

The Anatomy of a Church (40)

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[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 12/07/14)

Fundamental Priorities of a Good Church

A. The Description of the Church, [1 Timothy 3:14-16](#)

[1 Timothy 3:14-16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴ I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long;

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

2. [\(1 Timothy 3:15\) Church](#): this verse gives a great description of the church, a description that spells out three great pictures of the church.

[1 Timothy 3:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ 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.

1. The church is “the household [*oikō*] of God.” This does not refer to the building of the church, but to the household of the church, to the people of the church. The church is a body of people who have committed themselves to form a family of people, a family centered around God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The church is “the church of the living God.” The word “church” (*ekklēsia*) means “an assembly, a gathering, a company of people who have been called out by God.” But **note:** God is the living God; He is not some dead god. He is not some idol or figment of man’s imagination. He is the living God who is actually alive and is vitally concerned with how men behave and conduct themselves. This means a most significant thing.

God calls people to His church. He calls them to join His assembly, His gathering, His Company of people. But it is up to people whether or not they come to His church. He is the living God; therefore, He actually speaks to the human heart and calls people to follow Him and to live for Him. There are times when every person feels and senses the call of God within his heart to come and join His Company of people. But the decision is up to the person. God loves the person; therefore, He will not force the person to come to Him.

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1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 (NASB)

⁹“For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

¹⁰and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

Hebrews 10:30-31 (NASB)

³⁰“For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.”

³¹It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

3. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The church *supports* the truth just as pillars and ground support a building. The church props and supports the truth, holds together and binds the truth. **William Barclay** points out that Paul could also be thinking of the meaning of *display* (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p.102). Pillars, whether short and small or towering and large, always appear to have an air of stateliness that attracts attention. Therefore, the church is the pillar, the display, the demonstration of the truth that attracts people to Jesus Christ.

The church holds the truth up before a world that misbehaves and dies, yet does not have to die. The church—the family and company of God—is God’s instrument upon earth to proclaim the truth to the world. What truth? The glorious truth of the Incarnation—that God has loved the world and has demonstrated His love by sending His Son to save the world (**cp. 1 Timothy 3:16**). This is the glorious truth that the church supports and holds ever so highly before the world.

Thought 1. A piercing question is this: How many within the church are really supporting the truth before the world? How many are really holding up the truth by behaving and conducting themselves as they should? How many are holding up the truth by proclaiming it as they should?

Matthew 7:24-27 (NASB)

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

²⁵And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

²⁶Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

1 Corinthians 3:11 (NASB)

¹¹“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

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Ephesians 1:20-22 (NASB)

²⁰“Which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,
²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church.”

1 Timothy 6:19 (NASB)

¹⁹“Storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed [eternal life].”

2 Timothy 2:19 (NASB)

¹⁹“Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”

1 Peter 2:4-5 (NASB)

⁴“And coming to Him [Christ] as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,
⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Soft words produce hard hearts. Remember that. Soft words produce hard hearts. You show me a church where soft words are preached and I will show you a church filled with hard hearts.

Jeremiah said that the “Word of God is a hammer that shatters.”

Jeremiah 23:29 (NASB)

²⁹“Is not My word like fire?” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer which shatters a rock?”

Hard preaching produces soft hearts. And a love of soft words is a love of a hard heart...particularly do we have to preach the hard crushing truth about the holiness of God and the righteousness of God, that He is intolerant of sin, that He hates the sin and the sinner and that He will judge the sinner eternally.

The Jews didn't know how righteous God was and that was the fatal flaw. If you do not have a lofty enough understanding of God, that is rehearsed and repeated and lifted up before you all the time, and I'm not talking about in songs and choruses, **I'm talking about a substantial, theological, biblical grasp on God then you do not have in place the greatest motivation to godly living.** People don't live godly lives because some guy got up and gave a pep talk about the fact that they ought to live godly lives. People don't live godly lives because somebody got up and told them there are lots of negative consequences and you might not be successful if you don't...if you don't behave this way. **People are motivated to live godly lives primarily from their view of God.**

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I can walk in a church, I can be there five or ten minutes and I'll tell you...I can tell you usually how profound their understanding of God is by how they worship. You know, the preacher...the preacher's responsibility, first of all, **is to take people down so that they can go up**. That's how I view my role. And what do I mean by that? I mean, you have to take people down into the depths of Scripture, down into the deep things of God if you ever expect them to go up in praise.

And if you have a congregation that don't understand the deep things of God, that don't understand the height and breadth and length and depth of the glory of His majesty and His person, then what they call worship is just a form of manipulation. And they're primarily motivated by the style and the beat of the tune and not the content of the words. And when you get people together who understand the deep things of God, and they begin to sing and to praise God, they're lost in wonder, love and praise, not so much over the musical form, as over the gripping profundity of the Scripture and theology set to music.

Shallow worship is the byproduct of shallow theology. Elevated, glorious, transcendent captivating emotional enriching worship is the byproduct of a deep understanding of truth. And so, the key in looking at a church is...is there evidently there, manifestly there, a lofty view of God? If it's all about success, and it's all about tweaking your life and feeling better about yourself and solving your problems and fixing you, etc., etc., etc., that's selling short the priority. There's a whole Jewish religion confronted by Jesus and Paul that was apostate and on its way to eternal hell. As sophisticated as they were in their religious system, they all perished because they had too low a view of God.

We face a frightening battle with a man-centered kind of theology today...selling psychological comfort to people rather than exalting God. It was said of **John Calvin** that no man ever had a higher view of God. And does that ever come through.

It was **Isaiah**, you know, who had a vision of God and it just crushed him to the point where he literally cursed himself. But out of the ashes of that destructive experience of seeing the glory of God came his usefulness. And it was Isaiah who toward the end of his book in [chapter 66](#), the last chapter, gets this word from the Lord,

[Isaiah 66:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?"

I'm bigger than anything you could ever build.

[Isaiah 66:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² "For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."

God says, **"I'm not looking for buildings, here's what I'm looking for...to him who is humble and contrite, or broken in spirit, and who trembles at My Word."** That's what I'm looking for, the one who trembles at My Word.