

Message Three

The Function of the Church
(1)
The House of the Living God and
the Pillar and Base of the Truth

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 1:2; 3:16-17; 10:32; 11:16; Eph. 2:19, 21-22

- I. ***The house of God modifies the church, and the pillar and base of the truth also modifies the church; the house of God and the pillar and base of the truth describe what the church is—1 Tim. 3:15.***
- II. **The church is the house of God—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16:**
 - A. The expression *the church of God* indicates that the church is possessed by God and that the church has the nature of God and is constituted with the element of God—Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:13.
 - B. The church is *of* God because it is produced of God as the source and has God as its nature and essence, which are divine, universal, and eternal—1 Cor. 3:16-17. C. The content of the church essentially is God Himself—10:32.
- III. **The church of God is the house of the living God—1 Tim. 3:15:**
 - A. The house of God is the household of God—Eph. 2:19:
 1. The dwelling place—the house—and the family—the household—are one entity—a group of called, regenerated ones indwelt by God Himself—1 Pet. 1:3; 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:16.
 2. Just as Christ is not separate from the members of His Body but dwells in them, the Father is not a separate member of His household but is in all the children—Rom. 8:16; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:16.
 3. The house of God is organic in the divine life, organic in the divine nature, and organic in the Triune God—Eph. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:4; Matt. 28:19.
 4. Because the church is organic, the church grows—Eph. 2:21.
 - B. In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul refers to God as the living God—1 Tim. 3:15:
 1. The living God, who lives in the church, must be subjective to the church and not merely objective—1 Cor. 3:16.
 2. Because God is living, the church as the house of God is also living in Him, by Him, and with Him.
 3. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together.
 - C. As the house of God, the church is the dwelling place of God—the place where God can have His rest and put His trust—Eph. 2:22.
 - D. The church as the house of God—the Father's house—is the enlarged, universal, divine-human incorporation as the issue of Christ's being glorified by the Father with the divine glory—John 12:23; 13:31-32; 14:20.
- IV. **The Lord wants His church to know Him as the truth and to receive and enjoy Him as life—1 John 1:1-2, 5-6; John 11:25; 14:6; 18:37b:**

- A. *Truth* means “reality,” denoting all the real things revealed in God’s Word, which are mainly Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 2:4; Col. 2:9, 19.
- B. The church is built with the divine life in Christ, a life that is indestructible, un-conquerable, and able to withstand decline into death from any source—1 Tim. 1:16; 6:12, 19; 2 Tim. 1:1, 10; Titus 1:2; 3:7.
- C. Both the truth and the life are Christ Himself—John 14:6:
 - 1. Life is the inward and intrinsic element, and truth is the outward definition and explanation—1:4; 18:37b; 8:12, 32, 36; 17:17.
 - 2. The experience of the Lord as life is contained in the Lord as the truth; in order to experience the Lord as life, we must know the truth—14:6; 11:25; 8:32, 36.
- D. The content of the church should be the growth of Christ in us as truth and life—Col. 2:19; 3:4:
 - 1. Truth is the shining, the expression, of the divine light—John 8:12, 32, 36; 1 John 1:5-6.
 - 2. The standard of the truth should constantly be raised higher among all the churches in the Lord’s recovery—1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15.
 - 3. We need to grow in life, be saved in life, be filled with life, and reign in life—Eph. 4:13-16; Rom. 5:10, 17.

V. The church is the supporting pillar and the holding base of the truth—1 Tim. 3:15:

- A. The truth is the Triune God, having Christ as the embodiment, center, and expression, to produce the church as the Body of Christ, the house of God, and the kingdom of God—Col. 2:9; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 1 Tim. 3:15; John 3:3, 5.
- B. *Truth* in 1 Timothy 3:15 refers to the real things revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God’s New Testament economy—Matt. 16:16, 18; Eph. 5:32:
 - 1. The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of all these realities.
 - 2. A local church should be such a building that holds, bears, and testifies the truth, the reality, of Christ and the church—2:22.
- C. The church bears Christ as the reality; the church testifies to the whole universe that Christ, and Christ alone, is the reality—John 1:14, 17; 14:6.
- D. As the pillar that bears the truth and the base that upholds the pillar, the church testifies the reality, the truth, of Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ—Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4.
- E. In order for the church to function as the pillar and base of the truth, we all need to arrive at the full knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1.

VI. When every brother and sister is full of life and truth, the church will be strong as the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth; this is what is needed in the Lord’s recovery today—1 Tim. 3:15.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:14-16

First Timothy 3:14-16 is the most crucial portion in the four books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Paul has covered the matters of the different teachings, the economy of God, the need for the leading ones to have a prayer life so that all the other brothers may follow, and the charge to the sisters to remain in faith, love, and holiness with sobriety. Furthermore, the elders have been established and the deacons have been appointed. A church that has all these characteristics is certainly wonderful. Now in 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul tells us that the church is the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. Then in verse 16 he goes on to declare, “And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.” In these verses Paul presents an extremely high standard for the church.

Among Christians today the standard of the church is far below God’s standard revealed in 3:15 and 16. In order to reach this standard, the church must have all the characteristics described in the first two and a half chapters of 1 Timothy. There must be no different teachings, and God’s economy must be practiced continually. The leading ones must have a prayer life, and all the other brothers must follow them to pray in every place. Furthermore, the sisters should remain in faith, love, and holiness with sobriety. Then the government of the church must be established with the two offices of elders and deacons. It is our expectation to practice this kind of church life. We praise the Lord that in His recovery we have seen such a church life at least to a certain extent. Whenever God’s standard for the church is attained as outlined in 1 Timothy, the church will function as the house of the living God and the pillar and base upholding the truth. This is also the great mystery of godliness, the manifestation of God in the flesh. Not only was the Lord Jesus the manifestation of God in the past; the church today should also be the manifestation of God. This is the goal, the aim, of these four Epistles written by Paul.

Even though Paul witnessed the beginning of the decline of the church, he was not disappointed or discouraged. Because he had both insight and foresight, he could be encouraged. He knew that some day and somehow the church would reach God’s standard. The majority of the believers may decline, but a small number at least would be chosen, preserved, and established to practice the church life according to the divine standard.

We in the Lord’s recovery can testify of the great difference between the recovery and today’s organized Christianity. Reconciliation between the two is impossible. All the saints should be encouraged that the situation in the Lord’s recovery is heading toward God’s standard. This standard is that the church should function as the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, and as the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. The church life today must be the manifestation of God in the flesh. When visitors, including those who have not yet believed in the Lord, come to the meetings and behold such a manifestation, they will no doubt be greatly surprised. They may say, “What is this? It is different from anything we have seen elsewhere. It is even different from the church services in religion.” Yes, the church is different; it is the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, and the manifestation of God in the flesh. Every local church must reach this standard and continue according to it. There should be no decline; rather, we should maintain God’s standard until the glorious appearing of our Head, the Savior, Jesus Christ.

In 3:14 Paul says, “These things I write to you, hoping to come to you shortly.” By *these things* Paul means all that he has covered thus far in this Epistle. When he wrote this book, he was hoping to come shortly to see Timothy.

THE HOUSE OF THE LIVING GOD

Verse 15 continues, “But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.” The words *know how one ought to conduct himself* indicate that this book gives instructions concerning the way to take care of a local church.

According to Paul’s word in verse 15, the church is the house of God. The Greek word rendered “house” may also be translated “household.” The same word is used in 3:4, 5, and 12 (*houses*). The household, the family, of God is the house of God. The house and the household are one thing—the assembly that is composed of the believers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6). The reality of this house as the dwelling place of the living God is in our spirit (Eph. 2:22). We must live and act in our spirit so that in this house God can be manifested as the living God.

As God’s dwelling place, the church is both God’s house and His household, His family. In the Old Testament, the temple and God’s people, His family, were two separate things. But in the fulfillment in the New Testament, the dwelling place and the family are one. The family is God’s dwelling place, and God’s dwelling place is His family. As we have indicated, the Greek word for *house* may be translated either as “house” or “household.” According to God’s New Testament economy, God’s family is His house. These are not two separate things; they are actually one. We are God’s family and also His temple, His dwelling place.

In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul specifically refers to God as the *living* God. The living God, who lives in the church, must be subjective to the church rather than objective. An idol in the heathen temple is lifeless. The God who not only lives but also acts, moves, and works in His living temple, the church, is living. Because He is living, the church too is living in Him, by Him, and with Him. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together. The living church is the house and the household of the living God. Hence, it becomes the manifestation of God in the flesh. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, second edition, pp. 53-56)