

The Pillar and Ground of the Truth

There is a growing sentiment among Christians that the local church is not necessary. On top of this, there is a grave temptation to go to church instead to be the church. Thus, for many of us over time our love for Christ's bride grows cold. The Apostle Paul writes to instill and ignite in us a deeper affection for the church of Jesus and to move us to marvel that we have a place in her.

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. ¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

This short passage reveals why Paul writes. He desires that we know how to conduct ourselves in God's household. In these three verses, he wants us to know what our identity and what mission is.

1. **We cannot rely on our own thinking on how we are to live as God's people. We must be taught how to live the Christian life (1 Timothy 3:14).**

2. **We must rely on God's Word to learn how to conduct ourselves.**
Solid, biblical teaching results in a life where all of one's actions are rooted in love that springs from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5). The first chapters of 1 Timothy teach us how we are to live in the church. We learn how to deal with false teaching in the church from 1:3-7. We learn how to go about certain aspects of corporate worship in 1 Timothy 2:1-8. We learn how women are to live personally and corporately in the church from 2:9-15. We learn on what basis we are to elect those who provide leadership in the church from 3:1-13.

3. **God's Word sets forth three choice descriptions of the church.**
 - a. It is God's household. The church is not a place but a people. Paul speaks here in family language. This biblical term "describes the church as God's family, especially with reference to authority and responsibility with the church and the home. The stress is on God's authority over his people" (ESV Study Bible, p. 2330).
 - b. It is the church of the living God. *Ekklēsia* is a term that refers to the gathered assembly where the Lord primarily reveals His presence. Thus, the church is where we experience the reality and presence of the living God in His community of believers.
 - c. It is the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the supporting structure for the truth of the gospel. When she fails in this endeavor, she has lost her *raison d'être*, her fundamental reason for existence. "God has entrusted to the church the task of promoting and protecting the truth" of the gospel... The architectural imagery presents the church's responsibility of 'holding up' the gospel before a watching world, with a view to repelling the attack of false teaching" (ESV Study Bible, p. 2330). Why is this important? The proclamation of the truth of the gospel supports and steadies all of us no matter where we are in our spiritual journey.

4. **Three ways that the church serves as the pillar and foundation of the truth.**

Truth is what best defines reality. According to Thayer's *Greek Lexicon*, truth is all that is "taught in the Christian faith, respecting God and the execution of his purposes through Christ, and respecting the duties of man."

- a. Therefore, the church provides the reality of God's existence. When God's people dwell together in unity amidst all our diversity, we serve as a compelling apologetic to a skeptical world. Only God can produce this type of supernatural unity.
- b. The church provides the reality of sin and brokenness. The church is where we learn the truth about our real selves. We all are bruised, broken, and ruined by the fall. The church teaches us that we are not basically good, but sinful and that, even as a church, we are a fellowship of sinners. See below on why this is very important.
- c. The church provides support for the reality of redemption. Jesus comes to heal our brokenness. Verse 16 serves as a corporate confession of faith that highlights the person and work of Jesus Christ. Some commentators believe this verse served as a Christological hymn for the early church.

Discussion Questions

1. Which one of the Apostle Paul's word pictures regarding the church in verse 15 most resonates with you personally? Why? Which one of these is easier for you to embrace and embody than the others? Specifically, how would you live differently if you had a greater love for the church?
2. Where do you think our church needs most to recover her biblical identity? In light of discovering the biblical identity of the church, are there any changes the Lord is calling you to undertake personally? For example, do you view your fellowship with other believers as an optional add-on to your Christian life or as an absolute essential to maintaining your relationship with the Lord?
3. If the church is the gathered assembly where the Lord primarily reveals His presence, how would you assess your own life patterns in availing yourself of the Lord's presence and means of strengthening grace?
4. What do we learn about Jesus Christ from the series of affirmations about him in verse 16? How do these affirmations build upon one another?
5. Where have you recently seen in your own experience the reality of the existence of God, the reality of our sin and brokenness, and the reality of redemption and renewal at work in the lives of God's people?
6. Would you take a moment and ask the Lord to grant you and those that you love a greater capacity to wonder and marvel that you are a part of the bride of Christ? Take a moment and reflect on your future (Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 19:6-9).

Going Deeper

1. Do you ever feel like everyone else is advancing far in holiness and that you are isolated and alone in your sin? If we believe this, we will never disclose our failures and shortcomings to others and will continue in our image management and hypocrisy. Take a moment and reflect on these words from Richard Foster's The Celebration of Discipline:

"If we know that the people of God are first a fellowship of sinners we are freed to hear the unconditional call of God's love and to confess our need openly before our brothers and sisters. We know that we are not alone in our sin. The fear and pride which cling to us like barnacles cling to others also. In acts of mutual confession we release the power that heals. Our humanity is no longer denied but transformed."

What difference would applying this make in your marriage, your friendships, and in our church?

2. How do we naturally respond when we are hurt and disappointed by others in the church and we forget that the church is a fellowship of sinners? How should we respond? How would our corporate life be different if we lived more as a cruciform community than a Christian community? Remember that a cruciform community is marked primarily by how it loves. A Christian community is marked primarily by what it does.