

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

1st Corinthians 3:16–20, ESV

*¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?
¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy,
and you are that temple.*

*¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this
age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world
is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” ²⁰ and
again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”*

1st Corinthians 6:19–20, ESV

*do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom
you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So
glorify God in your body.*

Keeling over.

I went to a high school that had very few problems with drugs and alcohol, at least not on campus. But one day, ironically, during Health class, I was looking up at the teacher writing something on the board and madly copying it down, when I heard a loud thud behind me. A girl gasped. The teacher dropped her book and dashed passed me, down the row. I turned around. A boy I knew, who had been sitting about a half dozen kids behind me, was lying still on the floor, on his side, still bent at the waist and knees, as if he were sitting up. We’ll call him Tim, and

yes, I'm going to do my usual thing of leaving you hanging while we look at our Bible passages.

They are both from Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth. The church there had a lot of problems. Paul had founded the church in Corinth, but he hadn't stayed around very long afterward. It fell into division. In this letter, Paul is trying to remotely set things straight. Corinth, a city in the Roman Empire, was on the southern side of the approximately five-mile-wide isthmus between two bays. The isthmus connected mainland Greece with a peninsula region in southern Greece. Corinth sat between two port cities, Lechaenum and Cenchreae. It was an important connecting city and supported commercial traffic between the two bodies of water. It allowed traders and travelers to avoid having to sail around the dangerous seas that surrounded Greece. It was a very wealthy city and was well-known at the time. But, like many wealthy cities, there was an extreme separation of wealth among its population. The city had been crushed by the Roman army in 146 B.C. and was populated by freed slaves. By the mid first century A.D., the population had reached about 30,000 – a lot of people at that time. It had much to offer visitors: gladiator shows, circuses, chariot races. There were temples for both Roman and Greek worshippers. People could pray to Apollo, Poseidon, and Jupiter. It also had a well-to-do Jewish population.

Official business was carried out in Latin, but the common spoken language was Greek. Paul of course wrote fluently in Greek. Paul first went there during what we call his second missionary journey. The church was small, probably no more than fifty members. It's conceivable there were a hundred. Most of those new Christians in Corinth were Gentiles. They were of Roman and Greek descent. It was a welcoming church and there were a handful of Jewish members.

The letter starts out with an extended piece devoted to unity. There were far too many blowhards in the church, people chasing down high status and uninterested in unity and serving the poor. The letter suggests that the critical problem in the church was the belief in some kind of "human wisdom" that gave certain folks a higher spiritual status. They held themselves above other members of the church – thus, the extreme division within the church in Corinth. These self-proclaimed wise people saw themselves as being rich – not monetarily, but with respect to knowledge and skill. It was in essence a blend of true Christianity and Greek Stoicism. A common problem in the early church were people, in many parts of the Roman Empire, who perverted the teachings of Christ with the teaching of Greek and Roman paganism. What's true is that these arrogant members of the church in Corinth were probably also economically well-off and were highly educated in Greek philosophy. They were

having a very hard time separating themselves from their cultural past, one that pandered to privilege and education; they couldn't grasp the humble, equalitarian nature of true Christianity.

The letter is not fundamentally theological. By the standards of the time, it is also a long letter. Paul spends a lot of time appealing to individuals whom he sees as responsible for the division within the church and its tendency to pervert the faith. The writing is very terse, very literate, almost poetic. We see Paul's genius and education shining in this letter. By the time we get to the third chapter, where our first quote comes from, Paul is criticizing the ones who hold themselves above other people, saying that they are the problem. Thinking you are better than others is divisive, and when it comes to following the teachings of Christ, it is immature and foolish. The first verse of our quote says, *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"*

Importantly, the Greek word that is translated here as temple is actually a word that refers to the inner part of a temple, the sanctuary, where God is present, at least in the Jewish tradition. Paul then goes on to the very blunt point of telling these supposedly wise troublemakers that they are in fact, fools: ¹⁸ *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.* ¹⁹ *For the wisdom of this world is folly*

with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness,"²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

Moving ahead to our second quote, Paul is telling the Christians in Corinth - in particular, the snotty ones who hold themselves aloof from others - that they are actually spiritual slaves who have been freed by Christ: *do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.* He's telling them to quit living spoiled corrupt lives where they practice sexual immorality and drink heavily. He's telling them that they cannot abuse their bodies and souls and still consider themselves true followers of Christ.

Back to my high school health class. Tim, the boy sitting a handful of desks behind me, had overdosed on something. He was unconscious. People that we called "ambulance attendants" back then carried him away. Everybody was in shock and class was over for the day. I knew Tim fairly well. It was indeed ironic that in the middle of a class where the teacher was telling us how to take care of our bodies and how remain healthy that Tim fell unconscious from having taken some illicit drug. I'm sure he had no idea what was actually in whatever he had taken. And the very nature of illegal drugs is that they are not dosed properly. In a class where we were taught to only take drugs that had been prescribed to us,

and only in the amounts prescribed, Tim had hit the floor with his blood stream running wild with who-knows-how-much of who-knows-what. He was a good student, did not get into trouble, and was always kind to others. He had a mild disposition, often asked me for help with homework he didn't understand, and on one occasion, when a bully was giving me a hard time in the hallway, Tim punched him in the throat, sending him home for several days. Did I mention that Tim was a big guy?

I never found out what Tim had OD'ed on. But he did survive. We got news the next day in homeroom that Tim was home, that he was suspended for two weeks, that he had had a front tooth broken when they intubated him – something that I have seen at Boulder Community Hospital – and that we should all note the dangers of taking drugs. But here's the thing. This was a religious school and so later that day, the Health teacher took the opportunity of telling us that kids who used drugs were making two mistakes. First, they were thinking they knew more than the doctors and scientists who spent many years studying drugs. And second, they were treating their bodies as their own, when their bodies were in truth gifts from God that they were obliged to care for. That's why I chose our two quotes for today. They embody the two things that I can remember this teacher telling us the day after Tim OD'd in Health Class.

But why am I talking about this to you? I don't know of anyone in this congregation who buys street drugs and then swallows, smokes, or shoots them up. No one has keeled over while I have been giving a sermon, and if you did, I would suspect a heart attack or a stroke, not an overdose. But I do have a reason. Mental and emotional health is as important as physical health. Our lives, our bodies are indeed gifts from God. This is a time during which many of us are stressed out – and you can expect me to mention this in my sermons more than once. My dear hope is that nobody here keels over emotionally. I want all of us to try to look beyond the pandemic, look beyond whatever is making us anxious, look beyond the immediate world around us. I like to talk about handing our anxiety off to God – and you can expect me to say so again, in the future. But there is something subtle to this. This isn't an abstract notion, something that is nice to talk about, but too fuzzy to implement. There are two practical things we can do. First, we can pray. If you are not in the practice of praying, give it a try. All you have to do is talk silently – or with your voice, for that matter – to God. Tell God what has you anxious. Talk to God about the things that worry you. Lay them out, just like you would to a dear friend or another member of this congregation. Use plain language. No need to get poetic. Second, stop and be thankful. Think about the things in life that have

gone right. This varies from person to person. Maybe you've had a great marriage. Maybe you have kids who are doing well. Maybe you enjoy your job or have been able to retire without worrying too much about money. Perhaps you have gone decades without a serious illness. Maybe you just spent a great weekend with your grandkids. Maybe one of them told you he or she loves you. Oh, there is a third thing I would like to say. Over the last few years, I have worked with patients who have tried to kill themselves, so I'm sensitive to the panic that people can find themselves caught up in when things go bad. If you need professional psychological help, please get it. Please.

Most of all, try to be positive. When a lot of people pray, they focus on what they want to have happen in the future. They're looking for extra gifts from God. But prayer should be uplifting right now. Prayer is about your relationship with God, about what needs to change in you and in your world. Here's a subtlety: try to focus on what needs to change in you, not your world. Often, it's a lot more useful to ask God to help you get through something without totally freaking out than to ask God to make it all go away. Talk to God about the things that are interfering with you living a joyful life in the Kingdom of God, not about the things that would make the Kingdom of God a hell of a lot better. You can even try some little mental tricks, some actions that help you visualize what you

need to have happen. Hold your hand closed. Hold it up in front of you. Imagine the things about you that need to go away, your excessive worry, your fear of the future, your sense of loss. Picture those things as being in your hand and being lighter than air. Then open your hand and let them drift up to God so that God can deal with them. Please pray with me.

God, if the world were perfect, if everything about our lives was just the way we wanted it, we would be spoiled, and we would never turn to you. We would not be able to appreciate what your presence within us can do for us. We would not be able to accept the gifts that your grace and the Holy Spirit within us can do for us. We would not understand the true peace and joy of living in your world.

But the troubles we encounter in life will not always go away. You do not always remove money problems, sicknesses, worries about loved ones, and concerns over pandemics and political divisions. But you can walk us through all of the tragedies of life. Help us overcome all that makes us anxious and gives us pain. Let us emerge stronger at the end of every dark tunnel.

Yes, God, let us be tranquil in the moment. Let us find exhilaration in the midst of human chaos. Let us feel the true, immediate reward of having faith in you. And let us find serenity knowing that you have ensured our eternal futures.
Amen.