
Centrality of the Church @ home

1Timothy 3:14-16

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(A tour Lisa and I enjoyed of Biltmore estates and the centrality of the local church).

It was like no other place I had ever seen. Lisa and I toured Biltmore Estates. A few summers ago we and another couple took an afternoon and walked slowly through the largest residential house in America. We tried to consider the sheer size of this home - Four acres under one roof, 175,000 square feet, 250 rooms filled with artworks and 19th century furniture, 65 fireplaces, a two-story library, one 70,000 gallon indoor swimming pool and to top it off of course a bowling alley – This just to name a few things.

Marveling at the architectural excellence and stopping at each station to read descriptions Lisa and I were dazzled by the majesty of this mansion. But not everyone was. As we walked around in the mansion and about the grounds two things came to my attention. We were in the middle of magnificence and some were amazed while others were hardly fazed.

I watched some children with their parents touring the estate. It was painfully obvious that the kids were not overly impressed by its beauty and history. They were unaware of their surroundings. They were disinterested in the history. They paid no attention to descriptions. They were bored and made the tour for their parents difficult. My guess was they merely wanted to return to the outdoor pool of their Motel 8. At one point one of the parents took them aside and spoke to them presumably explaining where they were at and how they were to behave.

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This morning I want us to consider our individual families and how the local church is central to the families. What I will be arguing for (adapting some verbiage from Mrs. Clinton) is that it takes a local church to raise a family. What we will see in our passage this morning is similar to Lisa and my experience at Biltmore Estates. We as believers in Jesus Christ like the children in my illustration are in the middle of magnificence. And we need from time to time to be taken aside and helped in order to relish the wonders around us. We will not behave in a way that is “proper among God’s holy people (see Eph.5:3) until we:

1. realize the significance of the church
2. relish the magnificence of the Christ.

As we both recognize and relish these two wonders we will be protected from error, provided grace in time of need and enabled to behave in a way that is “proper among God’s holy people”.

If you have your Bibles with you, please open them to 1Timothy 3:14-16. (read the passage and pray)

The authority of the Church

v14

Our passage starts off with Paul's purpose for writing Timothy (you can see this in v14). He tells the young pastor how people in the local church are to behave. So my first question for us is "how are we to behave"? Who's to say who's right? Is one model of family life better than the next Paul? Our culture reflected its answer to these types of questions a generation ago in the Times magazine [October of 1992] The article talked about upcoming changes in the family makeup as illustrated in the "family tree" picture on the screen. Can I pick and choose the parts of a family I like and discard the ones I don't like? What should I believe to be true in the midst of all the differing opinions and options I hear today? Who and what can help me with my questions?

What answers questions like these is apostolic writing. v14 says, "I hope to come to you soon, but I AM WRITING THESE THINGS to you so that...you may know how one ought to behave". Paul the apostle writes this letter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (see 2Tim. 3:16, 2Pet.3:15ff) to a young pastor named Timothy in order to sketch out perspectives, priorities and the practice of Christian living in the local church.

He talks about:

- the importance of confronting and stopping bad doctrine (1:3-7)
- understanding the purpose of the law (1:8-11)
- knowing the difference between living under law by works and living under grace by faith (1:12-20)
- praying for the evangelization of the world (2:1-8)
- becoming more outward-looking as a group (2:1ff)
- men repenting of anger and women repenting of manipulation (2:8-15)
- who should be in leadership in the local church (3:1-13)
- how families are to be managed and how children are to act at home (3:4)
- training in and practicing all Christian ethics (4:1-16)
- treating each other in the local church as the family of families (5:1-2)
- providing financial support for the weak and vulnerable in the church (5:3ff)
- the danger of Satan and when and who to marry (5:11ff)
- managing our own households well (5:14)
- personally caring for our elderly parents (5:16)
- how to treat local church pastors in financial need or when they sin (5:17ff)
- the importance of becoming good employees (6:1-2)
- how to view money and what to do with it (6:3ff)

And all along throughout the letter he makes clear that our own families are to be shaped by and embedded in the church family (cf. 1Timothy 3 & 5). Our homes are to look like this list.

But wait a minute. So far I hear that Paul wrote this letter and in doing so he wrote Scripture. I hear that what he wrote about was how to conduct oneself in all facets of life. And that we as believers have no option but to submit to the perspective and practice he lays down in this letter. So far I'm following. But are we then to pull out of this

Scripture a manageable take-away list of do's and don't and conduct our families according to the list? Tomorrow morning am I to take out this directory of directions and follow them religiously?

Beloved, hear me please. The apostle did not write a directory of directions. We don't need a self-help list to accomplish through self-effort resolution. We need a Savior. We need to be recaptured by the wonder of the two things in this passage. These wonders are to grip our imagination, stimulate our motivation and bring about God-honoring transformation – and this in every facet of our homes. Look with me through eyes of faith at v15-16.

After Paul talks about how to behave he unveils the stunning significance of the Church and the magnificence of the Christ. These two striking realities will function as the two basic reasons for behaving the certain way outlined in 1Timothy.

Carrying out the obligations without being in wonder over these declarations will be fatal for our families – a mere fundamentalism that leads to legalism and moralism. But like the little children at Biltmore Estates, we need to be taken aside from time to time and made aware by the Scriptures of where we are now and whose this is. We will never see the life-changing, people-loving, risk-taking obedience to God's specific commands within our homes until we realize what the local church is and relish the glory of the Savior of the Church – Jesus Christ our Lord.

The significance of the Church

v15

To experience God-honoring, life-changing behavior notice first v.15 and the significance of the church. The weight and magnitude of the local church is to influence the members of the church into glad-hearted submission to God's heart and His moral revealed word.

as the household of God

At the heart of Paul's concern about which he wrote in chapters 1,2&3 and about which he will write in chapters 4,5&6 – at the heart of his attention over how we ought behave as a local church he unveils the identity of the local church. Here in v15 he describes her first as “the household of God”.

This local gathering in Ephesus is called the house of God. Can you imagine the thunderclap of Paul's words to a Jewish Christian? Many of us don't get the shock as they would due to our spotty understanding of the O.T. But this phenomenal truth that we as a local church are the very house of God, the family of God is one reason why it is vital that we behave a certain way.

This imagery was not plucked out of thin air. We see this imagery when Jacob was returning to the land and had a dream. In the dream he saw a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven. Angels were ascending and descending on it. At that point Jacob met the LORD and heard His promise to him. When Jacob awoke he said, “Surely the LORD is in this place... This is none other than *the house of God*” (Gen 28).

God's nearness was not a threat to him but rather a promise. Echoing the promise made to Abraham and his descendents, the LORD's presence that brought his favor was to be found in a certain place.

Later in the Bible's storyline we come to Moses who received a blueprint of sorts on the dimensions of the Tabernacle – a sophisticated yet portable tent that served as the meeting place for God and his people as they journeyed through the wilderness. This tabernacle was the focal point of God's presence with His people. It also served as a place where animals could be sacrificed. And remember animal sacrifice was a picture of salvation. Sin could be dealt with through the death of a substitute. God's people at the Tabernacle could gather with each other and meet with God – to praise Him, to hear from Him, to receive mercy and hope from Him.

Still later in the story we come across King David, King Solomon and the building of the Temple. Similar to the functioning of the tabernacle the Temple served as the particular dwelling of God at which His people could meet with Him and the world could see something of the magnificence of the LORD.

But whether you notice in the Bible the dwelling of God in the garden or in the wilderness or in Jerusalem you are seeing a sign (symbol, representation) pointing to a greater reality. In the New Testament we see the Christ as the true temple. At Pentecost we notice the church born. And 30 years later we see it sprawled across Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and now into Asia. Through these church planting efforts scattered throughout the known world we see the true house of God; Jesus Christ and His people formed into a local church witnessing of the resurrected Christ.

Paul here in v15 is saying, "God is in your midst. You are the house of God. You are God's family, members of His household. He owns this house. He owns each of you. He indwells each of you. He manifests himself to you as you gather together to bring worship to Him. Why are you not to live as the world lives? Why are you a chosen peculiar people out of the unbelieving world? It is because you are God's house. This reality changes everything. Everything I write to you in chapters 1,2,3,4,5,6 are to be taken to heart because you are the very dwelling of God.

As the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth

If this was not enough, Paul goes on. He goes further in his description of who the local church is by saying that you are "the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth". The imagery stays fairly consistent as this word picture represents the Temple. But he breaks down the imagery to talk about two things regarding the church.

The living God

First he says the church is the church of the living God. Now why does Paul describe the church in these terms? In another place in the Bible the writer of Hebrews uses this phrase. He talks about coming "to Mount Zion and to the city of *the living God*, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable angels in festal gathering..." This language when pondered causes amazement in the believer. When we assemble as the church of the living God this is the reality. Paul tells us that we are the church of the living God so that we will be awestruck over the

awesome environment called the local church. Each time we gather for worship we are in the dwelling place of the living God of heaven and earth. Pause beloved and take in – this is who and where you are!

A pillar and buttress of the truth

The second description Paul gives in order for the church to behave properly is found in the phrase *a pillar and buttress of the truth*. Paul describes the church in Temple imagery not only to underscore the place in which God dwells. He talks about the church this way to highlight the source of the church. The church was/is created from the truth. The church does not produce the truth. The truth produces the church. The truth brings it into existence as the temple of the living God. The Truth lays down the foundation. The truth erects the strong columns. As a result, the local church by God's design is the proclaimer and the protector of the truth. If the truth of the gospel is the only way the church comes into existence then the church has an awesome responsibility to preserve and promote the truth so that more and more of these dwelling places of God crop up.

This insight is to stretch our imagination to the point of passionate worship of the living God. It is to stimulate in us an awesome respect for the members of this household. We are a gospel-believing, Truth-bearing, people-loving, gathered group whose ultimate joy is God almighty and His magnificent son and our Savior Jesus Christ.

This vision of the local church becomes the power and perspective necessary to obey anything God calls us into. This is why Paul talks about sublime things. This is why he talks about the church. Hardly could one believe such things about the local church and stay the same.

The magnificence of the Christ

v16

Having explored the household of the living God, it seems like that would be enough. But Paul thinks better. He's only warming up. Look at the beginning of v.16. If you had any doubt about how we are to behave, doubt no more. Paul in v.16 gives us the second wonder at which to marvel that produces obedience. The first one we saw was the significance of the local church. Now in v.16 we come to the magnificence of the Christ.

The mystery of godliness

The mystery of the Christian life is found not in cracking a code or reading the 20th new book on the secrets to successful living. Rather, Paul says the mystery of godliness is in this confession of v16. This confession starts off with the pronoun "He". Please do not miss this observation. The mystery of godliness is not in mere principles. It is in the stunning person of Jesus. Jesus Christ is the secret of the Christian life.

Christ is the source of the church's life. Christ is the sustainer of the Church's life. Christ laid down His life to purchase the church. He is the revelation of what the church is and ought to strive to be. He is the author. He is the accomplisher. He is the original. He is the reason for the church. And as we will see a faith-union with Christ is the only way for us to live the life Paul writes about in his letter.

The glory of Christ

If that is not enough, Paul reaches for the ultimate by “singing”/quoting a hymn that describes Jesus Christ.

The point is that we as the church, we as families making up the Family of God, we as the household of the living God will only behave in God-honoring ways when we have a deep love for Christ that sings over the gospel we are about to hear.

Let Paul tell us about the Christ through this hymn.

V16 appears to be a confession or a hymn written and circulated around the first century. Perhaps Paul wrote it or perhaps he borrowed it for his purpose in the letter. Either way it centers clearly on the Christ and makes plain the gospel for the church.

There have been many interpretations clustering around this hymn. There are some verses in the hymn that are difficult to interpret. Also, there are varying opinions as to what the structure of the hymn is. Is it six lines in consecutive order. Are there two stanzas with three lines in each? Are there three stanzas with two lines in each?

These are good questions that lead to good study. One thing is certain. It is all about Christ. It is all about his glory. It delineates the true gospel that would have been used to stop the false teachers of the day. And it was/is not to be used merely as a primer of the gospel. It is a hymn. It was to be sung!

As I pondered this piece and read some over the various interpretations, I see it as follows. Verse 16 functions in two ways. It was given to Timothy and the church in contrast to what the false teachers were giving the church. Timothy and other elders were to confront the error circulating in the day with scripture like v16.

It was given also to the church in order to awaken affections for the Christ of the church. These renewed affections for Christ would have given rise to song and worship of the magnificence of Christ. As the local church saw and sung over the gospel, the power for obedience would have been experienced. When Paul taught on how to behave as Christians, it would not have been received as a list of do's and don'ts. It would have been welcomed as loving counsel over how to please the King.

The structure seems to be two stanzas comprised of three verses each. The first stanza looks at Christ on earth. It begins with the incarnation resulting in his crucifixion, moves to his vindication reflected in his resurrection and then ends with the exaltation. The second stanza mirrors the first but has the church as its reference point. In other words, it is about the church moving forward in the first century with Christ having already died, resurrected and ascended. Now the church has the gospel and is moving forward. It preaches the Christ's incarnation, humiliation, crucifixion, resurrection and his glorious exaltation.

Both stanzas with their particular point of view are given to the church to reach the heart of the Christian and produce the song over the Christ. The pattern for obedience would look like this: Doctrine – what the gospel is. Delight – what the gospel produces in the heart. Duty – what the gospel produces through daily obedience.

To hear how to obey God at home and in church while seeing and singing the gospel is the point of this passage.

We end this morning in the place where we started. Like the little children in Biltmore Estates we are in the midst of magnificence. The question is: Are we wildly amazed or barely fazed?

What is to take us aside and tell us about this magnificent place is the written revelation (v14) revealing the reality of the Lord's personal presence with his people (v15) made plain in the gospel of Jesus Christ (v16). As the crisp and clean air of the gospel is breathed in the magnificent place of God's church its people will believe certain things and behave in certain ways. We will be light to the world rather than like the world. We will sing of the Christ. We will serve one another. We will suffer that others may enter into this magnificence. And all this will be to the praise of the glory of blessed God.

Amen.



Title
Text
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The Chapel Pulpit • <date> Sunday Morning

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