

Sermon outline and notes:

© Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

Monday, March 28, 2011

## I Timothy 3:15-16 “The Church of the Living God”

Intro. I grew up in a church-going family. I have gone to church all my life. I probably have never missed more than 2 Sundays in a row. There was a time when I didn't love going to church. The church I went to as a teenager was formal and spiritually dead. But ever since I started going to a Baptist church, I can say that I have loved going to church.

I want to tell you who else loves the church. God loves the church. He has great plans for the church. And even though we have failures and problems, God still loves the church. He will never abandon the church as His way of reaching & influencing the world, & nor should we.

My text today calls the church, “the church of the living God.” Our God is called “the living God” some 30 times in Scripture. He is not a dead idol. He is real, & very much alive, and His church should be a living, vibrant force for good in this world. On this anniversary Sunday, let's see what we need to know and do to be the church that God wants us to be.

First, we need to understand:

### I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

What is the church? Is it the building where we meet? Is it just another human organization? Are we nothing more than a religious social or service club? Some today seem to expect the church to be an entertainment club! But what does the Bible say? This is what we know about the nature of the church from our text. First of all:

A. The Church Is a Called Out Assembly of Believers – That's the meaning of the Greek word translated “church” (*ekklesia*), which was used of any assembly that was called together for secular or religious purposes. But we are going to focus on the biblical meaning of the word. First, it means:

1. We Are Called to Salvation - We have responded to God's gospel call to salvation. And only those who have responded to the Gospel call are to become members of a church.

When I was 9 years old I began to sense that God was calling me to be saved, to give my heart to Jesus. But at that time I said no. But by the time I was 12 years old, that call of God came again, and I said “yes” to Jesus. I answered the call and asked Jesus to be my Savior. Then I joined His church by baptism.

Are you among those who have answered the gospel call to be saved? Have you responded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit? Have you joined His church? If not, you can take care of that today.

2. We Are Called to Assemble on a Regular Basis - Believers are to gather each week to worship God, receive exhortation from God's Word, and go out to serve Him. Hebrews 10:25 says that we are not to be “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another....” I'm glad we have a TV ministry, but it is no substitute for the church. We are not only called to salvation, but we are also called to *gather* together for worship on a regular basis.

So the church is a group of believers who have been saved, and who gather for worship, discipleship, fellowship, and service. But we also see in v.15 of our text that:

B. The Church Is the House of God - Paul is not referring to the church *building* here. The New Testament church did not own buildings that they called churches, though the Jewish temple was called “the house of God” (Mt. 12:4; 21:13; Lk. 6:4; 11:51; John 2:16-17, etc.). Instead, Paul may be comparing the church to the *household* of people who belong to God (cf. Mt. 10:6; Luke 1:27, 33, 69; 2:4; 11:17; Acts 2:36; 7:42, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

This reminds us that when you are saved & become a member of a church, you become part of the family of God. You have a church family. My church family means a whole lot to me. How about you? And who is the head of this household? God is the head. Christ is the head of His church. Since it is *God’s* house, let us obey His instructions for the church. We’ll talk more about that in just a moment.

C. The Church Is a *Living* Church – As Paul says in the last of v.15, we are a part of the church of the “living God.” If we are the church of the living God, then *we* should be a living, vibrant church. Jesus said in John 14:19, “Because I live, you will live also.” The Church is also called “the Body of Christ.” If we are truly connected to Christ by salvation, we are indeed a church that is alive, for Christ is alive! There ought to be life and energy when we gather for worship.

On the other hand, if a church is dead, or if a church dies & closes its doors, it gives a bad testimony to the world. Years ago it was said that God is dead. Well, when you visit some churches, you would get the impression that their God is dead. But the true church is alive and vibrant, because we are the church of the *Living* God. While God lives, a local church may die, but His church universal can never die. No matter how much they may persecute the church, the church will never die, for it is the church of the living God.

If church is boring, or if you are dead and unresponsive in your worship, then perhaps the problem is not with the church, but with *you*. How can you desire to go to church, and seek the things of God, if you are still dead in trespasses & sins (Eph. 2:1). If you’re not saved today, may God help you to receive new life in Christ!

Once you become a member of a church, and understand the nature of the church, next you need to know:

## II. THE CONDUCT OF THE CHURCH

When you are at home, or school, or at work, there are certain standards of conduct that you should follow. The same is true of the church. So the Word of God gives guidance concerning proper conduct in the church. Paul says in v.15, “but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God...” “Ought” (*dei*) is literally “must,” what is necessary and right. There are certain standards of conduct that are not optional. Evidently, Paul

---

<sup>1</sup> But on the other hand, he may also be comparing the church to a house by way of illustration. For example, just as a house has a builder, even so God is building His church on this earth. Jesus said in Mt. 16:18, “on this rock I will build My church...” And the apostle Peter said, “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house...” (1 Pet. 2:5). And there is never a child of God brought into the Church by man’s contrivance or man’s persuasions; each precious stone is added by God’s call, & God’s saving work. We are but instruments in His hand as we proclaim the Gospel, and witness for Him. So let’s build God’s church by praying unto God to save souls, and add to His church. 1 Cor. 3:6 expresses this truth with a different metaphor, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”

was concerned about the conduct of some people in church. It can be quite embarrassing how people act in church.

One general principle to follow is this: We must not treat the church as a common place, a common organization. It is special and holy. What may be appropriate in a common, secular gathering of people is not necessarily appropriate during the worship of our God, who is holy. You should not treat the worship service like a ballgame. Don't wear a ball cap into church. Don't bring food into a worship service. Don't surf the internet on your smart phone, or text your friends. Can't you set aside common activities for about an hour & 10 minutes on each Lord's Day, and engage in holy worship unto God? And unless you have a good reason, don't disturb people by walking out, especially while someone is speaking or singing. If you need to slip out, do it during congregational singing, or the offering.

Parents, you have a responsibility to teach your children how to conduct themselves in church. Back in the old days, when a child acted up in church, mom or dad would see to it that they lived to regret it!

Notice again that Paul says "I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself..." He is talking about this letter to Timothy. So let's see a few examples of proper conduct that he gives in this letter. First, we should:

A. Engage in Peaceful, Godly, Reverent Living – In chapter 2, v.1 Paul encourages us to pray for others, and give thanks to God when we gather for worship. We'll talk more about that later. Then he says in the last of v.2, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence." "Quiet" refers to an absence of outside disturbance, while "peaceable" refers to an absence of inner disturbance. We should live that way both inside and outside the church. The church is no place for arguing & fighting. No church is perfect, so while there is a place to express disagreement, we should do so in the right way, and in the right spirit. Other Scriptures back up what Paul is saying here. 1 Thess. 4:11-12 says, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands... so that you may behave properly toward outsiders." We must never attempt to disrupt society by creating disturbances. The church is not to be a political agitator, perceived as an enemy to national security or peace. Instead, Christians are to be model citizens, a quiet peace-loving people.

B. Dress Properly for Worship – I preached about this last Sunday night. But most of you did not hear that sermon, and let me summarize. In v.9 Paul says, "in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation..." The word translated "in like manner" (*hosautos*) shows that Paul is continuing his remarks about conduct in connection with public worship. He gives instructions to the men of the church in v.8, and then to the women of the church beginning in v.9. So Paul says in v.9 that women are to dress "in modest apparel." The Greek word for "modest" (*kosmios*; KJV "shamefacedness") actually means "well arranged, orderly" and thus appropriate. Furthermore, in v.10 Paul says that women should put on what "is proper." What you wear should be seemly, and fitting for a *Christian* woman, or young lady when you come to worship.

Then in the middle of v.9 Paul uses two words to describe what is appropriate for Christian women. First, they would dress "with propriety." This word (*aidos*) probably refers to dressing with modesty, reverence (see Hebrews 12:28), and with due regard for others. The other word (*sophrosune*) for proper dress is "moderation," which refers to "good sense, soundness of mind, and self-control." Ladies, you should dress sensibly & with discretion. Exercise some restraint.

Don't put on something that would cause your husband or father to exclaim, "You are not going to wear *that* are you? Are you out of your mind?"

What would be improper, and not sensible? First, I believe it is improper for a woman to dress in such a way that you provoke lust in a man, especially at church. Women should not dress in such a way that men are distracted from the Word & worshipping God as they ought! Surely you know what I'm talking about. The more skin you show & the more skin-tight your clothing is, the more a *normal* man is going to be provoked to lust. That's just a fact. So be sensible, and *think* about how you should dress, especially to church.

Secondly, I believe it is improper to wear clothes for the purpose of showing off. I believe it is proper to dress nicely when you come to worship the King of the universe. And we all like to receive complements. But don't *over* do it just to draw attention to yourself. Worship is a time it should not be about us, but about God, about the Lord Jesus Christ. May our attention be upon Him!

Furthermore, Paul says in v.10 that you should dress in a way that "is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." How you dress should not contradict your profession of Christ, but confirm the message that you are a godly woman who loves God and does good works. If someone were to see you in your Sunday clothes out in public, would they tend to conclude that you are probably a Christian by the way you dress, or would they see no difference between you & an unbeliever?

I admit that I am skipping over the rest of this section. If you missed the sermon last Sunday night, you can order the CD!

Then Paul adds something else about proper conduct in church:

C. Elect Leaders Properly – In chapter 3 Paul gives instructions about electing leaders in the church. We are not to elect leaders based on popularity, or good looks, but based on their Christian character. Pastors must also exhibit giftedness in teaching. Some churches elect deacons based on how successful they are in the business world. We are having deacon nomination in May, and deacon election in July. Be sure you read over vv.8-12 before you nominate or vote for a deacon. Paul says we should know how we are to conduct ourselves in the church of the living God.

So I hope you have a better understanding of the nature of the church, and the conduct of the church. Now let me share with you:

### III. THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

What is the work of the church? What are we supposed to do? First, we should:

A. Preserve & Uphold the Truth of God – The last of v.15 says the church of the living God is "the pillar and ground of the truth." Though many today deny the concept of absolute truth, the Bible confirms that God has given His truth to His Church. Jesus said in John 17:17, "Your word is truth." My Bible does not just contain truth; it *is* the truth. I'm not talking about the fluctuations of personal & worldly opinions, but I'm talking about the eternal word of God. The apostle Peter affirms the Old Testament quotation, "The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever" (1 Peter 1:24-25).

We have received the truth from God in His word, and the church is to uphold the truth, and stay true to the teachings of God's Word. Paul mentioned this work of the church because he could foresee the rise of false doctrine. He wrote in 4:1, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in

latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” Just as Paul predicted, cults & false religions have arisen through the centuries. Then Paul said in Acts 20:30, “Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” Indeed, since the 1950’s theological liberalism has trickled into our churches, and for the past 40 years it has become more like a flood. I am referring to the type of liberalism that denies the Word of God, the Bible, as being completely trustworthy.

In light of this tragic reality, the Holy Spirit led Paul to compare the church to a “pillar,” like the pillar of a temple.<sup>2</sup> Paul does not intend to teach that the church is the source of truth, or the church establishes what is truth. Instead, as the pillar supports the roof, so the church supports & lifts high the glorious truth of the gospel. If pillars are the means to the continued existence of a building, so the church is the means to the continued presentation of the truth to the world. The church does not manufacture the truth; we simply have a supporting role in proclaiming the truth. And if we do not preserve & proclaim God’s truth, who will? The Government will not. Most of the educational systems of this world will not uphold God’s truth. Business will not. The secular media will not. So the church must uphold the truth. The belief of God’s truth by people in this world is largely dependant upon your instrumentality. The church is to be the one place where people can go to hear the truth.

Our Christian & Baptist forefathers defended the truth years ago. The doctrines which we preach to you are doctrines that have been baptized in blood—swords have been drawn to slay the confessors of them. They were called to maintain the truth when they had to die for it. Many of us are cowards compared to them!

So what are we to do? We should defend the Truth, & hold fast to the truth. Paul wrote in 6:20, “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust....” Regardless of how the world changes in their morals, beliefs, and values, we are to remain true to the Word of God. We are to guard and preserve the truth of the Gospel, and the moral truths of God as well. If we do not believe & defend the truth of God’s Word, nothing else will really matter. All that we believe & do is based on the Word of God. We should also defend the truth against false doctrine. Back in 1:3 Paul told Timothy to remain in Ephesus that he “may charge some that they teach no other doctrine.” Of course, there will always be those who oppose the teaching of God’s Word as truth. So Paul said in 6:12, “Fight the good fight of faith....” May God always raise up those who will be faithful to His Word, and who will speak out against the heresies of our day. May God give us courage to stand up for the right!

We should not only uphold the truth, but the work of the church is also to:

B. Share the Truth of God – What good is it to uphold & defend the truth if we do not share it? We are not to put our light under a bushel. Jesus said we are to be the light of the world. So let us share the truth of God with two groups of people. First, share the truth of God:

1. With Unbelievers – In 1 Timothy 2:4 Paul says that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Right here in 3:16 Paul affirms some basic truths of the Gospel. He says, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.” The words, “without controversy” means this is what is confessed by all true Christians. Most all scholars recognize this as an early Christian

---

<sup>2</sup> That would have special significance to those in Ephesus with Timothy. Ephesus was the home of the temple of Diana, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It had 127 pillars. Some were studded with jewels and overlaid with gold.

hymn.<sup>3</sup> The order of each phrase is not fully chronological, but poetic. This hymn begins with Christ's lowly birth, and ends with a reference to His glorious ascension. Jesus must be the theme and focus of our message to the world. Let us proclaim that Jesus is God's Son, manifest in human flesh. Why did He come? Paul said in 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He did that by dying for our sins on the cross. Yet His enemies proclaimed that He died because of *His* sins, so our hymn also proclaims that he was "Justified in the Spirit." I believe that is a reference to the resurrection. By the power of the Spirit the sentence of death was reversed, and God thereby proclaimed the innocence of His Son (Rom. 1:4<sup>4</sup>). Then the hymn also speaks of His resurrection when He was "Seen by angels." Angels announced His resurrection. Then the hymn proclaims our mission. He was "Preached among the Gentiles." Then the hymn proclaims our Lord's victory when we sing Christ was "Believed on in the world, [and] Received up in glory." Christ ascended to the right hand of God.

Do you believe what you read in v.16. If so, confess your faith by saying "Amen."

There was an elderly gentleman who was hard of hearing. In fact, he was so hard of hearing that he could hardly hear what was going on. Yet he kept coming to church. So someone said, "Friend, why do you still go to church even though you can't hear what is going on?" He said, "It's because I want everyone to know whose side I'm on."

We should not only share the truth with unbelievers, but also:

2. With the Saved – Back in v.2 of chapter 3 Paul says a pastor should be "able to teach." In 5:17 Paul says that teaching elders should "labor in the word and doctrine." Clearly, we are to teach & share with Word of God to make disciples & help believers grow in their faith. In fact, in 4:6 Paul refers to the fact that believers need to be "nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine...."

Finally, I will focus our attention on one more work of the church:

C. Give Priority to Prayer – In 2:1 Paul says, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men." We are to be a praying church, and Paul indicates here that this is of first importance. Jesus said in Matthew 21:13, "My house shall be called a house of prayer...." In v.8 we see that the men of the church are to take the lead in setting an example in prayer. On this anniversary Sunday I want to challenge the church to be even more of a praying church. Pray in your S.S. classes. Pray with us in the worship services. Pray with us at the Wednesday night prayer meetings. More of you men could join us for prayer on Friday mornings. Perhaps a group of ladies would form a prayer group. One of the most important works of the church is prayer!

Conclusion: Our church is now a 3<sup>rd</sup> of a century old. Though our total membership is still growing, our attendance has been pretty flat the last several years. Are we going to begin a slow process of aging & dying as a church? Or are we going to continue to grow, and be healthy, & vibrant? We can grow stronger if we remember what our church is supposed to be and do. We are not just another social club. We are a called-out assembly of believers. We are the household of God. We are the church of the living God. We are *His* church. Let us conduct ourselves according to directions found in His Word. If we do not please God, we will not enjoy His power & blessing. And let us recommit ourselves on this anniversary Sunday to doing the true work of the church: Uphold the truth, share the truth, and intercede for others.

---

<sup>3</sup> The six parts are balanced and rhythmic and the ends of the Greek verbs are very much alike.

<sup>4</sup> "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

Some here today need to take the first step in being a part of this church. I have briefly shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God is calling some to be saved. Will you believe in Him? Will you publicly confessed your faith in Christ? Will you followed Him in baptism?

Others have been saved & baptized, but you need a new church home. If so, we invite you to join our church on this anniversary Sunday. Help us make this church an even stronger church, and force for good in our community.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: 1-II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 93-104; Donald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1974); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: The Pastoral Epistles* in Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).