

## The Church

### 1 Timothy

#### *The House of God*

One of the most moving experiences in anyone's life is his first trip home from the hospital. You probably don't remember yours, and so perhaps you aren't particularly moved by it. But your parents sure remember. They remember things like which day of the week it was, whether it was sunny, if you were asleep during the trip, and maybe even the blanket you were wrapped in. It's a precious moment when their little bundle of joy gets to leave the hospital and come home. Home – to a safe environment, surrounded by people who love him and will take care of him. Now think what it would be like if that adorable baby were instead carried out of the hospital and set on the sidewalk to make his own way in life. That is what happens to most adults – they walk out of the hospital after they are restored to health, and resume life as before. But while it is normal for an adult to walk away on his own foot power, it would be cruel to expect that of a baby. And even adults don't really make their own way in the world. We all have families and friends who support us in many ways as we go through life. Without such support life would be miserable.

This same principle holds for spiritual life also. It is disastrous for a new believer to be cast upon the world alone, and even mature Christians cannot thrive on their own. God made man a social being, like Himself, and we need each other. That is why an integral part of salvation is the creation of the church. When we think of how God saves us, we usually think of Jesus' coming to earth as a man to die in our place for the sins we commit. Jesus' death *is* a central part of salvation, but His death by itself is not enough. Our salvation is accomplished also by Jesus' righteous life, His enthronement in heaven, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the creation of the church. Notice carefully that I did not say the church saves us. God saves us. But the church God created is part of His plan of salvation. And just as men and women cannot grow and thrive in isolation, neither can believers grow spiritually outside the church.

The role of the church in salvation is a topic which is vitally important, but badly neglected. Tonight we are going to one of the books in the New Testament which is largely devoted to the church and its operation – 1 Timothy. Let's begin by reading chapter 3, verses 14-15.

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

This short paragraph, appearing in the middle of the book, explains the purpose of this book. The apostle Paul was writing to his younger colleague Timothy. Paul and Timothy had ministered together for many years, and Timothy had been trained in ministry by Paul. Now they are separated. Timothy is the pastor of the church at Ephesus, and Paul is writing to remind him of the things Paul had taught him about what the church is and how it ought to function.

The first thing we notice here is Paul's description of the church as the house of God. God made the whole universe and is present everywhere. But He is present in some special way in His house, the church. God's presence was physically visible in the Old Testament when He led the Israelites in the desert in the form of a cloud and pillar of fire. Then when the temple was built, the fire-cloud filled the temple, which was God's Old Covenant house. This explains the significance of the little pillars of fire that came on the believers when the Holy Spirit was given to the church. It was the New Covenant sign of God's presence entering the church. So although God is with you wherever you go, He is present in some unique and powerful way in His house, the church.

The second thing we notice here is that the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth. This does not mean that the church is always right, or that truth cannot be found outside the church. It means simply that the church guards, supports, and protects a true understanding of the world. The church is like an intellectual gyroscope. As we read and study and discover truths about our world, the church keeps us from falling into serious error. We'll return to this concept at the end of our study. But now, let's turn to the beginning of 1 Timothy and read what Paul says about the church.

### ***Proclaiming the Truth***

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, <sup>4</sup> nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. (1 Timothy 1:3-4)

Paul's opening words to Timothy (after his greeting) were a reminder of why Timothy was in Ephesus in the first place. The book of Acts tells us that Paul had ministered in Ephesus for two years. This was the longest Paul ever stayed in one place. It seems that during that time God had established a solid church there, but it was immature. There were people who were tempted in various ways, and when Paul moved on to minister in Macedonia, he left Timothy behind to continue his work. Now we see that the central feature of that work is teaching.

Apparently there were people in Ephesus who kept getting entangled in false ideas. "Fables and endless genealogies" almost certainly refers to ideas imported from other prominent religions and philosophies prevalent at the time. What's worse than falling into error, however, is that they were teaching others their falsehoods. The antidote to the poison of false teaching is the truth delivered in strong doses. Notice the potency of Paul's vocabulary. He "urges" Timothy to "charge" people to cease and desist from teaching their evil doctrine. In this letter we find an abundance of words for teaching – teach, five times; exhort three times, command three times, charge three times. Let's turn to chapter four, verse 1-11 to see how Paul continues this train of thought.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, <sup>3</sup> forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; <sup>5</sup> for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. <sup>6</sup> If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. <sup>7</sup> But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. <sup>8</sup> For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. <sup>9</sup> This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. <sup>11</sup> These things command and teach. (1 Timothy 4:1-11)

Notice the stark contrast between truth and falsehood. Notice the vigor of Paul's command to oppose false teaching. He says falsehood is demonic in origin. Timothy is not to discuss these things, but to reject them. As for the truth, Paul concludes on a strong note saying, "These things command and teach." One of the most critical roles of the church is to proclaim the truth in a world that is entangled in foolish ideas.

In order to teach the truth one must know what is true, so a related priority of the church is to maintain sound doctrine. We'll return to this later also, but a quick summary of sound doctrine is found in the creeds of the church. Two of the universally accepted creeds are the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. Christians differ on many points of doctrine, but these are non-negotiable. Paul's emphasis on sound teaching makes no sense if there were not an equal emphasis on the truth of what is being taught.

Finally, we note here that not everyone is qualified to teach. Christians are not equally capable of understanding and teaching the truth. This is a hard thing for Americans to accept. We are reared to think that any boy, and maybe girl, can grow up to be president someday if he works hard enough. But most of us are not as smart, ambitious, and fortunate as Abraham Lincoln. We all are equal before the law, but we are not all equally gifted. Timothy was gifted to teach. 1 Timothy 4:14 says, "Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership." This means God had called him to a special role in the church. It was his job to teach his congregation the truth, and to refute those who opposed him. Everyone is entitled to his own opinions, but only those called by God to teach are entitled to teach in the church. A clear application from this passage is that you should join a church which teaches sound doctrine, and learn from the teachers there. They will no doubt make mistakes from time to time, but if it is a solid church, you can trust your leaders to teach you the truth. If you find that you are in a church that is not teaching the truth, you should look for one that does. Proclaiming the truth is so central to the life of the church, you need to be confident your church is doing this well.

### ***Praying for All Men***

As we continue in Paul's letter we find next that he instructs Timothy to lead the church in prayer.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,<sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.<sup>3</sup> For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,<sup>4</sup> who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth...<sup>8</sup> I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. (1 Timothy 2:1-4, 8)

We should each pray on our own, but God desires us to pray as a church as well. When we gather as a church we should especially pray for our leaders and for the salvation of the lost. Churches which use the historic liturgies do this every week, and other churches do it as well. You can see by the energy Paul puts into this command that prayer is a vital part of church life.

### ***Led by Elders and Deacons***

Next Paul addresses leadership in the church.

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.<sup>2</sup> A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;<sup>3</sup> not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;<sup>4</sup> one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence<sup>5</sup> (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);<sup>6</sup> not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.<sup>7</sup> Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.<sup>8</sup> Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,<sup>9</sup> holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.<sup>10</sup> But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.<sup>11</sup> Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.<sup>12</sup> Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.<sup>13</sup> For

those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

Our first observation is that there is a clear leadership structure in the church. We don't get to decide how to run the church, God has already made that decision and has revealed it here for us. Of course God does give us freedom in *applying* His commands, but the basic pattern is clear. The church is led by men who are appointed as overseers and deacons. These must be men of superior character – so much that even unbelievers will admit that they are respectable citizens. There is so much to say about church leadership we could spend all evening on just this topic, but we will touch on a few key aspects of it.

First a clarification. The word used for church leader in verses one to seven is *ἐπίσκοπος*. Some translations render this as bishop and others use overseer. Bishop corresponds more to the position in some of our churches, while overseer more accurately reflects the meaning of the word itself. Later in chapter 5, verse 16 Paul uses the word *πρεσβύτερος*, elder, to refer to church leaders. Now I am not going to argue for or against having bishops. Actually, I think there are solid biblical reasons for such a position, properly understood and used. But this passage is not the justification for bishops. If you study the New Testament uses of *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος*, you will discover that they are used interchangeably. Scholars from all sorts of churches agree on this. The biblical justification for bishops is found elsewhere in scripture.

That means that there are essentially two types of leaders in the church – those who govern and teach, and those who serve in other ways. The *ἐπίσκοποι* oversee the church. They teach and lead and make decisions. The deacons serve in other matters, often in meeting the physical needs of the congregation. One feature of the *ἐπίσκοποι* is that they are elders. In Greek, the word elder means “old man”. It does not refer to a position. We used the word to refer to someone in charge, but that is not its meaning here. One implication of this is that a true church will be led by old men. How old is a good question, but there is a case for thinking that fifty is the minimum age.

We must also note that these elders and deacons are not merely the best men on hand. The eldership and diaconate is a fixed structure that Christ has established for the church. When Paul says in 3:1, “If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work,” he is referring to an established office, not merely a role. The NIV misses this entirely by leaving out this word in its translation. The word used for position is the same used in Acts 1:20 where Judas' missing spot among the twelve apostles is discussed: “Let another take his office.” Of course no one would suggest that leadership consists *only* of a position – but neither does it consist only of a role. As in most of these issues, the truth is in the middle. Church leadership is both a defined structure in the institution and a vital role in the living community.

There is much more to say, but we must move on. If you have questions, I'd love to discuss them with you later. For now, an obvious application is to join a church with strong elders and deacons. Look for men who are mature, responsible, and godly.

### ***Care for the Needy***

One of the most evangelistic activities of the church is care for the needy. In this book Paul focuses on widows, but the principle applies to all who are destitute and cannot provide for themselves. The church must provide for such people.

Honor widows who are really widows. <sup>4</sup> But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. <sup>5</sup> Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. <sup>6</sup> But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. <sup>7</sup> And these things command, that they may be blameless. <sup>8</sup> But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially

for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. <sup>9</sup> Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, <sup>10</sup> well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. <sup>11</sup> But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, <sup>12</sup> having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. (1 Timothy 5:3-12)

Here we see that the church is not the primary care-giver for needy people. Neither is the state, for that matter. But when someone has no family to provide for him, the church must do so.

As for widows in particular, this passage apparently virtually mandates the establishment of convents for such women. Protestants have essentially failed in this, and Catholics do it wrongly. The sort of convent Paul mandates here is to support women who are engaged in a life of prayer. But this is only for women over sixty.

The primary application for us is to plan for taking care of your parents when they get old. It is not the responsibility of the state. *You* need to make provisions for them, and you can't wait until they are desperate.

### ***Pursuit of Godliness***

One of the most neglected aspects of the Christian life is godliness. We are urged to go to church, to witness, to read our Bibles, to avoid the bad sins, like murder. And all this is part of the Christian life. But the pursuit of godliness is relatively absent these days.

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>11</sup> But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, <sup>14</sup> that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing. (1 Timothy 6:6, 11-14)

My parents' generation sought godliness by avoiding movies and dancing. Now we reject such legalisms, but instead we rush headlong into whatever we can get away with. The church is not populated by people who are trying to get away with as much sin as possible. It is the people who desire to be as much like God as possible. Let that be our deepest desire and lifelong goal.

### ***Guarding the Truth***

Paul concludes his letter to Timothy with a heart-felt plea:

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – <sup>21</sup> by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:20-21)

The church not only teaches the truth, she also guards the truth. Eight times in this letter Paul uses the word doctrine. Elsewhere he calls it a treasure, sound words which have been committed to Timothy. Doctrine is not a favorite topic among Christians. That is a shame, because it is a vital topic in the Bible. Scripture teaches that right living begins with right thinking. Right doctrine is the beginning and foundation of the Christian life. We all should read the Bible and learn for ourselves what it teaches, but God has commissioned the church to guard the truth, to protect it from error, and to preserve it for posterity.

It is so important to guard the truth, this is why we saw Paul instructing Timothy to oppose those who would corrupt sound doctrine. And if someone refuses to be corrected, Timothy must separate him from the rest of the church.

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,<sup>4</sup> he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,<sup>5</sup> useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

Not very pleasant, is it? Such a stern approach to doctrine seems foreign to ears accustomed to hearing more about fellowship. But this also is part of the Christian life.

### ***Conclusion***

This has been a quick overview of what the Bible teaches about the church. The most vital application for you is to join and attend a church. You can benefit much from RUF and other campus ministries, but they are not the church and cannot take the place of the church. A campus fellowship does not have older men to lead it, does not encompass people of all ages, is not authorized to oversee sound teaching, and does not perform the sacraments. You need to find a church where you can rub shoulders with people of all ages, receive the sacraments, be taught sound doctrine, and be led by men ordained to the offices of the church.

There are many churches in the Lehigh Valley. Some are sound and others are not. Do not just go to the easiest church to get to. Attend a church which is sound, strong, and vibrant. The church I attend is a good choice – of course! You can always get a ride with us on Sundays. If you do not know where to go, you might come with us for awhile. A good many people go to Faith Evangelical Free Church, too. And there are many others represented here. Pick one and attend. Your spiritual health depends on it.

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## **The Church**

1 Timothy

The House of God

3:14-15

Proclaiming the truth

1:1-20; 4:1-5:2

Praying for all men

2:1-8

Led by elders and deacons

2:9-3:13; 5:17-6:2

Care for the needy

5:3-16

Pursuit of godliness

6:6-19

Guarding the truth

6:3-5, 20-21

## **Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth;  
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried.  
He descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven, and sitteth  
on the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick  
and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen

## **Nicene Creed**

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only-begotten Son God,  
begotten of his Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made,  
being of one substance with the Father;  
by whom all things were made;  
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;  
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered and was buried;  
and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,  
and ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;  
and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead;  
whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life,  
who proceedeth from the Father and the Son;  
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;  
who spake by the Prophets.  
And I believe one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;  
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins;  
and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.