



I've been thinking lately about all of the TV programs that deal with our homes. Here are a just few:

Spouse vs House: This show offers couples cash to remodel a few rooms in their home. But there's a catch: only one partner will be making the decisions and doing the work themselves; it's typically the "irresponsible" husband.

Trading Spaces: This reality show had a cult following for eight years. It featured two sets of neighbors redecorating rooms in each other's homes in just 48 hours with a budget of \$1,000.

Extreme Home Makeover: Everyone's favorite. This show gives one needy family a complete home makeover in seven days.

Million Dollar Decorators: Five sought-after interior decorators manage high stress renovations and decorations from their wealthy, famous and challenging clients.

This Old House: The Granddaddy of all remodeling shows. It began in 1979 and grew into the most popular of all. The show's success is due to the irresistible charm of handyman Bob Villa.

It seems like the point of many of these shows is that if you can get the right house then you can have a great life. And if we can't get the right house for ourselves, at least we can live vicariously through those who do.

Obviously, for followers of Jesus, this kind of thinking is questionable at best. It should be no surprise to us that one of the Ten Commandments specifically says not to covet your neighbor's house. Why would God say that if he didn't know how many of us are prone to this particular kind of coveting?

Lynn and I walked down the street last weekend to look at an open house. Now we just moved into a new house a year ago so we're not looking to move. As a matter of fact, we're very content in our house. Well, we **were** very content. Then we saw this house down the street that had a front patio. It was tiled and it was Mediterranean style and I thought of all the fun we could have with friends and family if we had something like that. What's that about? Coveting my neighbor's house!

Solomon Built the Temple of God

We've been studying the life of Solomon, King of Israel. Many scholars would say the greatest achievement of King Solomon was the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The story of how this took place dominates the story of Solomon's life. Eleven chapters are devoted to Solomon's life; four of those chapters

deal with the construction and dedication of the temple. But what's often missed in this is that wedged within the story of how Solomon built God's house is the story of how Solomon built his own house. As we'll see, there are two houses in this story: God's house and Solomon's house.

The construction of God's house starts in chapter 5 and ends in chapter 7. Without reading these chapters, let me give you an overview. In chapter 5 Solomon prepares to build the Temple. Obviously, to build such a structure you need the right materials and a huge work force. David had already bequeathed to Solomon a lot of what he'd need in terms of the plans and the materials for the Temple. But Solomon also needed a massive amount of wood and stone. In chapter 5 he enters into an agreement with Hiram, the king of Tyre. Tyre was an important city along the north coast of Palestine. It was home to two towering mountain ranges with the best cedar in the world. Solomon agreed to pay Hiram a hefty fee if he would cut and prepare the timber, put it aboard ship and float it down the coast to Joppa where Solomon's men would transport it to Jerusalem. Solomon then conscripted a huge labor force to go to Lebanon and help. He also needed to quarry stone, which was no small task. Back home he employed 70,000 carriers and 80,000 stonecutters.

Construction began in about 970 B.C. This is described in numbing detail in chapter 6. Remember this book was written for the Jewish people who were in exile years later and though these details may be cumbersome for us, they'd keep the visual memory of the Temple alive for them. Someday, they'd rebuild this Temple and all of this information would be useful.

The Temple had three central parts. First, the main hall which was 60 feet long. Second, the inner sanctuary was 30 feet long. The majority of the chapter describes this sanctuary, or what was called the Most Holy Place, because that's the most important part of the Temple—the place where God would dwell. The third part was the front portico, which was 15 feet long. There was also an attached structure three stories high surrounding most of the main building. The building of the Temple structure is finished in chapter 6, inside and out.

The foundation of the temple of the Lord was laid in the fourth year, in the month of Ziv. In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it (1 Kings 6:37–38).

The only thing left is to provide the furnishings for the Temple, which was a big deal. Those will be described in great detail as well. You'd expect that to be described as the very next thing in chapter 7. Not so! Furnishing the Temple isn't picked up until 7:13ff. Instead, the first 12 verses of chapter 7 deal with the description of another building project—the construction of Solomon's royal palace.

Solomon Builds His Palace and Other Buildings

It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace. He built the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon a hundred cubits long, fifty wide and thirty high, with four rows of cedar columns supporting trimmed cedar beams. It was roofed with cedar above the beams that rested on the columns—forty-five beams, fifteen to a row. Its windows were placed high in sets of three, facing each other. All the doorways had rectangular frames; they were in the front part in sets of three, facing each other. He made a colonnade fifty cubits long and thirty wide. In front of it was a portico, and in front of that were pillars and an overhanging roof. He built the throne hall, the Hall of Justice, where he was to judge, and he covered it with cedar from floor to ceiling. And the palace in which he was to live, set farther back, was similar in design. Solomon also made a palace like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had married. All these structures, from the outside to the great courtyard and from foundation to eaves, were made of blocks of high-grade stone cut to size and smoothed on their inner and outer faces. The foundations were laid with large stones of good quality, some measuring ten cubits and some eight. Above were high-grade stones, cut to size, and cedar beams. The great courtyard was surrounded by a wall of three courses of dressed stone and one course of trimmed cedar beams, as was the inner courtyard of the temple of the Lord with its portico (1 Kings 7:1–12).

This was no small task either! You can see this was more than just Solomon's house; this was a whole palace complex. It included an immense building called The Palace of the Forest of Lebanon—150 feet long, 75 feet wide with a virtual forest of cedar pillars. Then there was a colonnade which was like an entry hall or waiting area for the Hall of Justice where Solomon would make judicial decisions from his throne. And then, behind the Hall of Justice, were two royal residences. There was Solomon's own personal house and one for the Egyptian Princess he'd married. Notice also in verses 9–12 the writer stresses the high quality construction material used: high grade stone and fine, trimmed cedar beams.

Now, we might want to ask, what's the significance of these buildings? We can understand the importance of the Temple, but what about this palace and all that went with it? In some ways, it

makes sense. Everyone needs a home to live in, and as King it was right and good for Solomon to have not just a home but a palace. Our President lives in the White House. We wouldn't want him living in a shack! There's a kind of royal dignity that makes it fitting for a king to live in a palace.

It's also true that all these buildings weren't just for Solomon. Some were used for official purposes. It was the king's responsibility to administer justice. In Psalm 72 Solomon prays, "*Endow the king with your justice, O God... May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.*" (Ps 72:1-2) So he needed a Hall of Justice.

There's even something to be said about the fact that Solomon built his palace right next to the Temple and with similar features. He wanted to show that not only was he King by divine sanction but he was under God's rule.

There's even a sense in which this amazing palace complex shows God's blessing on Solomon. Remember, God had not only promised him great wisdom but great wealth and honor.

Solomon's Building Projects Reveal Misplaced Priorities

But I believe if we look carefully at this text, we'll see the writer is raising a red flag. There's something wrong with this picture. There are some spiritual issues here and he brings this out in a number of ways.

First of all, look at the amount of time he took on each. It took about 7-1/2 years for Solomon to complete the construction of the Temple, but he spent almost twice as long (13 years) on his own palace complex! That makes some sense because the palace complex was much larger. But the writer puts this in a way that points to a problem with Solomon's priorities. In the original Hebrew, 1 Kings 7:1 starts with the word "But." A more literal translation would say, starting at the end of chapter 6, "*He spent seven years building it (the Temple). BUT his OWN house Solomon spent thirteen years building...*"

And that's not all. The way verses 1–12 seem to interrupt the completion of the Temple is a hint that Solomon's energies were diverted from Temple building to palace building. It's like he pushed the building of his palace through to completion before he finished the Temple!

Then there's the matter of the materials. The Temple had a lot of cedar, but the palace had so many cedars one part was called The Palace of the Forest of Lebanon! One writer says the whole project "smacks of affluence and indulgence."

I can't help but think of King David. Remember it was David's idea to build a Temple for God in the first place. It all started when David said to Nathan the prophet, "*Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.*" (2 Sam 7:2) That's why David wanted to build a Temple for God in the

first place. David's more concerned about God's house than his own, but Solomon seemed to have this turned around.

Then I think of the prophet Jeremiah. Many scholars believe he actually wrote 1 Kings. Much later, Jeremiah pronounced a woe against any king who said, "*I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms*" or who "*makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red.*" He then asks, "*Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar?*" (Jer 22:14-15) I'd like to ask Solomon that same question.

Aristotle wrote, "In the brain of the wisest of men resides the corner of a fool." That's certainly true for Solomon. At the very least what we see here is a case of misplaced priorities. The things he thought were important weren't that important at all. He put his own house before God's house.

We Are to Place God's House Above Our Own House

Sometimes we fall into the same trap. Sometimes the things we think are so important aren't that important after all. Sometimes we put our own house before God's house.

The Temple is a theme throughout the Bible. The Temple isn't about a building; it never was. When David first brought the idea up, God said, "I don't need a house made of human hands to dwell in. I've been doing just fine all these years without one. Have I ever asked you for a house?" (2 Sam 7:7).

But the Temple came to represent something very important. It represents the magnificent truth that a holy and righteous God wants to dwell among us. It communicates to all the world that God has made a way for us to be in relationship with him. He's not just holy but he's loving and merciful and so he wants us to draw near to him. The Temple reminds us God has designed our lives in such a way that he's to be at the very center of who we are and what we do. He's not just one thing at the top of a list of priorities so we can do our God-thing every once in a while and check it off. God wants to be the center of all that we do.

In the New Testament this theme is developed in several ways. First, when we put our faith in Christ his Spirit comes to reside in us and so we become the Temple of God. We have within ourselves the Holy of Holies. Paul wrote, "*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*" (1 Cor 6:19-20). Our bodies are God's Temple; the place where he dwells and where his glory is displayed for all to see. Solomon's Temple was glorious; God's glory is also reflected in us.

Another way the New Testament develops this theme is with the church. The people of God gathered together, what we call the church, is now the Temple of God. When we come together, he dwells among us. He's at the center of our life together. Our life together revolves around worshipping him, honoring him and serving him. As we do that, we communicate to a watching

world there's a God who is glorious and good and he wants to be in relationship with us.

But sometimes we fall into the same trap as Solomon did and we put our house before God's house. If you go back to 1 Kings 6 you'll see that right in the middle of building the Temple God spoke to Solomon. Here's what he said.

"As for this temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, observe my laws and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. And I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel" (1 Kings 6:12-13).

God cares a lot more about obedience than buildings. And this very issue would eventually be Solomon's downfall. He didn't obey the Lord. 1 Kings 11:4 says, "*As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God...*" Because of that, the nation Israel was eventually divided and conquered and this Temple was destroyed. But it started here. It started with small choices, like putting his own house above God's house.

So let me ask you, what's more important to you? What's at the center of your life? He created you in such a way that your life should center around him. Worshipping God, honoring him, loving him, building up his house should be the passion of our life. This often comes down to choices we make about time and money. We know we should set aside time each day to be in his presence, give thanks, call out to him with our needs and listen to his word. We know how important it is for us to gather often with other believers to worship. We know how important it is for us to invite others to be a part of God's spiritual temple through a relationship with Jesus Christ. We know how important it is for us to give generously to the work God is doing.

But how often do the cares of this life distract us from the higher priorities of living for his kingdom? And when that happens, we choose our house above God's house. It might be our career, our education, or just what we do in our spare time. Sometimes it is, quite literally, our own house that distracts us. Think of all the trouble we take to find the right place to live, pay for it, decorate it, and keep it up. Think of all the effort it takes to move from one house to another, dragging all our possessions with us. Most of us take more stuff with us on a family vacation than many in the rest of the world own. A nice house isn't wrong in itself. This isn't about you feeling guilty about living in a nice house. It wasn't wrong for Solomon to live in a palace, but we always need to be careful to put God's house above our house. Thank God that our homes can become places where God's spiritual temple is built up, where strangers are welcomed, where the hungry are fed, where his word is honored, where children learn about a God who loves them. If God has given you a beautiful house, that house was meant to not only bless you but others.

The late Charles Colson tells about his home town of Naples, Florida: "It's an absolute nirvana for all golfers... They're all CEOs of major corporations, and they retire to Naples, and this is 'it' — 27 golf courses and miles of sparkling beach and the best country clubs. I watch these guys; they're powerful people. They have this New York look on their face; they're determined. But now, all of a sudden, they start measuring their lives by how many golf games they can get in. I often say to them, 'Do you really want to live your life counting up the number of times you chase that little white ball around those greens?' They kind of chuckle, but it's a nervous chuckle, because in six months they've realized how banal their lives are, and they've got beautiful homes—castles—and when they get bored with that, they build a bigger castle, and they're miserable. The object of life isn't what we think it is, which is to achieve money, power, pleasure... The object of life is the maturing of the soul, and you reflect that...when you care more for other people than yourself."

It seems like every day I get a couple of catalogues in the mail that offer beautiful things to buy for my home. We've gotten into the habit of just throwing them away. We don't need reminders laying around the house of what we don't have or what others think we should have. What we need to do is work harder at simplifying our lives so we can focus on what matters.

An argument could be made that Solomon's house was more extravagant than God's house. Wouldn't it be interesting to add up all the money we spent in a year on our house—mortgage or rent, upkeep, utilities, decorating, etc., and compare that with what we gave to the work of God's kingdom. In the Bay Area, a higher percentage of our income goes to housing than other places, but our priorities are still seen in how we spend our money. God is more interested in our hearts than in ratios, percentages or even square feet. But Jesus did say, "**Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**" (Matt 6:21).

Vinoth Ramachandra says this in *Gods That Fail*, "The people of the modern West are better fed, better housed, better equipped with health care than those in any previous age in human history. But paradoxically, they also seem to be the most fearful, the most divided, the most superstitious and the most bored generation in human history. All the labor-saving devices of modern technology have only enhanced human stress, and modern life is characterized by restless movement from place to place, from

one experience to another, in a frenetic whirl of purposeless activity."

Jesus talked a lot about this. He even talked about Solomon in this context. In the Sermon on the Mount he said, "**And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these**" (Matt 6:28–29).

Jesus assumes these people know all about the glories of Solomon, including his palace. But Jesus wasn't impressed because he knew Solomon's glory was nothing compared to the glory of a single lily. Solomon had to employ tens of thousands of lumberjacks and stonecutters to build his Temple, but the lilies don't even break a sweat. Yet there's more glory in a single wildflower than in all the palaces of Solomon.

Jesus wants us to be like the lily, not worrying about what we'll wear or even where we'll live. If God takes such good care of them he'll take even better care of us. There's a place for hard work, but we don't have to worry and spend all of our energies on building our own house. If we seek his kingdom first, God will take care of our house. God will take care of our lives.

And he'll give us something better. Look at it this way, when the time is right, God will give us the biggest upgrade you could ever want when it comes to a home. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples before he left? He said, "**My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am**" (John 14:2–3).

The first time Lynn and I stepped into our new house we knew this is where we wanted to live for the rest of our lives. It was everything we wanted and more—even without an outdoor patio! But sometimes we have to remind ourselves that this house is only temporary. The day will come when Jesus will take us to another house; his Father's house. When we see it, we'll know that's the house we've been waiting for our entire lives. So enjoy your house, use it for the glory of God, and always put God's house first.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.