

Eden, The Temple and the Work of the Church

1 Cor. 3:5-11

Introduction:

1. Scripture speaks of God's presence in the garden of Eden and in the temple of God. Jesus described Himself as the temple and N.T. writers describe the church as the temple of God.
2. In these ways God's presence is made known in the world. It is our mission as God's image bearers to make His presence known by reflecting His image to the world.
3. This is executed by our exemplary behavior (1 Pet. 2:11-12) and by our evangelistic endeavors (cf. Matt. 28:18-20), both of which reflect who we are as bearers of the image of God.
4. In this lesson I want to consider the garden of Eden imagery and the temple imagery used in Scripture and observe their relationship to the work of the church of making God's presence known in the world. We are going to study about planting and watering, about building on the corner stone. We are going to learn about using the word of God in accomplishing the task and we are going to see that suffering is a part of the task.

Discussion:

- I. 1 Cor. 3:5-11 uses both horticultural (gardening) imagery and architectural (building) imagery.
 - A. In verse 6 Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."
 1. In this way he diminishes both himself and Apollos and emphasizes the activity of God.
 2. And yet he recognizes that he and Apollos are fellow workers with God.
 3. He identifies the Corinthians as God's field.
 4. Those who teach the word are the planters and waterers and those who are taught the word are God's field.
 5. Such imagery was common in the teaching of Jesus (cf. Luke 8's parable of the sower, Luke 13's parable of the mustard seed).
 - B. In verse 9 the building imagery is introduced and continues in the next several verses concluding in verses 16-17 with their identification as the temple of God.
 1. This too is an image used by Jesus.
 - a. After Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18).
 - b. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt. 7:24ff).
 2. The horticultural and the architectural images are used back-to-back in 1 Cor. 3:5ff and in Lk. 20:9-18. In the passage in Luke 20 Jesus specifically connects

the parable of the vine-growers with Psa. 118:2 and the stone rejected by the builders! That these images are used together by both Paul and Jesus is not a coincidence. They see a connection between the garden of God and the temple of God. (Does Peter do something similar in 1 Pet. 1:22-25 and 2:1ff?)

- II. Notice the place of the word of God in these images.
 - A. In 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16 it is the wisdom come from God that Paul and Apollos used to plant and water.
 - B. It was the “grace of God given to me” (1 Cor. 3:10) Paul says, that laid the foundation of Jesus Christ.
 - C. It is hearing these words of Mine and acting on them that builds on the rock (Matt. 7:24).
 - D. It is the word that is prominent in the parable of the Sower (Lk. 8).
 - E. And in 1 Pet. 1:22ff it is the living word of God that is enduring and that is desirable for growing rather than withering like grass.
 - F. Eph. 2:20ff speaks of the household of God “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” Note also Eph. 4:11ff. God’s gifts are given for building up the body of Christ. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers all speak the truth so that we grow up (not like plants, but like children, cf. 1 Pet. 2:2) and are built up in love.
 - G. You might object, “You are going back and forth between the images.” True, but the Scriptures connect the two images.
 - H. The word of God is critical to the growth and building process. Strange doctrines, false teaching, do not further the administration of God (1 Tim. 1:3ff). Instead, we are to preach the word and endure hardship (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

- III. In growing the garden or building the temple hardship and suffering must be endured (2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Pet. 4:12ff).
 - A. Growing the garden and building the temple does not involve ease and convenience, but self-sacrifice.
 - 1. 1 Pet. 4:1 says that we should arm ourselves with the purpose of Christ who suffered.
 - 2. He did not come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom (Matt. 20:28).
 - B. In the sermon on the mount Jesus was clear on the world’s response. It involves insult and persecution (Matt. 5:11-12).
 - C. Heb. 10:35ff calls for enduring faith as a response to “a great conflict of sufferings.”

- D. The message to the church at Smyrna was, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).
- E. Growing the garden and building the temple require the giving of our lives to the work (2 Tim. 3:10-13).

Conclusion:

1. So what is the connection between Eden, the temple and the work of the church? Eden and the temple are manifestations of the presence of God in the world. The church by its very existence is a manifestation of the presence of God in the world, but we are also a dynamic organism whose mission is to communicate God’s presence to the world.
2. In our work of building up the saved and instructing them how to live in the world we communicate God’s presence. In this training process we equip one another to be effective in persuading others to respond in faith to this calling.