

Called Out:
Pillars and Foundation
1 Timothy 3:15-16

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Text Introduction: Our Scripture comes today from the book called 1 Timothy. First Timothy along with Second Timothy and Titus make up a collection of letters generally referred to as “Paul’s Pastoral Epistles.” Obviously, this reference comes from the pastoral advice that Paul offered Timothy and Titus. You might be thinking that since Paul wrote these letters primarily to pastors that they do not apply to everyone. Not true! Though the primary original purpose of this letter was a primer to Timothy, the counsel is dealing with the organization and purpose of the church. As such, the whole church profits considerably.

I want to take us on a short three week doctrinal survey of the church. Our primary focus will be some word pictures that the New Testament gives to the Church. The word pictures help us to see the doctrine of the Church.

Text: But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to act in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ And most certainly, the mystery of godliness is great:

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

Introduction: We are well accounted with the notion that the church is not the building. The church is the people. A people called the church could have no building at all in which to meet and still function as a church. However, when the writers of the New Testament were looking for analogies to point to truth about the church, one of the word pictures used is building. That’s why we can talk about the pillars and the foundation of the church.

Here is a sampling of those passages:

- 1 Corinthians 3:9-17 with verse 9 beginning, “For we are God’s co-workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.
- Ephesians 2:19-22 which says, “So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ The whole building, being put together by Him, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord. ²² You also are being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.
- Matthew 16:18 which says, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church...”

That's what I see in verses 15-16. The analogy helps us to think about 4 pillars of the church. I pray that you see them with me today and understand the implications.

- **We are family.**

We are first of all the "household of God." We are family. Together, we make up God's family. What does that mean? As a church, we do things families do.

- We love one another.
That's what families do, right? We sometimes are embarrassed by our family, disappointed in our family, struggle with our family, but in the end, we know that families are to love one another. As believers in Jesus, because we are bound together by the blood of Jesus, we are bound together with even a stronger bond. Paul wrote so that they might know how to act in God's household. Was that the building? No, it was in the household—the family.
- We represent God and one another.
In a family, you as an individual represent the family. The way that you live your life is a reflection on your family whether you like that or not. All of us who are parents understand this. We have to understand this in relationship to the church. We are a reflection on Christ and His church.
- We encourage one another.
The writer of Hebrews declared that it is the reason that we assemble ourselves together. By the way, we can't very well give and receive encouragement if we are not faithful in our attendance.
- We correct one another.
Interesting, isn't it that more times than not when someone confronts us about a sin area, we are quick to call them judgmental. And sometimes they are. But sometimes, out of love, they are correcting us. We ought to welcome that. Our first line of defense ought not to be "Stop judging me." Our first reaction ought to be "Tell me more. I want to be more like Jesus. Show me how I can be more like Jesus."

- **Our Founder is the Living God.**

We are the "church of the Living God." There is something about that phrase that just grabs me. I mean it energizes me. The phrase inspires me. We are the church of the Living God. We are not some mere organization. We are not a club. We don't belong to ourselves. We are the church of the Living God. These words change me. These words change our focus. These words serve as a pillar to our work.

I was reminded this week of the story that Billy Graham told while in Washington D.C. He said to his audience, "You know, as I've been walking around the halls of the Capitol, and have seen the portraits of those hanging on the wall and have visited all of the monuments in this city, I have noted that they all have one thing in common. They are all dead."

But, we serve the Living God.

- **Our foundation is God's Truth.**

The main purpose of this letter is to prepare Timothy to deal with false teaching. If you glance down to chapter 4, Paul there alludes to the times that would come when people would turn from the truth.

This term "pillar" would have been particularly meaningful to those in Ephesus, the city in which Timothy lived and was pastor. There in Ephesus was the great Temple of Diana or Artemis—one of the so-called seven wonders of the world. Part of its extravagance was 127 pillars, each one of them a gift from a king. (Barclay, p. 89.)

Paul, in this setting, wanted them to think about the role of the Church as a pillar of truth.

- Christians need the Church to stand for truth.

You and I need the Church to stand for truth because left to our own devices, we will always drift away from the truth. This is why we need the Church to swing us back to the truth. We need the Church to help us to clarify the truth and challenge us when we veer away from the truth.

- Culture needs the Church to stand for truth.

In addition, culture needs the Church to stand for the truth. Our culture is better off when we stay close to the truth. Whether culture accepts our message or not, culture needs us to caution and confront them when they move away from the truth of God's Word.

- **Our focus is Jesus.**

Finally, you will note the hymn in verse 16. Our focus is Jesus. This hymn is not exhaustive of Christ, but it points to our focus being on Jesus. He is, as Paul called Him in Colossians, "the head of the Church." Jesus is, as Peter referred to Him, "the Cornerstone." (1 Peter 2:6-7)

There's a hymn that dates back to 1866 written by Samuel Stone. Stone specifically wrote the hymn in a collection of 12 hymns each one to express a different doctrine. The hymn that he wrote to express the doctrine of the church is *The Church's One Foundation*. The first line is "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord."

That's it. The church's one foundation is Jesus. Our focus is on Jesus.

So What?

1. Are you committed to Christ?

None of this matters if you are not first of all committed to Christ.

2. Are you committed to the Church?

If committed to Christ, the second question that you ought to be raising is your commitment to His church. I mean if we are family. If Christ is the head. These two truths alone ought to cause us to pause in our reflection about the church. Now, Paul raised these issues simultaneously about the church of the Living God—that is the universal church to which all believers are a part—and the local church in which Timothy was overseer—in Ephesus.

Chuck Colson writes in his book, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why it Matters*:

We cannot treat the local church like a restaurant, picking and choosing from the menu, visiting another whenever we feel like it. Church membership involves making a covenant with fellow believers. It takes time to develop unity with others at any depth, and this never takes place, ever—not at any time or anywhere—without conflict.¹

3. Are you really committed to Christ?

You say, “I thought you just asked that.” I did, but I want to ask it again and here is why. There have been some occasions in my pastoral ministry where I have noted that people have been more committed to the church than they have been to Christ. You say, “I thought that a great commitment to the church would indicate a great commitment to Christ.” Not always! You see, it is possible that we be so committed to ***our Church—our view of the church, our desires in the church, our work in the church***—that we get deceived in our relationship to Jesus and His church.

4. Will you contend for the truth?

- By your belief.
- By your behavior.

¹ Chuck Colson, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why it Matters*, Zondervan, 2008, 155.