

1 Corinthians 3:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

Analysis

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy (φθείρει... φθερεῖ, phtheirei... phtherei)—Paul employs the same verb twice (wordplay lost in English): whoever corrupts (φθείρει) God's temple, God will corrupt/destroy (φθερεῖ). Phtheirō means to ruin, corrupt, or destroy. **For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are** (ἅγιος... ὅστινες ἐστε ὑμεῖς, hagios... hoitines este hymeis)—hagios (holy, set apart) explains the severe warning.

The context (verses 10-15) suggests 'defiling' means corrupting the church through false teaching, divisive behavior, or immoral leadership—the stubble-building Paul warned against. This isn't about individual sin but systemic corruption of God's people. The threat 'God will destroy' is chilling: those who damage Christ's body face divine retribution. This may indicate loss of salvation (Hebrews 10:26-31) or temporal judgment (1 Corinthians 11:30), depending on whether the person truly belonged to the temple or was an infiltrator. The warning targets false teachers and divisive leaders, not struggling saints.

Historical Context

Defiling Israel's temple brought severe penalties—even death (Leviticus 15:31, 'lest they die in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle'). Paul transfers this gravity to the church: corrupting God's people is as serious as desecrating his sanctuary. In a church plagued by factions, immorality, and false teaching, this warning carried urgent weight.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the severity of God's judgment against those who 'defile' his temple warn against causing division or promoting false doctrine in the church?
2. What behaviors or teachings today constitute 'defiling the temple of God'—corrupting the church's purity and unity?
3. How can church leaders 'take heed how they build' (verse 10) to avoid the devastating judgment Paul threatens here?

Interlinear Text

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| εἷ | τις | τὸν | ναὸς | τοῦ | θεοῦ | φθερεῖ | φθερεῖ | τοῦτον |
| G1487 | G5100 | G3588 | the temple | G3588 | God | defile | defile | him |
| | | | G3485 | | G2316 | G5351 | G5351 | G5126 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| ὁ | θεοῦ | ὁ | γὰρ | ναὸς | τοῦ | θεοῦ | ἅγιός | ἐστιν |
| G3588 | God | G3588 | for | the temple | G3588 | God | holy | is |
| | G2316 | | G1063 | G3485 | | G2316 | G40 | G2076 |

| | | |
|---------|-------|-----------|
| οἵτινές | ἐστε | ὑμεῖς |
| which | are | temple ye |
| G3748 | G2075 | G5210 |

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 43:12 (Holy): This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.

Ezekiel 7:22 (Parallel theme): My face will I turn also from them, and they shall pollute my secret place: for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it.

Ezekiel 5:11 (Temple): Wherefore, as I live, saith the Lord GOD; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish thee; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity.

Numbers 19:20 (Temple): But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean.

Psalms 79:1 (Holy): O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.

Leviticus 20:3 (Holy): And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name.

Isaiah 64:11 (Holy): Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste.

Leviticus 15:31 (Temple): Thus shall ye separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness; that they die not in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle that is among them.