer will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and have his works revealed and tested by the Lord. Every single work will be tested, and the truth and quality of his work will be exposed. This, of course, is a reference to the judgment seat of Christ (see note, 2 Cor 5:10).

How will they be tested? Shockingly, by fire. In the Bible fire is constantly used as a symbol of judgment and terrible trial. The building is to be set afire, and only the permanent materials of the Spirit will survive the fire. All the materials of this earth will be burned and consumed and gone forever.

Mat 16:27 *“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”*

Rom 2:16 *This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

1 Th 5:4 *But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.*

1 Pet 1:17-20 *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*

2 Pet 3:3-4, 6-15 *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are*

looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

3. The believer whose works survive the fire will be rewarded greatly, so greatly that it explodes the human mind.

Rewards Dealing with our Nature and State of Being

- => Being adopted as children of God (Gal. 4:4-7; 1 Jn. 3:1).
- => Being made blameless and pure (Ph. 2:15).
- => Being given eternal life (Jn. 3:16; 1 Tim. 6:19).
- => Being given a better and lasting possession (Heb. 10:34).
- => Being given a glorious body (Ph. 3:11, 21; 1 Cor. 15:42-44).
- => Being given eternal glory and honour and peace (Rom 2:10).
- => Being given eternal rest and peace (Heb. 4:9; Rev. 14:13).
- => Being given the blessings of the Lord (Prov 10:22).
- => Being given the value of knowing Christ Jesus (Ph. 3:8).
- => Being given enduring wealth and prosperity (Prov 8:18).
- => Being made priests (Rev. 20:6).
- => Being given a crown that will last forever (1 Cor. 9:25).
- => Being given a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8).
- => Being given a crown of life (Jas. 1:12).
- => Being given a crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4).

Rewards Dealing with Work and Position and Rule

- => Being made exalted beings (Rev. 7:9-12).
- => Being put in charge of many things (Mt. 25:23).
- => Being given the Kingdom of God (Jas. 2:5; Mt. 25:34).
- => Being given a position of rule and authority (Lk. 12:42-44; 22:28-29; 1 Cor. 6:2-3).
- => Being given eternal responsibility and joy (Mt. 25:21, 23).
- => Being given rule and authority over cities (Lk. 19:17, 19).
- => Being given thrones and the privilege of reigning forever (Rev. 20:4; 22:5).
- => Being given the privilege of surrounding the throne of God (Rev. 7:9-13; 20:4).
- => Being made priests (Rev. 20:6).
- => Being made kings (Rev. 1:5; 5:10).

Rewards Dealing with our Inheritance or Wealth

- => Being made an heir of God (Rom 8:16-17; Tit. 3:7).
- => Being given an incorruptible inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (1 Pet. 1:3-4).
- => Being given the blessings of the Lord (Prov 10:22).
- => Being given enduring wealth and prosperity (Prov 8:18).
- => Being given unsearchable riches (Eph. 3:8).
- => Being given treasures in heaven (Mt. 19:21; Lk. 12:33).

4. The believer whose works perished in the fire will suffer loss. Note: he will be saved, but he will suffer the loss of reward, appearing and looking like a burned out building.

Mat 25:27-28 ‘Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.’ “Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.”

2 John 1:8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

Jer 5:25 Your wrongdoings have kept these away; your sins have deprived you of good.

VI. 1 Corinthians 03:16 Church, the Temple of God, of the Holy Spirit

There is the building identified. It is God’s temple, the church. This verse is sometimes applied to the individual believer as God’s temple. It is true that the believer is God’s temple, indwelt by God’s Spirit (cp. 1 Cor 6:19). However, this particular verse does not apply to the individual believer. Within the context of this passage, it is the church as a whole that is called the temple of God. Note two points.

1. There are two Greek words for temple. The first (heiron) refers to all the temple precincts. The second (naos) refers to the *sanctuary*, the shrine proper. It is naos, the *sanctuary*, the shrine proper used here.
2. The word “*temple*” is singular, but the word “*you*” is plural. Scripture is saying, “*you* [all the Corinthian believers] are the temple and sanctuary of God in whom the Spirit of God dwells.” The stress is upon the presence of God: His very presence *dwells within* the sanctuary, within the shrine proper. The point is powerful: God dwells among all the believers of the church. The Spirit of God lives in, dwells within the church — in a very, very special sense — no matter where they meet. The church itself, the body of believers, is the sanctuary for God’s presence. (See notes, Jn. 14:20; 20:22; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 3:6; Col. 1:26-27.)

This is extremely important. It is a truth that should be stressed just as much as the Spirit indwelling and living in the body of the Christian believer, for defiling the temple or the church is to result in severe judgment (1 Cor. 3:17). This is the very

point Paul is making. The Corinthian church was being defiled by some. Some were *grumbling, misbehaving and being divisive*. They were in danger of the severest judgment. They needed to learn and fear, for they were defiling the very temple of God, the sanctuary in which God's own Spirit dwelt.

Mat 21:12-13 *Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"*

2 Cor 6:16 *What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

Eph 2:21-22 *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Heb 3:6 *But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.*

1 Pet 2:5 *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

VII. 1 Corinthians 03:17 *Seriousness of Destroying the Church*

There is the seriousness of destroying the church. The person who defiles or destroys the church shall face terrible judgment. Note the two words "destroys" and "destroy": they both come from the same Greek word (phtheiro). The point is striking: the person who troubles the church will suffer the same kind of trouble himself. Whatever he sows, he is definitely going to reap. Troublemaking within the church destroys the spirit of unity and love within the church. To corrupt and destroy the church is to invite God to corrupt and destroy the troublemaker. Note that the punishment is not specifically described. It is simply made clear that he who does such a terrible thing as trouble a church will suffer a terrible punishment. He will be destroyed: wrecked, torn apart, ripped, devastated.

The church or temple of God can be destroyed in at least two ways.

1. Troublemakers can make it utterly impossible for the Spirit to work within the church. An attitude of disgust, a spirit of ill will, an unwillingness to learn — grumbling, griping, complaining, quarrelling, arguing, divisiveness — destroy the spiritual fellowship of the church.
2. Troublemakers can split the church. Troublemakers hold opinions just like everyone else. However, there is one distinct difference: they become *opinionated*. Sometimes they try to hold their opinions to themselves, but their opinion is usually written all

over their faces and in their speech and behaviour. Sometimes they become so opinionated that they just burst at the seams to share their derogatory feelings, and before long others are following. The result is that the church begins to disintegrate into little parties and opinionated cliques. The church is then on its way to a series of disconnected groups and begins the march to ruin.

It is the Spirit of God alone that brings about a spiritual fellowship. Only as church members fellowship with the Spirit of God can they be drawn and bound together in a spirit of unity and oneness and love. (See *Fellowship*, Acts 2:42.)

Something else needs to be noted. The Spirit creates a spiritual fellowship of different personalities and opinions. And there are always different personalities and opinions, even when only two people meet together. It is a disturbance — whether by attitude, word or act — that grieves and squelches the work of God's Spirit within the church.

Phil 2:3 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*

2 Tim 2:14 *Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.*

2 Tim 2:24 *And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

Heb 12:15 *See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

James 3:6 *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ■*