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Series: [The Anatomy of a Church](#)

# The Anatomy of a Church (36)

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[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 11/02/14)

## Fundamental Priorities of a Good Church

**1 Timothy 3:14-16 (NASB)**

<sup>14</sup> I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;

<sup>15</sup> but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

<sup>16</sup> By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

Those of you, who know me, know that I am addicted to the church. I'm a fanatic for the church. I love the church, it is my life and breath, and it is the source of my highest joy and my most overwhelming anguish. It is on my mind all the time. I sort of live in the aura of the church, all that it is and all that it calls for and requires and provides.

It's a real adventure to be a pastor. I could not be a president and...I could deal with that. I could not be a radio preacher or an author that would be all right. But if I were not a pastor, that would be the greatest loss of my entire life.

The highlight of my life has been a stint at Living Word Christian Center. The church has never ceased to be an adventure, really an amazing adventure. The earliest years of life in the church were almost euphoric. The church was growing very rapidly, people were loving the Word of God. Dynamic conversions taking place and far more than anybody ever expected.

We were...we were learning as we went. I didn't know a whole lot. I was discovering during the week, preaching it on Sunday and implementing it the next week in the church. So we were all in this big adventure trying to find out what the church really was, trying to sort out theology, interpret the Bible, figure out how to apply it and it was just one incredible adventure.

But always from the beginning, the goal was to...to develop the church in such a way as to make it what the Lord of the church wanted it to be, to look at the Word of God and try to discern there what revelation in the New Testament tells us about the church and what God's plans and purposes and expectations for the church are, and then figure out how to implement that and to bring about the perfect will of God in the church through totally imperfect people. Therein lays the great challenge. And they all know that I am equally imperfect, and that even makes the challenge greater. But it has been an immense adventure.

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And when I speak about the church, I'm not speaking about something sort of off the top of my head, or off the cuff, or something I hope might be true, but when I talk about the church I'm talking about that to which I've given most attention throughout my entire life. And I believe that one can understand what the Bible says about the church. I don't think that's intended to be ambiguous. I don't think the Lord said, "Now go out and build the church and it's all going to be a riddle and see if you can figure the riddle out."

I think it's patently obvious what the church is to be. And so once you discern that in the Scripture, you can move to implementing that in the lives of people. And that's what we've been trying to do in all these many years and God has allowed us to raise up a seminary training program where we can train men to do the same thing and to have influence around the world with pastors and teachers and leaders who want the same thing. And this has been the great joy of my life.

And while some people may assume that the church is somewhat complex, I'm convinced that what really makes the church effective is pretty simple. And that's what I want to share with you. I'm going to unfold some of them and there are going to be things that I don't think will surprise you. In fact, there may be a certain amount of indifference as you hear me say them. And I understand that because I've learned something being around for a number of generations in the church. I was there when I was in my twenties so I was there when the young people really were the heart and soul of the church and now it's those people who matured and become the elders in the church, who give leadership to the church...I've seen their children, I've seen their grandchildren.

**I've watched the processes of generations in one single place.** And I have found that with some exceptions it's generally true that the **first generation** fights for the discovery and establishment of the truth. There's a real exhilaration, there's a real passion in that first generation, new Christians, people just awakening to the realities of divine truth. There's a **passion to learn it, to know it** and **defend it** and **fight for it**.

**The second generation** tends to sort of try to maintain it, and maybe even extend it. The first ten, fifteen years of Living Word Christian Church, maybe even heading toward twenty years, we were really working hard to crystalize and clarify doctrine. That's why the church has such an extensive doctrinal statement, which is also the doctrinal statement of the over 600 plus churches that we have planted world-wide and seminary training program.

But that **first generation** was primarily committed to the development of...of the truth, to understanding the truth, to systematizing the truth thoroughly consistently with Scripture, not imposing it upon Scripture. **Establishing the truth, discovering it, refining it, and establishing it.**

And now we're in the **second generation** and what we're seeing now **is this desire to maintain the truth, to guard the truth,** to secondly, extend the truth. There came, I suppose, about year ten at Living Word Christian Center this desire to take the truth to the ends of the earth, to get teachings translated into every imaginable language.

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I was talking to one of our guys who graduated from the seminary, who's just back from Croatia where they planted a training center in Croatia to take the truth to that part of the world. We've got this sort of spiritual young man mentality you find in [1 John](#) where he talks about the young men who are valiant for the truth. They...they know the truth and they want to fight for the truth and they overcome the evil one who is a liar and the father of lies and tries to, of course, destroy the truth.

And so I look at that and I think that that's probably generationally speaking where our church life is. We are passionate about guarding the truth. We are passionate about extending the truth. In fact, one of the guys who was at the Bible Conference in South Africa, never been there before, is from down in Alabama, and he said to one of our elders at the end of the conference, he said, "I get it, I get it, I know what this church is all about. It's all about proclaiming and protecting, is that right?" And our elder said, "Yeah, you've got it. It's all about proclaiming and protecting."

There's a passion at that and I think that's a **wonderful place to be, to know the truth, to have established the truth, affirm the truth, to understand the truth** and now to be passionately committed **to maintaining the truth** and **extending the truth**.

But, **there's a third phase** and historically this is...this is kind of the way it flows. **The third generation is apathetic**. The **third generation is apathetic**. They weren't a **part of the process of discovery**. They weren't a **part of the process of refinement**, so they don't understand the pain and the endurance and the relentlessness that you went through to get there. And they...they really weren't, because they weren't there fighting to understand that truth, they weren't there fighting to defend that truth, they just kind of show up at some time.

And obviously we have people flowing into Living Word, we have people flowing into the sister churches even now, people flowing into the seminary who never were in the battle **to define the truth**, who never were in the battle **to defend the truth**, who just show up when all the work is done. And that...and the attitude that tends to be there is an **attitude of apathy**. And that's really sad. You see people who go to church today, only if it's convenient, **they're really not energized by the discovery of the truth**. **They're not particularly energized by refining the truth**. **They're not very interested in protecting the truth** and **proclaiming the truth**, and **extending the truth**.

They...they come whenever they can, and they show up whenever they want. You take the preaching of the Word of God for granted; you take the truth for granted because you weren't a part of the process, that's why it has no value to you. You're like a rich kid who has all the money to buy things but doesn't understand the value of anything because no sacrifice was necessary for you to acquire it.

And that's when church life gets tough. That's when people are worried about whether the air conditioner is blowing on the back of their neck or not, or whether they can find a parking place, or whether the service time interrupts the plans for the day, or whether the sermon's too long, or the seat's not comfortable. And they become absorbed in all that stuff. I've read enough about church history and even contemporary and more modern church history to

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**know there's a time in the life of the church when that becomes the dominant characteristic of the church because that third generation weren't a part of the struggle and that is a frightening thing.** Maybe I'll die before I have to deal with too much of that. But somebody in the future will have to deal with it.