**Misguided Priorities**

***An Exposition of John 2:16***

By Charles Strong

*And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!”* (John 2:16)

These words were spoken by Jesus Christ to certain merchants who at the time were selling doves in the Temple court in Jerusalem. Immediately preceding these comments Jesus engaged in driving out the cattle and sheep, their tenders and those who engaged in the exchange of money within the Temple court. The actions of Jesus Christ and His specific words have application to the believer in the Church Age, but not necessarily the application and meaning that many well-intentioned Christians jump to upon a superficial reading of the verse.

To gain an understanding and appreciation of what this verse conveys and, just as important, what it doesn’t convey to the believer in the Church Age (the era upon earth starting at Pentecost and ending at the Rapture), it is necessary to understand the following facts.

1. The specific focus of the verse is governed by the era of the Mosaic Law, that is, the time when God administered to the Israelites by means of His laws and rituals. Christians are no longer under the Law; they are under Grace.

2. The specific application of the verse pertains to the Jewish Temple. The Temple was an outgrowth of the portable Tabernacle (sanctuary) designed by God and established by Moses as seen in Exodus 25. The primary purpose for the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, was so that *God could dwell among His people* in the form of the “*Shekinah* Glory,” which resided above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Testimony between the two cherubim located in the Holy of Holies. The Temple, whose design was by God and given to King David, was patterned after the Tabernacle, except it was twice as big and employed a few additions. It was built by King Solomon.

a) The Mosaic Tabernacle (translated *temple*, 1 Samuel 1:9; 3:3) lasted around 500 years—up until the first Jewish temple.

b) Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 6:1-38) lasted nearly 400 years—it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

c) Herod’s Temple (John 2:14-16) lasted 85 years—it was destroyed by Titus the Roman.

d) A third temple will be erected by the Jews of the “end times” and occupied by the “man of sin or lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

e) The Millennial Temple (Ezekiel 40-44) will be erected by Jesus Christ upon His return to earth.

f) The Heavenly Temple is the personal presence of God the Father and God the Son in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:3, 22).

3. In the Church Age, the Age of Grace, God has neither designed nor required a physical structure or accessories of any kind for Christians to utilize in their worship or service. He has ordained water baptism (as an outward symbol of an inner faith experience in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ) and the Lord’s Table (as an act of remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ for all mankind) for Christians to experience, but he has left it up to his children to arrange the details and administer these ordinances.

4. The Greek word for “church” that is used in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, which never refers to a structure, building or place of worship. Its exact meaning is “assembly” (of individuals) and it either refers to (1) all believers that make up the “Body of Christ”—Matthew 16:18; Acts 12:1, 5; 20:28; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 10:32; 12:28; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-32; Colossians 1:18, 24; etc., (2) a gathering of local believers—Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:1, 3; 11:22, 26; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3-4, 22; 18:22; 20:17; Romans 16:1, 5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 4:17; 6:4; 11:18, 22; 14:4; Colossians 4:15-16; etc., (3) a legal citizens assembly of a Greek city—Acts 19:39 or (4) an Old Testament Jewish assembly—Acts 7:38.

5. The Temple in the Church Age refers to the individual believer who embodies the Person of the Holy Spirit and/or it may refer to the Body of Christ—the spiritual union of all believers by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Both realities are contingent upon the “second (spiritual) birth,” which is activated by faith alone in Christ alone (John 14:17-20; 17:23; 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16, 17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:20-22; 3:17; Colossians 1:27; 1 John 3:24). Every believer is not only the Temple of God, but he is a Priest for the purpose of serving God (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

6. During the early days of the Church (Body of Christ), the only local churches were those assemblies of believers who met in private homes (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2) or anywhere else (in or outside) they could achieve some privacy in Bible instruction and worship.

With the preceding facts in mind, the following conclusions regarding John 2:16 may safely be determined.

**What It Doesn’t Teach**

***First***

It does not teach that any structure employed for worship by any assembly of believers is in the least bit sacred. It is only man in his continued and misguided eagerness to achieve the approbation (approval) of God through “religion” (good works, beautiful buildings and other means of “outward appearance”) who applies a form of holiness to meeting halls. R. B. Thieme, Jr., Pastor of the Berachah Church, Houston, Texas and one of the most astute Greek and Hebrew scholars and Bible expositors of today routinely tells the following account of a visitor to his church. As he was walking outside the visitor approached him and asked the following question, “Sir, could you please direct me to the tabernacle or sanctuary?” Pastor Thieme responded by saying, “Sir, you are looking at it.”

The point is that the only valid tabernacle, sanctuary or temple in the Church Age is the individual believer and/or the spiritual union of all believers, which is also classified as the Body of Christ. Whereas God in His *Shekinah* Glory abode among His people within a physical Temple under the Old Covenant, He now, under the New Covenant, abides within every believer by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the believer’s body that is holy, not a meeting hall or building (called “church”) in which he assembles with other believers.

Believers may meet in private homes, in parking lots, in warehouses or any physical location. None of them are more notable or worthy than any other. They all are simply a fabrication of wood, stone and other building materials. It is only man in his “religious mode” (which is a product of Satan) that attempts to ascribe something special or sacred to the structure in which the assembly of believers meets.

He will even go farther by insisting that no expense be spared in erecting a monumental edifice with lofty spirals, stained glass windows and an ornate interior so that he may “feel close to God” and “show off his religiosity.” By so doing he brings shame upon himself and dishonor to God. Unfortunately, it is through “misguided priorities” such as this and other superficial spiritual endeavors that the Church in this age has drifted away from God. Man seeks cathedrals; God seeks cardiac involvement, which is to say that God looks at the heart of man (his true motivation) rather than the elitist pretense embedded in religion to which so many aspire.

***Second***

It does not teach that the offering of Christian material for purchase, which is a ministry in itself, within the confines of an assembly hall (local church) is inappropriate, as long as the motive for such offerings are truly for the blessing and spiritual growth of believers and they do not distract from the worship service within. Because the Temple under the Old Covenant represented the abode of God, the verse cannot strictly be applied to a building or meeting hall today.

**What It Does Teach**

A proper interpretation of the verse must involve a parallel with the Temple of God of this (Church) Age. As the Scriptures clearly indicate, the believer, both individually and collectively, is/are the Temple of the Living God. In the days of Christ, under the Mosaic Law, the “abode of God” (Temple) had been violated with “religious” interests and activities that dishonored the presence of God. The religious order of the day had forsaken the true purpose of the Temple by turning from “divine good” to “human good” within its very walls. Instead of submitting to and following God’s way, they turned to self-interest, self-efforts and carnal motivations. In so doing they turned God’s abode into a “den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46) by making it “their” house of merchandise.

After a person accepts God’s gracious gift of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, he is immediately prompted by Satan and his minions in concert with his “sin nature” to return to self-effort (human good works) to please God. In so doing this he corrupts the Temple of God. This is why it is so critical that immediately after the salvation experience, a new-born Christian should be encouraged and guided into Bible doctrine and fellowship in a Christ-honoring and loving local church.

The fundamental application of John 2:16 to the believer today is that above all else he must keep himself pure by following God’s plan for sanctification [\*soul salvation], because now *he is the Temple of God*. God’s way is to turn from religiosity and, just as he accepted Christ Jesus for his personal justification ([\*spiritual] salvation), to continue in the same manner for his personal sanctification (spiritual growth [\*soul salvation]), which is to turn from self and all self-effort (human good works) and solely trust Jesus Christ to live a life of “divine good” through him (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:6).

\*Added

[Bible One - Charles Strong's Misguided Priorities](http://bibleone.net/print_tbs31.html)