

A People Who Belong to God

- *I invite you to turn to 1 Tim. 3 this morning
 - I have every intention of returning to Romans
 - but I am convicted that another series of messages may be more timely in the moment

- *We began the year 2021 with a study of God
 - and I think a study on the Church would be beneficial to us now
 - what does the Bible teach us about who we are as a Church, and what we are to be about?
 - that's a huge question, and I know that I'm not going to be able to say everything that needs to be said
 - but what I hope to do is hit the fundamentals
 - What is a Church according to the Bible?
 - What is a Biblical Church?

*This morning, I want us to hone in on a couple of verses in **1 Tim. 3:14-15**

14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

PRAYER

A People Who Belong to God

*If you were to look up the word 'church' in the dictionary you would read definitions like these:

- 1-a building for Christian worship
- 2-religious services held in a church
- 3-a particular Christian group
- 4-the clerical profession
- 5-the whole body of Christians

*Those definitions taken from Merriam Webster's Dictionary, communicate some of the confusion that exists in our day regarding the church...

-of course, we use the word in a lot of different ways...

"It's about time to redecorate the church"

"I enjoyed church today"

"My church is a Baptist church"

-but those meanings of the word church are not found in the Bible per se

-in the Bible, the 'church' is not a building, or a denomination, or an activity, it's a group of people

-the Greek word "ekklesia" is used over a 100 times in the NT and it means "called ones," for the purpose of worship

-we might call them "a group of worshippers"

-it can mean the 'universal church', all believers in the world

-but it mostly refers to a local church, a group of people who meet together in a particular location to worship God and serve one another

Wayne Mack writes, “Technically speaking, those people do not worship “at a church” or participate “in church” – they are the church! And if you are a member of the body of Christ, you do not “go to church” or “sit in church” – you are a part of the church who comes together for worship and the rest of the body.”

(Life in the Father’s House, 12)

*One of the concerns that I have as a pastor is the growing indifference to being a part of the church today

-it’s been estimated that as much as 1/3 of churchgoers stopped attending church during the pandemic...

-many off whom are not coming back...

-but I think that trend was already happening before Covid, and that Covid has only accelerated it...

-Gathering with God’s people, the Church, has been on the ‘un’ essential list for a long time

*A few years ago William Hendricks wrote a book called “Exit Interviews” in which he chronicled the failure of the “church growth” movement to keep people in church...

-he noted that while some people were

coming into the church, some 53,000 people were leaving out the back door of the church every week...
-and that book was written in the early 90's

*There is no doubt people leave the church for multiple reasons...

-but at the root it seems to be a sentiment that the church is just not that important to my spirituality and to my life

*In George Barna's book, "Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary," he talks about a growing number of Christians who are serving God with no connection to the local church. He begins his book by admiring a Christian who plays golf every Sunday morning instead of attending church. He writes, "*Scripture teaches us that devoting your life to loving God with all your heart, mind, strength, and soul is what honors Him. Being a part of a local church may facilitate that. Or it might not...*"

(as cited by Mack, "Life in the Father's House, 19)

-so it's kind of optional for Christians...

*That's a far cry from how our forefathers thought about the church...

-Augustine once said, "*He cannot have God for his father who does not have the church for his mother*"

-Martin Luther wrote, "*Apart from the church,*

salvation is impossible.”

-wow... there's been a big change in the way people view the local church...

*I understand the frustrations people have...

-let's be honest... we as the church are responsible for some of the disillusionment today...

-we haven't always handled our disagreements very well

-we sometimes let our mission serve the church structure rather than our structure serving the mission

-sometimes we get over-programmed

-side tracked from what's most important

-we haven't always articulated our convictions well

-we could go on...

*But is it really possible to have a vibrant spiritual life, a growing relationship with God apart from the local church, as some think so today?

-is church really just an option?

-is it really that unimportant?

*The answer to those questions need to be sought from Scripture and not from our opinions or feelings

-and what I want you to see today, is that

- according to Scripture, the answer to all of those questions is a resounding “no”
- no, it's not possible to have a vibrant spiritual life a part from the church.
 - it's not possible to move closer to God and farther from the church.

*The Bible gives us a much higher view of the church, then what we see today in our culture and from some Christians

- Christ founded the Church (Matt. 16)
- He died for the Church (Eph. 5:25)
- He identifies intimately with the church (Acts 9:4-5, Saul, you are persecuting me when you persecute Christians, Jesus says)
- He even calls the church His own bride (John 3:29) and His body (Eph. 5:30)
- what's clear is that *“the church is the primary means through which God accomplishes His plan in the world.”*
(Mack and Swavely, 21)
- it's not just an option, it's His plan
- I want to show you from His Word, How God views the local church
- and what we should aspire too!

*The text we read a moment ago was from the Apostle Paul to his son in the ministry, Timothy

- Paul has been laying out for him, how one

- should conduct himself in the Church
- in doing so, Paul wanted Timothy to understand the significance and gravity of his instructions ...
- and so instead of just saying, (I want you to) *know how one ought to behave in the church...*
- Paul says, (I want you to) *know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*
- this is how important the church is to God, Timothy
- Paul uses four descriptive terms to describe the church to Timothy

Let's look at each one of them...

First, he calls it

1-The Household of God

v15a *the household of God,*

- the Greek word "oikos", which can mean either a dwelling place (house) or an immediate family (household)
- and the church is both...

First,

***The Church is a Dwelling place**

- when we say that, we're not talking about the church building
- I remember when I was a kid someone would say to me, "Hey, don't run in the church"

- that's really not what Paul means by this
- he's not talking about a building!
- but rather the community of people that manifest God's presence

*Paul wrote to the whole church in **1 Cor. 3:16**

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

- that is, we are a building, in the metaphorical sense, of God's presence

Eph. 2:19-22 explain it even further...

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (But notice the terminology he uses) **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

*Think of the implication or the application of what's being said...

- if we want to be where God is, we need to be in His Church, a part of His people, b/c that is where He dwells!
- the way that we relate to God is largely

dependent upon the way we relate to
His Church

-this is the house He has built, and is
building, it's His People!

(Mack and Swavely, 23)

You might refer to the church as,

****The Church is God's Family***

-the people of God, the family of God

*I remember as a child singing, "I'm so glad I'm a
part of the family of God"

-John 3, talks about entrance into the family
of God...how we must be 'born again',
born into it

-just as you were born in an earthly family,
you must be born again to be a part of
God's family

-Paul used the metaphor of adoption, we've
been adopted into God's family, as His
sons and daughters

*The point is, the family of God is metaphor
for the local church!

*Paul no doubt is using this to show Timothy the
importance of right conduct in the church

-in **v4-5** he speaks of Elders/Pastors, **4 He
must manage his own household well,
with all dignity keeping his children
submissive, 5 for if someone does not
know how to manage his own**

household, how will he care for God's church?

*But notice the language... (Slowly)

- not only do we need to be in His church if we want to be where God is, but we also need to be in his family if we want to consider Him our Father!
- it begs the question... *“how could someone call God their Father, while refusing to be a part of His family, the church?”*
- yet, that’s describes so many today... who say they have faith and salvation, but they are not in the Church
- to be frank, the NT simply doesn’t envision such a person...

Secondly, notice Paul uses the phrase...

2-The Church of the Living God

v15b which is the church of the living God,

*This is a powerful definition!

- the church proceeds from God and belongs to God
- His the Originator and the Owner of the Church
- and He is the Living God!
 - in contrast to the temples of the pagan idols of the day; idols to gods who do not exist...

- the church belongs to the Living God
- who is personally and actively involved in its operation!
- This is not the “dead poets society”
- Our God is alive! Amen?!

2-The Church of the Living God

*One pastor states the significance of this...

God is at work among his people, and that living divine presence distinguishes a church from every other human assembly. Without that presence a church is nothing but a self-help group, a mere social club.

(Bill Kynes, Sermon on “The Church: A Hidden Glory”, TGC)

- the church is not simply another helpful organization in the community
- there are many “para-church’ ministries that exist
- there are some good humanitarian agencies that do good work in our communities
- but there is no other organization of people, or body of people, in whom the Living God promises to be with, when they gather and go forth!

*Think of the what the Scripture says about God’s presence in the Church

- how God loved us before the very foundations of the world (Eph. 1)
- how He sent His beloved Son to die so that

He might purchase His people with His own blood (Acts 20:28)

- how he participates continually in our fellowship together (1 John 1:3)
- *Jesus has promised to be personally present with the Church meets (Matt. 18
 - when it goes forth to fulfill His Great Commission, He promises “I will never leave you” (Matt. 28)
- His Holy Spirit brings us into the Church as we are saved (John 3)
 - empowers us, indwells us, illumines our minds and hearts to the Truth of Scripture
 - gifts us for the service of others! (Eph. 4)

*Again, this an incredible thought...

- I'm not knocking any organization here, but just pointing out that this promise of God's presence and power is not given to the Lions Club, or the Red Cross or whatever organization you enjoy
- it's only for God's household, the Church of the Living God!!

*If you want to find God today, the Bible says, you need to look not in the meeting halls of the community, or the lecture halls of the universities...

- if you want to know God, then look no

further than the gathering together of
God's people in the local Church
-b/c that's where He will be!

*Think about how significant that makes our
weekly gatherings together...

- the Bible reminds us, that when the
church gathers, the Living God is among
us
- and yet, how often we let other things
keep us from this gathering...

*I was reading an article awhile back on the
increasing number of Christians who, might
be firm in the faith but flabby in their church
attendance.

- it looked at a typical family who attended
church about HALF of the 52 Sundays
in a year
- and you think about how easily this happens
- it started with **Vacation**, which is a good thing
- which usually is a week and two weekends,
or 2 Sundays
- they took 2 vacations, and then another
weekend off for Memorial Day
- so there's 5 Sundays gone
- And then there's **Sports**
- with a couple of kids, and not wanting to let
the team down, they missed another 9
Sundays...
- and then there's unexpected **Sickness**

-and so there's another 3 Sundays.
-and then the **Pastor went on a couple of vacations too**, and we had a guest speaker
-and we all know what happens the pastor is away (I know what you do when I'm not here!)

-so there's another few Sundays.

*Do you see how it happens...

-throw in some out-of-town visits from family and friends, and then some holidays
-and then you're here about 28 of the 52 Sundays

*Now I'm not trying to guilt you, this isn't about trying to impose a legalism on you

-in fact the article rightly concluded this is about grace!

-the author writes, *"Guilt is the result of not going to church – not because you feel bad for not living up to God's expectations, but because you're not hearing the message of gospel grace pounded into you week after week."*

-he went on to say, "we don't go to church b/c of guilt. We are the church b/c of grace"

(Trevin Wax, Are you a part-time church goer" TGC, Aug. 6, 2013)

-Paul is reminding us that when the church gathers, the Living God is among us!

-we are His House, His Household,

worshipping in His presence, listening to His Word, being strengthened by the fellowship of other believers!

-we need this grace in our lives!

-moms and dads need this grace

-our kids and youth need this grace

-our families need this grace...

-lest Hebrews warns us, that we *fall away from the living God*

This may be why Paul describes the Church as

3-The Pillar of Truth

v15c a pillar...of the truth.

-a 'pillar' holds something up; and so Paul says the church holds up the Truth

3-The Pillar of Truth

*Now that's a shocking kind of statement...

-b/c the implication is that God's Truth is not able to stand without the church

-if the pillar is removed, then everything collapses

-now, of course that's never going to happen, b/c God has promised His church will always endure! (Matt. 16)

-but Paul's words are designed to help Timothy and us, grasp the gravity of the Church's importance!

*One of the books that has been particularly helpful to me this week is “*Life in the Father’s House*,” by Wayne Mack and Dave Swavely

-and they note 4 ways the church functions as a pillar of truth...

First, through...

***Revelation**

-and what they mean by that is that God has chosen to reveal His Word, the New Testament in and through the church

-listen to Paul in **Eph. 3:8-10**

8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

-how did God reveal His Word? Through the Church!

-through Paul and the Apostles, Gods Word has been revealed to us...

-now the Church is not continuing to reveal God’s Word today

-there’s not any new Revelation from God today...

But rather the Church is now the instrument God has chosen to proclaim it to the world

***Proclamation**

- Eph. 4 tells, God has given pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry
 - through preaching and teaching!
- and He's called every believer to be witnesses of the Gospel, proclaiming it to the ends of the earth
- it is the sacred duty of the church to proclaim the faith once for all delivered to the saints
- b/c through it, the Holy Spirit calls sinners to repent and believe
- faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ, that is proclaimed!

Third, the Church is the Pillar of Truth in it's...

***Administration**

- that is God gives us the instructions for how He wants us to worship and life for Him
- how we are to function as a church!
- God has never provided instructions for how a 'para-church' organization should function
- but He has instructed the church
- He's instructed us matters of worship, baptism, communion, giving, leadership, preaching, the role of men and women, and a ton of other things
- and we should look to His Word for these

instructions, not to the world or to ourselves

Finally, the church upholds the truth by protecting it from error

***Protection**

-we have the responsibility of passing this Word on, holding it fast, defending it against false teaching

*Think about all those areas...

-Paul is reminding Timothy and us of the indispensable role the church plays in our lives

-think of all that would be lost if the church were removed from our lives!

-think about how our own relationship with God and His Truth IS in danger of collapsing if the church does not occupy it's intended place in our lives...

(Mack and Swavely, 27)

*I think one of the reasons people are rejecting and neglecting church today is b/c it is a Pillar

-b/c it does provide walls

-it defines the truth, it shows us the way to live, it tells us the news we must believe if we're to be saved

-and that's the reason that folks like William

Young, author of the best selling book
“The Shack” is no longer a part of the
institutional church

-b/c he's found Jesus in more depth and
freedom outside the walls

-it's a Jesus that's devoid of Scripture!

-in fact his view of God, the Holy Spirit,
the Church, Sin, Suffering, is
contrary to Scripture

-but Young has found freedom in his
heretical views, which is what happens
when the Pillar of Truth is removed!

*Someone once said, “If I could find a church
without religion, then that would be the
church for me!”

-the problem with that is, it wouldn't be a
church at all!

-B/c Christianity, the Church is not
whatever we want it to be!

-it's shaped by the Truth of God's Word

-and the Church is the Pillar of that
Truth, holding up the Truth in a dark and
deceived world

(DeYoung and Kluck, 85, 178)

*This is more and more important as we see the
decline and disintegration of Truth in culture

-as our world rejects the Truth, it is losing it's
ability to discern the Truth...

-even in the most basic, biological

matters such as gender and
sexuality

- when a man isn't for sure if he's a Man or a Woman OR vice versa...
- and even our 'scientists and doctors' are no longer for sure
- *The church is a Pillar of Truth...
 - not 'a' truth, but "the" Truth, Paul says
 - and we must hold on to it, stand firm in it, and proclaim it to a world that needs it!

But notice finally, the Church described as...

4-The Buttress of Truth

v15d and buttress of the truth.

- the word likely means 'foundation'
- it speaks of stability and permanence

*We ask, why did Paul use this word in his attempt to help Timothy to see the importance of the Church?

- He wanted Timothy to know that the church is the one institution that God has promised to preserve throughout all time!
- it will always endure!

*Jesus said in **Matt. 16:18**, *I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

-in **Eph. 3:21**, Paul says, “...to him (to God) be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.”

4-The **Buttress** of Truth

*This should provide us, as Christians, a tremendous amount of hope and confidence!

-but also conviction...

-as Mack writes, “*It also presents a convincing argument for the idea that we should direct our energies and efforts primarily toward the edification and growth of the local church rather than organizations and institutions outside of it!*” (31)

-b/c the church is the only body, whom God has promised to preserve and bless in this way!

*There’s so much more that could be said here, but then I wouldn’t have much to next week...

-but here’s the question I want you to think about today...

*Ask yourself, whether the church is as important to us as it is the Lord?

-that’s really the question here...

-if God has this high of a view of the local church, do we?

A People Who Belong to God

*I remember growing up, my home church in Maceo, KY, used to give perfect attendance pens for Sunday School. Do you remember that? I probably got 9-10 years worth of those pens. My family would go camping most every weekend during the summer. The campground was only about 5-6 miles from my house. But I remember on Sunday's, dad would take mom and I to church, then we would come back and camp for a couple of hours and go home. I remember thinking it seemed kind of inconvenient at the time.

We usually took one trip to Florida for vacation, and I remember we had to seek out a church to visit so I could get the bulletin (b/c you got credit for being in church if you could produce a bulletin). So we went.

I look back on it and I can see how some would say that's so legalistic, and silly, "you were just going to church to get a pin." Maybe... but I don't remember thinking of it that way at the time.

What I did think though, was, the Church sure is important. And I'm so thankful for that...

*Do we have a high view of the Church, like God does?

-how can we make sure that it holds the rightful place in our lives?

-does anything need to change in my life in

light of this Truth?