

Is Smoking A Hell Deserving Sin?

1Co 3:16-17 say, “*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple*”. Some Christians say that these verses mean that people who smoke tobacco will end up in hell because they are destroying God's temple. If that was true then we would have to tell a person who is fat from overeating that they are heading for hell too because being overweight is also bad for our health. When 1 Cor. 3 is examined closely it will be found that these verses are not saying that God will destroy people who destroy their bodies but rather that He will destroy people who destroy His church.

1 Cor. 1:11-13 and 1 Cor. 3:1-8 tell us that the Corinthians were fighting about which man they should follow. Paul said that they should follow Jesus rather than follow men like himself or Apollos. He goes on to say that they were just servants with God-given tasks; one man plants, another waters but God makes things grow and each man will be rewarded according to his own labour. Then in 1 Cor. 3:9-11 he says that we Christians are God's building and that he has laid a foundation as an expert builder and each of us must be careful how we build on that foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

Then 1 Cor. 3:12-15 talk about how we build the church and warn that fire will test the quality of each man's work. The verses say that we can -

- a) Build with gold, silver or costly stones and receive our reward or
 - b) Build with wood, hay or straw and, although we will still be saved, our work will be burned up.
- Building with gold, silver or costly stones represent good leadership and sound doctrine while wood, hay and straw represent poor leadership and unsound doctrine.

So far, the chapter has spoken about building the church with good or poor leadership but there can also be bad leadership which destroys a church. Back in 1 Cor. 3:9, we Christians were referred to as God's building and 1 Cor. 3:16-17 continue with that picture, calling us God's Temple - “*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you [plural] are that temple*”. The term “God's temple” is referring to the church, not individuals. When these verses are taken in the context of building the church, we see that they are saying that God will destroy bad leaders who destroy His church rather than build it up.

From this we can see that 1 Cor. 3:16-17 is not referring to destroying our body but to destroying the church. 1 Cor. 3:18 to 1 Cor. 4:6 continue on to further warn us not to follow the wisdom of men and in 1 Cor. 4:6 we are told, “*Do not go beyond what is written. Then you will not take pride in one man over against another*”. So, if we follow what is written, and not follow men, then we will build well and not be corrupted by false teaching which will destroy a church.

So, we can see that this chapter is telling us to be careful how we build and to build on the foundation of Jesus because our rewards will be according to the way we build.

- If we build well then we will be rewarded.
- If we build poorly then we will still be saved but lose our rewards.
- If anyone destroys the church then they will be destroyed.

If we take 1 Cor. 3:16-17 out of context and tell a smoker that he is going to hell then we ourselves will be guilty of poor doctrine. Also, the smoker may have little faith and poor self-control and what we say may destroy the little faith he has. Feeling hopelessly lost, he may turn to wine, women and song ... which will certainly lead him to hell.

There is no doubt that smoking is bad for our health and people are in bondage to it but nowhere does the Bible say that smokers will go to hell. When the Bible is silent on something then we should be also but of course smokers should be encouraged to quit the habit.