

I TIMOTHY 3

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Timothy chapter 3 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

As we have seen so far in our study of this letter or epistle to Timothy, he was overseeing the church in Ephesus. He was their pastor.

And he was a young man and Paul is trying to exhort him to stand strong in the faith and not let the people discourage him in the work.

Now we saw in I Timothy chapter 1 the importance of sound doctrine in regard to the health of a local church.

Make no mistake about it, the teaching of sound doctrine was to be the absolute foundation upon which the church was to be built upon.

And if you think about that, it just makes sense. Just as we need to eat healthy to keep our physical bodies in shape; spiritually speaking, we also need to take in a healthy spiritual diet of the Word of God to stay healthy and strong, spiritually speaking!

Remember what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:19-20, “**Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.**”

How were we built up in the faith? By the Word of God, the teachings of the apostles and the prophets who laid down the foundation of our faith and it is all held together by Jesus, the chief cornerstone of our faith.

And that is what we will see here in I Timothy as Paul reminds Timothy in I Timothy 3:15, **“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.”**

This is so important for us to understand. Paul is telling Timothy how they should conduct themselves in the house of God and that the house of God is not some entertainment center, but it is **“the pillar and ground of the truth.”**

That means that the Word of God is being taught, because the Word of God is truth. If it is not the Word of God that is being taught, then how do you know if it is truth or not? You don't and there is the danger and we see that so much today and thus, because so many Christians don't know the truths of God found in the Word of God, they accept all kinds of sinful practices into their own lives and into the life of the church!

Last time, in I Timothy chapter 2 Paul laid down some general guidelines in regard to the conduct of men and women in the church service. We looked at the men in I Timothy 2:1-8, and the focus was on the importance of prayer and how men should lead the way in regard to prayer.

Then we looked at the command for women in I Timothy 2:9-15 and the focus was on how they were to dress, not trying to draw attention to themselves, and how they were not to be teaches in the sense of being in charge of teaching a congregation. It is not that women can't teach, but not in the sense of being the pastor and we will see that more this evening in our study!

Here in I Timothy chapter 3 the main focus is the qualifications for leadership in the church.

Now some of you, not being leaders, may be wondering what this has to do with you.

Hear me out on this. When you look at what Paul lists for qualifications for leaders you can easily see these are qualities that should be manifested by all Christians, not just the leadership.

It just makes sense to me. What are you going to say, *“Hey, I’m not a leader so I don’t have to be blameless, I can be greedy, I can be violent and-so-on!”*

Of course you are not going to do that.

Peter tells us in I Peter 1:13-16, **“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”**

Thus, these are lessons for each of us to learn and also lessons of order in the church.

Let me give you some background to set the stage for what we will be looking at in our study this evening here in I Timothy chapter 3.

At the end of Paul’s second missionary journey Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus to continue the work.

Then, on Paul’s third missionary journey, we see in Acts 20:31, that Paul spent three years in Ephesus building them up in the faith, raising up leaders in the church.

Now, some 10 years later the leadership is a mess. There is disorder in the church and Paul returns to set things right and he leaves Timothy behind then to finish up the work.

Timothy, a young man maybe in his late 30’s at this time, is now getting godly advice from Paul on what to look for in leaders, and how important that is.

You see, the church is a living organism and when a living organism is not in order it will die!

The same is true for the church and thus, we have church leadership to help establish organization or order within the church.

Notice what Paul says in Ephesians 4:12-16 regarding leadership in the church and how it is to bring stability, it should build up believers; nourish them in the faith, and-so-on.

Paul tells us that the leadership is **“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”**

Over the years I have learned some hard and valuable lessons about putting people in leadership roles. And one of them is that it is better to wait to put someone in leadership because if you don't and it doesn't work out, it is a lot harder to remove them!

Let me share this with you, it is one pastor's life experience you might say in regard to putting people into leadership positions.

We are told,

I learned early in ministry, and with some pain, to be very careful in respect to the character of those appointed to church leadership. By my mid-thirties, after a little more than a decade in the ministry, I had “seen it all” as to the duplicity [deception] and hypocrisy and immense evil that can exist in church leaders.

I knew a man who was prominent in his denomination and community, a married man with a family, who was discovered to be a practicing homosexual and regularly consorted with several of his male employees.

In another instance the church treasurer appeared in the church narthex [lobby area of the church] on a Sunday morning dead drunk, glass in hand, wildly whispering that he was leaving his wife and family – was departing that day on a private jet for the Middle East!

I have known pious, Bible-quoting, “soul-winning” murderers.

And over the years, while speaking at pastors’ conferences, my wife and I have had pastors’ trembling wives seek us out and reveal abuse and perversion by their publicly straight-laced husbands – tales that sound as if they were scripted by Flannery O’Connor!

I have said in times of despair that you have never been “had” until you have been “had” by a fellow born-again Christian who calls you “brother.”

Am I too cynical? I do not think so. I am a realist who also believes in the power of the gospel to deliver believing, humble, repentant sinners from their sins and instill a nobility of character that the angels admire.

Church leadership can attract people with mixed and sometimes outrightly sinful motives. The seeming prestige of spiritual leadership attracts some. The lure of power draws others. The spiritual directing of others' lives can be heady stuff. Some, I think, like the idea of having access to the supposed mysterious inner workings of the church. All these motives are empty pursuits, but that does not reduce the lure for some.

I say all this to emphasize that Christian ministry and leadership is without question a matter of character. One's authentic spirituality and Christian character is everything in church leadership. It is a sober fact that as goes the leadership so goes the church. . . .

- R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1-2 Timothy and Titus, pp. 77-78

So, as you can see, this is a very important topic and a very controversial one today. And I will say controversial because many people refuse to obey what God has said here in His Word regarding leadership in the church and they have adopted what the culture or society is telling them.

And you know me, it is not the culture or the society that is going to drive me, it is the Lord who is going to guide me.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in I Timothy chapter 3, starting in verse 1, as Paul lays out for Timothy and for us the qualifications for church leadership!

I TIMOTHY 3**VERSE 1**

Paul opens up with these words, “**This is a faithful saying . . .**” and the idea here is that this is something that stands the test of time, it is something that you can depend upon. It does not change as the culture changes or society changes, and that is important for us to understand!

Also, Paul just spoke of the fact that women are not to hold positions of authority in the church, but in saying that, please do not come to the conclusion that just because you are a man it makes you qualified for a leadership position. Not at all and Paul will expound on that as he lists the qualifications of a bishop!

Let me explain some of these terms for leadership positions, because there is a lot of confusion here.

As I have said, Paul is going to list the qualifications of a “**bishop**” or EPISKOPOS in the Greek.

This word, broken down means “over” (EPI) and “watcher” (SKOPOS) or an overseer.

And the idea here is that a bishop is a word that is used interchangeably with pastors and elders.

In Acts 20:28 he is called POIMEN or shepherd, and again in Acts 20:28 he is also one of the elders in the church or PRESBUTEROS in the Greek.

Thus, all bishops (senior pastors) are elders but not all elders are bishops.

Elders dealt with the spiritual matters of the church, while deacons, as we will see tonight, will deal with the physical matters of the church.

Many of you are new to Calvary Chapel and you may be wondering about our church government, how the church is organized.

Before I tell you what we have, let me share with you what we don't have, and you will see why, even though there are many who follow these forms for church government.

CONGREGATIONAL

This was popular in the 1800's but it is still around today. This type of church government came into being to protect against dictatorial pastors and thus, the congregation votes on everything.

They vote on the pastor, the carpeting, the paint and-so-on.

This is the least ideal of the three I will share with you and I believe it is unbiblical. I can't find any place in the Scriptures where the sheep lead the shepherd.

In fact, on average, you will find in any given church that 10% of the people are the core or the heart of the church.

Then there are some 30% of the people are getting fired up for the Lord.

And 60% are new believers and unbelievers just checking out the church.

And here's the thing. The church is not a democracy, the 60% leading the 40%, but a theocracy! It is governed by God and the Lord has placed shepherds in the role to oversee the church.

PRESBYTERIAN

This is an elder run congregation where the pastor is just one of the elders, all are equal, all are a vote on the board and majority wins.

This can be difficult if the elders try to tell the pastor what to do, what to preach on because he is hired and controlled by the elders since the pastor only has one vote.

I have seen churches split over this because the elders wanted to go in one direction; for instance, in this one church they wanted the pastor to teach on health, wealth and prosperity. The pastor saw the error in that and refused but he lost 2 to 1 and ended up leaving the church.

In this type of church government, the pastor is a hireling, and I once again don't see this as a biblical form of church government although it can work if you have elders that are good and godly men!

But when you think of a shepherd, it is the shepherd that is in charge of the sheep that has been entrusted to him, not shepherds!

EPISCOPALIAN

In this type of church government, which we have here at Calvary, the pastor is the shepherd of the church, and in Acts 20:28 he is called "**bishop**" or EPISKOPOS and pastor or shepherd, POIMEN.

He is also an elder or PRESBUTEROS but he shepherds the church and the elders are there to support him.

Paul, in speaking to these shepherds in Ephesus, said this in Acts chapter 20:28-32, and this is from The Amplified Bible, **“Take care and be on guard for yourselves and the whole flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you bishops and guardians, to shepherd (tend and feed and guide) the church of the Lord or of God which He obtained for Himself [buying it and saving it for Himself] with His own blood. I know that after I am gone, ferocious wolves will get in among you, not sparing the flock; Even from among your own selves men will come to the front who, by saying perverse (distorted and corrupt) things, will endeavor to draw away the disciples after them [to their own party]. Therefore be always alert and on your guard, being mindful that for three years I never stopped night or day seriously to admonish and advise and exhort you one by one with tears. And now [brethren], I commit you to God [I deposit you in His charge, entrusting you to His protection and care]. And I commend you to the Word of His grace [to the commands and counsels and promises of His unmerited favor]. It is able to build you up and to give you [your rightful] inheritance among all God’s set-apart ones (those consecrated, purified, and transformed of soul).”**

You see, a pastor watches over the flock that God has entrusted to him just as a shepherd does his sheep. You feed, them, care for them, protect them. That is the heart of a pastor, his love for the sheep!

Now can there be problems when a pastor is in charge, he is the boss? You bet there can be!

Then how do you keep them in check if they start to go astray?

Here at Calvary, if I started to teach heresy or was living in sin the elders can talk to me about it but if I refuse to listen and blow them off, then they would go to other Calvary senior pastors and then they would confront me on the issue and they are the ones that can remove me from this position.

And here is why this is so important, this form of church government.

You see, there is the safeguard for me that the elders can't rise up with a coup and try to remove me because they want that position or whatever the case may be.

Also, it is a safeguard for you in case I get weird or something!

We do see this pattern in the Scriptures, in the Old Testament, (Numbers 11:16-17) where Moses is accountable to God for the whole nation.

He, in a sense was the pastor or the shepherd.

Then there were the priests who dealt with the religious matters. They, in a sense, were the elders.

Next there were the Judges, who dealt with civil matters. They, in a sense, were the deacons who dealt with the physical matters of the church.

And then you had the children of Israel, the sheep.

So I feel that our church form of government is very biblical and I think it does work.

One more point before we move on.

Notice, if you desire this position, if God has placed this upon your heart, that is great.

Here's the thing, Paul says you "**desire a good work**" and that is true.

But this is not some kind of idle position you have. It is 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, even on vacation you can be on call.

For many, they desire money, cars, homes, fame – no that is not correct,

Paul says it is work and if you don't have this calling, don't get into the ministry!

Pastor Chuck would say to the men who were wanting to be a pastor, "If you can find anything else to do, then do it!"

It was as if he was discouraging them, and I guess he was. You see, if you feel you can do something else, then don't get into the ministry, do that because it is not going to be easy. You will have your heart broken over and over and over again. Yes, there is tremendous rewards, but there is a lot of pain involved as well.

Also, Calvin said, "For it is no light matter to represent God's Son in such a great task as erecting and extending God's kingdom, in caring for the salvation of souls whom the Lord Himself has designed to purchase with His own blood, and ruling the church which is God's inheritance."

It is as Jesus said in Mark 9:35, "**. . . 'If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'**"

And in Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus tells us what Biblical leadership is about. Notice what He says, "**. . . 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'**"

In other words, true Biblical leadership is humility, servanthood and sacrifice and it flows out of a relationship with God. And Jesus uses His life as an example for us to follow!

Now, as Paul goes on, he will speak on the qualifications of bishops or pastors.

VERSES 2-7

Today we pick leaders for all the wrong reasons. Please understand that leaders are not picked by who has the most money, the most influence, they know someone, because if it is done that way it will be a disaster!

God looks at the heart, which we can't see, and thus, He tells us to look for outward actions that are a reflection of his heart.

These are not suggestions for leaders, but they should flow from their lives, not that he is 100% perfect, but it is his desire to live according to the standards that God has set for leaders.

And again, this is something all of God's people should manifest in their lives, not just leaders, but leaders *must* exhibit these qualities, these characteristics!

As we read through these verses here in I Timothy chapter 3 we see this list of qualifications for pastors and elders or those who are overseeing the spiritual aspects of the church. And Paul lists 16 qualifications here in I Timothy chapter 3 and another 6 in Titus chapter 1, which we will cover when we get to Titus.

Blameless: Obviously none of us are perfect but Paul's point is that a leader doesn't have some blot on his life that someone can point to after he is saved.

Husband of one wife: This is better translated "*a one-woman man.*" A leader doesn't have to be married, but if he is, he can't have wandering eyes, he must be faithful to his wife. He can't be a Playboy! Also, if your wife died or you were biblically divorced, you can still be a leader.

Temperate: This speaks of a balance, that you are not given over to extremes. You must keep things in perspective and if you don't, your anxiety will affect the sheep that God has entrusted to you. For some, everything is a disaster, everything is falling apart, and if the shepherd behaves like that, then the sheep will just reflect that nature of the pastor and in that instance, it is not a good thing.

Sober minded: This speaks of a person who knows how to handle situations clearly. Of this Warren Wiersbe makes this point, "This does not mean he has no sense of humor, or that he is always solemn and sober. Rather it suggests that he knows the value of things and does not cheapen the ministry or the Gospel message by foolish behavior."

Good behavior: Remember the Jerry Lewis movie, *The Disorderly Orderly*? Well, here the idea is of being in order, respectable, the opposite of that movie! God is a God of order and not chaos.

Hospitable: They are willing to open their home and their lives up to people.

Able to teach: How important is this! In Nehemiah 8:8 we are told, "**So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.**" Leaders are to read the Word of God to the people, explain the Word of God to the people and then apply the Word of God to their lives. We truly need more men that can teach God's Word! If you are a pastor, you are a teacher!

He must “**hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.**” (Titus 1:9) He must be able to intelligently share his faith with unbelievers as well as to capably expound doctrine or instruct from the Word those needing instruction, correction or edification.

Not given to wine: Does this imply elders can’t drink? No, the idea is that he doesn’t linger long to wine, he doesn’t get drunk. Personally, I don’t drink alcohol because I feel it is a bad example and it can cause someone to stumble. I don’t think elders should drink alcohol!

Not violent: A leader is to have a gentle spirit, able to let things go. An elder must not be a violent man or one who is ready with his fists. He must be gentle in his demeanor, not contentious or looking for a fight.

Not greedy for Money: I like the way the KJV puts it, “**not greedy for filthy lucre.**” If you are in the ministry for money, you are in for the wrong reasons. Paul said in I Timothy 6:6-12, “**Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. 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.”

Gentle: A leader is not a dictator or Conan the Christian, but he has a gentle spirit towards people as Jesus did.

Not quarrelsome: There are times you just need to let it go. Some just like to argue. I knew a guy who loved to quarrel, and I think he thought he was being spiritual, but he wasn't. He was just looking to argue. Sometimes you just need to walk away and not add fuel to the fire!

Not covetous: This is a person who is never satisfied, they always want more, bigger, better. A leader who is consistently dissatisfied is not to be a leader of God's people.

Rules his own house well: If you can't manage your own family well, then you can't lead God's family either! What if a leader has a child that rebel's? That does not disqualify him from leadership unless the rebellion was the result of the parent's lack of discipline. And when a child rebels how is the situation handled? Is it ignored or is it dealt with in a godly way? You see, a child can rebel in spite of a good job the parents have done, and they are not removed from the ministry because of it. Look at Adam and Eve, God was their Father and yet they still rebelled! If a man is going to be a leader in the church, he must first give evidence through his family that he is a godly leader at home and that his family is following the godly example that he sets.

“An elder must be a man who passionately loves his wife; a man who loves and is devoted to his children, who constantly models for them a life of godliness and integrity. He must first be the spiritual leader of his family before he can be a spiritual leader of God’s family.”

Not a novice: You don’t put a new believer into the ministry; you allow them to grow, mature in the faith. In our culture a movie star, athlete, musician that gets saved is immediately placed into the spotlight to speak of his faith and that is usually a disaster. Allow them to grow first!

A good testimony: As unbelievers speak of you, do they do so in a good way, is your life an example of Christ? Don’t live two different kinds of lives, one inside the church that is holy and one outside the church that is far from holy. That is what a leader’s life should be, not perfect but growing. Paul said in Colossians 4:5, “**Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.**”

William MacDonald gives to us this insight on walking in wisdom. He wrote, “The snare of the devil is the trap which Satan lays for those whose lives are not consistent with their profession. Once he has caught men in this trap, he holds them up to ridicule, scorn, and contempt.”

Many a man has had the reputation of their entire ministry wiped out because they weren’t careful and fell into one of the enemy’s traps.

Leadership is not easy. In fact, it has been said that Biblical leadership is “***Bent knees, wet eyes and a broken heart.***”

It is because you care for them, you love them!

In Ephesus some of the leadership went astray, they taught heresy and Paul warned Timothy to know, before you replace them, make sure they meet the standards!

VERSES 8-12

Now Paul speaks of the qualifications of a deacon or DIAKONOS in the Greek.

It means servant and a deacon dealt with the physical matters of the church, setting up the chairs, cleaning the sanctuary, ushering, sound ministry and-so-on.

In Acts 6:1-6 we see an example of deacons being appointed.

We are told, **“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”**

And please understand that deacons are also accountable; you don’t just make someone an usher because there is a need, but because they fulfill the requirements of being a deacon!

What are they? Paul lists them for us.

Reverent: If you don't show proper respect towards those who are leaders in the church, then you are dishonoring God and you can't be a deacon! I actually had someone in the sanctuary say, while I was teaching, "Heresy" because he did not agree with what I was teaching. It was not loud enough for me to hear, but it was loud enough for those who were around him to hear. That is not showing proper respect. If you disagree with what I am saying, that is not how you handle it!

Not doubled-tongued: Let your yes be "Yes!" and your no be "No!" Speak the truth, don't try to deceive people or you can't be a deacon! I have also seen this where someone is nice to me when we are together, but behind my back, they speak nasty things about me. That is being double tongued!

Not given to much wine: The same idea here as we saw in the elder, and again I don't think a deacon should drink alcohol, it is a bad witness! But you can, the main point is that you are not to be drunk!

Not greedy for money: Don't use your position for your own gain – like an usher who is handing out his business cards as people are coming into the sanctuary!

Holding the mystery of faith with a pure conscience: In other words, you are to live what you say you believe! It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 1:12, **“For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.”** Now this mystery of faith is that which was once hidden, in the Old Testament, and is now revealed to us in the New Testament, it speaks of several things. ***The mystery of the incarnation*** – I Timothy 3:16. ***The mystery of the indwelling of Christ in believers*** – Colossians 1:26-27. ***The mystery of the saving Gospel*** – Colossians 4:3. ***The mystery of the rapture of the church*** – I Corinthians 15:51-58. ***And the mystery of lawlessness*** – II Thessalonians 2:7.

Proved blameless: Again, like the elders they are not to have some big blot in their life.

Wives not slanderers, temperate, faithful: Is this speaking of their wives? It could be but the word **“their”** is not in the original Greek and thus, this could be speaking of women deacons in the church! Some have a hard time with that thought, they don’t like it but women can be deacons in the church as we are told in Romans 16:1, **“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea.”** Phoebe was a deaconess! Thus, deaconesses or deacons’ wives are not to be slanderers or accusers but to be levelheaded, cool and faithful! And this can also be speaking of the husband and that his wife, as he is a deacon, is also part of the ministry and she must display these qualities in her life as well. I think both apply.

Husband of one wife: Again, the idea is ***“a one-woman man”*** or that his eyes are not wandering!

Rules his own house well: Again, if you can't take care of your own house, how can you care for God's? You can't!

I find it interesting that even those that care for the physical well-being of the church are held to a high standard for they are representing God in all that they do!

And really, these qualities are for all of us to follow, but especially for deacons here.

VERSE 13

I like the blessing Paul put in here for deacons because in our society, the more menial the task the less honor is given.

God does something different and says that all are important, not just the elders that deal with the spiritual matters of the church, but also the deacons who deal with the physical aspects of the church.

God is interested in faithful service and that is how He rewards!

The blessing here is they will be respected and given great confidence in the faith. You see, if you serve God faithfully, see His power and grace at work in your life; you will have a passion for even more service unto Him!

VERSES 14-15

I am sure everyone of you in here has heard of the great Vince Lombardi.

He was the coach of the Green Bay Packers football team, making it into the Hall of Fame for his great coaching ability.

Vince Lombardi emphasized the fundamentals of the game; blocking, tackling and because of that his players could execute these things better than anyone else, which enabled them to win championships!

At the half time of one game, against the Chicago Bears, the Packers were getting creamed and the players were prepared to get blasted for their lack-luster performance so far.

They knew their coach and they knew he would not tolerate what they were doing and not doing. As he walked into the locker room, he held up a football and said, “*Gentlemen, this is a football!*”

You see, he went right back to the basics!

How important it is to know how to conduct yourself in the church, what the church is all about, it is the fundamentals!

The church, the place where God’s people gather, is to be the pillar and the foundation of the truth and that truth is from the Word of God, not experience or feelings!

A pillar, of course, was used to support or hold up a structure.

But, in those days, a pillar was often set up free standing in a public marketplace and notices were posted on it, in that context it became a proclaimer.

The first thing that we Christians are to do as “**pillars**” is hold up and proclaim God’s truth to the people of this world (the Great Commission).

But also, Paul says that we, as the church of the living God, are not just the pillars but also the “**ground of the truth.**”

This is interesting to me because the word “ground” suggests a bulwark and the dictionary says of this word, that it is, “a solid wall-like structure raised for defense.”

In other words, we as Christians are not only to proclaim the Word of God but we are also to defend it against the attacks of the enemy, or as Jude reminds us, “**earnestly defending the faith.**”

Warren Wiersbe sums it up like this, “As a *bulwark*, the church protects the truth and makes sure it does not fall . . . When local churches turn away from the truth (1 Tim. 4:1ff) and compromise in their ministry, then the enemy makes progress. Sometimes church leaders must take a militant stand against sin and apostasy. This does not make them popular, but it does please the Lord.”

Remember what Jesus said in John 17:17, “**Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.**”

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, “**Sanctify them [purify, consecrate, separate them for Yourself, make them holy] by the Truth; Your Word is Truth.**”

May we truly believe that and apply it to our lives so that as we speak, we have so much of God’s Word in our lives that it just flows forth from us!

Listen to this regarding truth. We are told,

In a debate with Dennis Praeger, a believer, atheist Oxford University professor Jonathan Glover, said, “It doesn’t really matter whether a person has a belief system that is biblical or godly. The important thing is that they believe in something.”

Praeger replied, “Imagine, Professor Glover, that you’re in downtown Los Angeles. It’s two o’clock in the morning. Your car breaks down. You get out. You hear footsteps. You turn around to see ten big young men walking toward you. Would it make a difference if you knew they had just come from a Bible study?”

It does matter what people believe! And praise be to the Lord that we are a part of the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.

What is sad today is that many churches today are not the pillar and ground of the truth but they have allowed into the church the philosophies of the world, the basic principles of the world and we see people's lives falling apart because lies will do nothing for you, except hurt you.

We need the truths of God found in the Word of God to direct our lives and keep us strong and the church needs to stand strong in this area!

One writer put it like this, "The church provides the solid bedrock of truth. Pillars stand upright on the foundation as columns and give the building its structure and beauty. The church as a pillar upholds the truth. Of course, the truth comes from God. God is the source of truth and not the church. But whenever the church is faithful to God's Word, it is the foundation and pillar of God's truth in this world!" (R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1-2 Timothy and Titus, pp. 77-78)

And here is the wonderful thing. The closer we draw to Jesus, the closer we draw to one another. Think about it. Are you at odds with people? Are you angry with people? You need to repent and get right with the Lord. Draw close to Him and as you do, your relationship with others will be worked out!

A. W. Tozer gave to us this example. “Has it every occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being turned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

Again, the closer we are to Him, to Jesus, the closer we are to each other!

VERSE 16

Why does Paul start out with these words, “**And without controversy . . .**”?

“When he says ‘without controversy,’ I suppose he means that there ought to be no controversy about these facts, though controversies have arisen concerning them, and always will, since the most self-evident truth will always find self-evident fools to contradict it.”

(Spurgeon)

And he goes on to say, “**. . . great is the mystery of godliness.**”

First of all, the word “**great**” is “mega” in the Greek. And keep in mind that Paul is not saying that this mystery is so great that we can’t know it. The idea here with this word is that it is a revealed truth, something that has been revealed to us by God.

Thus, this is a wonderful truth, a very great truth!

Why is this so great?

Because it concerns the Person and work of Jesus Christ on our behalf!

Spurgeon summed it up like, this, “Observe that the comprehensive summary of the gospel here given is contained in six little sentences, which run with such regularity of measure in the original Greek, that some have supposed them to be an ancient hymn; and it is possible that they may have been used as such in the early church.”

Also, keep in mind that this is all born out of the idea of, “**. . . how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground [foundation] of the truth.**”

So what is this truth that God’s people hold up, that is the pillar and foundation of the church?

It is these six statements!

That God added to His deity humanity – the incarnation – *God manifested in the flesh!*

Jesus was *justified by the Spirit* not meaning that He was sinful but that He was declared to be righteous in His baptism, (Matthew 3:16-17), and on the Mount of Transfiguration, (Matthew 17:5), and in His resurrection, (Acts 2:32-33).

Angels, saw him, which probably refers to the resurrection, (Matthew 28:20-7) but we also see angels at His birth.

He was *preached among the Gentiles* and believed on in the world, which Paul was the primary force here.

He was believed on in the world. Notice that it doesn’t say believed on “*by the world*” but believed on “*in the world.*” (John 15:18-19) The world hated Him and put Him to death. But there were those who did believe on Him. And when it’s all said and done Jesus will have been believed on by those from every “*nation, tribe, tongue, and people*” (Rev.14:6)

And lastly, *received up in glory* which gives us confidence that one day we too will be raised in glory as God is preparing us down here to fit in up there.

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 3:18, **“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”**

But until that time, we have the Gospel message, the Good News of Jesus birth, death and resurrection to bring to people, the pillar and foundation of truth!

What a great lesson for us, to know the fundamentals of our faith, to get back to the basics of our faith.

Verse 16 speaks of what Christ has done, what we are to do, and our future restoration in glory with Him. May we not lose sight of that focus as happened with this church in this story.

We are told,

There once was an old church in England. A sign on the front of the building read, “We preach Christ crucified.”

After time, ivy grew up and obscured the last word. The motto now read, ***“We preach Christ.”***

The ivy grew some more, and the motto read, ***“We preach.”***

Finally, ivy covered the entire sign, and the church died.

Such is the fate of any church that fails to carry out its mission in the world!

May we keep the main thing the main thing and that main thing is Jesus.

Don’t lose Jesus in the message.

Also, you need to cultivate that relationship with Jesus, or, like the ivy, it will cover your life and people will not be able to see Jesus!

Let me leave you with these words from Paul in I Corinthians 1:22-24. He says, **“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”**

Praise God for the message of life that we have received and that we now bring forth to a world that has lost hope!

It is truly Good News!