

**1 TIMOTHY**  
**December 4, 2022**

**1 Timothy 3:14-16**

<sup>14</sup>I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, <sup>15</sup>if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. <sup>16</sup>Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

**He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated by the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory. <sup>1</sup>**

*“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”*

Do you love God’s church?

Of course, it’s Sunday morning at our Lord’s Day gathering. We are in the room together and the expected answer is “Yes, of course.”

That’s the right answer. But...let me ask you again and don’t answer aloud, just be honest and think about your answer – “Do you love God’s church? Like Christ loves his church?”

Love is a funny word. It has so many meanings in English. There were numerous, as you know, Greek words for love. Other languages offer variations as well, but we compile them all into the simple four-letter word – L-O-V-E.

---

<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (1 Ti 3:14–16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Do we love the church of Jesus Christ with a righteous, holy selfless, permanent, sacrificial, devotional love?

Do we love the church? The local church? The church that is gathered here today under the signage “First Baptist Church of Orange Park?”

Or do you love the stuff of church? You know, the programs, events, age-group ministries, community activities, your Bible study group fellowships, etc. All that’s good, but is that why you love your church? What if those things that are expressions the church may do ceased? Is it then love for the church or love for the product the local church produces?

I am confident many of us love the church. We love the things church does, but many of us truly love the church because it is, not because of what it does. That’s a holy love.

But...what about those times we don’t? We know the right answer in this church service to a question such as “Do you love the church?” is “Yes.” Of course, that’s the right answer. But what if our love is less about what and who the church is and more about what the church gathered does?

In other words, right answers to wrong questions lead to misplaced priorities and leaves us...well...wrong.

It is clear in this passage that the love for Christ’s church is vital for those who are the church. Yet, I must confess...personally...that there are days it does not feel like love for me. And I’m the pastor. The question for me in this moment of transparency is “Do I love the church?”

My answer is yes Lord, I do...but please forgive me for when I don’t.

Paul loved the church. He loved the church because Christ loved the church. There is no ignoring this reality as you read through the book of Acts and then through the varied letters from the apostle to local churches and pastors of such in the New Testament.

There is a devotion to the gathered believers, to the redeemed, to the Holy Spirit birthed family of God. Thus, as we read this portion of Paul's letter to pastor Timothy, the personal desire of the apostle to visit with Timothy and the believers in Ephesus was clear, though he was not sure he would be able to make that journey.

There is a presumed devotion to the local body in this and other passages. Certainly, the church universal is important and valid. That would be the church that is comprised of every born-again believer on the planet and throughout history.

So, this word translated church in the New Testament – ekklesia – means the universal church at times, but also the local.

When Christ spoke of the church in Matthew 16 it is rightfully understood to be the broad, universal church of God that includes members from around the globe and from history.

### **Matthew 16:18**

**<sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.<sup>2</sup>**

I will build my **CHURCH** he says.

Then, just a couple of chapters later, with the same word, he clearly is speaking of the local body.

---

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 16:18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

## **Matthew 18:17**

**<sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.<sup>3</sup>**

New Christians often find this confusing and let's be honest, in the culture that elevates individualism and the distrust of organizations, especially organized religion, there are many who push against the call for local church membership, local church family, and connecting one with another. I believe this has unintentionally fueled many megamoments in modern Christianity where love of local is swapped for attending auditoriums with thousands. Thus, fellowship is traded for fandom...unintentionally, but to our detriment.

At a very basic level the Greek work ekklesia means assembly. In scripture it is clear that it refers to two types of assemblies – one in heaven and the other on earth.

Therefore, the heavenly church, the eternal church, the sweet by-and-by church is the universal church that includes every single true, blood-bought, repentant, surrendered Christian throughout history. How do you join this church? By being saved.

Some tend to think of the universal church as here on earth, but loosely connected. Yet, even the writer of Hebrews clarifies...

## **Hebrews 12:22-24**

**<sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new**

---

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 18:17). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

**covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.** <sup>4</sup>

The “assembly of the firstborn” = the ekklesia of the firstborn, or the church of the firstborn, of the saved.

As Jonathan Leeman has stated,

“Yet a Christian’s heavenly membership in the universal church needs to show up on earth, just like a Christians imputed righteousness in Christ should show up in works of righteousness. Membership in the universal church describes a “positional” reality. It’s a heavenly position. It is therefore as real as anything else in or beyond the universe. Yet Christians must then put on or enflesh or live out that universal membership concretely, just like Paul says we “put on” our positional righteousness in existential acts of righteousness.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words...if you love the universal church but refuse to covenant in the local, your love for the universal church is not authentic. It’s self-serving, designed to keep a distance from other believers, created to avoid accountability to one another, and designed to leave church as an activity you attend, or an entity that produces a desired product, rather than the living, breathing, bride of Christ of which we have been called to love and be.

You may be saying “Yeah, but some local churches are not godly.”

Absolutely. There are so many examples of bad local churches and instances where sin crept in, set up shop, and led to fake righteousness for personal pleasure. And that’s not new. Paul wrote numerous letters to local churches in the first century facing the very same thing. Even this

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Heb 12:22–24). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *The Gospel Coalition* <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-church-universal-and-local/>

letter to Timothy addressed the pious heretics who had set up shop within the body.

It is a never-ending challenge to keep the local church biblically sound, righteously focused, and fully submitted to the lordship of our Savior Jesus Christ. But it is because it is worth loving the local church that it is worth every single bit of holy effort. And this is Paul's instruction. It is Christ's mandate.

### **Ephesians 5:25-27**

**<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.<sup>6</sup>**

Thus, Paul states the following to Timothy in this short letter.

### **1 Timothy 3:15**

**<sup>15</sup> if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.**

### **BEHAVE**

Christianity is not simply behavior modification, though at times it has apparently been sold as such. Behavior modification without heart transformation is little more than cultic legalism designed to create audiences of affirmers with no truth.

Yet, when the heart is transformed everything changes. Actions change when the heart is redeemed. Desires change when the Savior saves.

---

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 5:25–27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

*“That just ain’t right”* moments become clear for the child of God. Being perfected by the Holy Spirit until the moment of glorification when we are taken into heaven leads to seeing things differently than others. Discerning truth leads to an acknowledgement that how a child of God behaves is different. It’s not a holier than thou, self-serving, pious, better-than-everyone-else identity, but a humble, holy, graciously thankful perspective that one’s own depraved, sinful heart has been replaced.

The righteous see their own sinfulness clearly. The ungodly only see everyone else’s sin.

“How one ought to behave in the household of God” is not Paul’s treatise on what you should do when you enter the building called church. The household of God is not a temple in the center of the city as the Jews knew in Jerusalem. The household of God is not a brick-and-mortar facility. This is not about whether you should be able to have a cup of coffee in the building, or whether you should wear a suit and tie, a long dress, no makeup, or stand or sit during songs. This is about how Christians, living in fellowship with one another in the local body called church (ekklesia) are to behave in reverence toward our holy God and in love toward one another. This is the Great Commandment fleshed out.

Yet, people are frustrating aren’t they? Especially when no one else is behaving, right?

I like how A.W. Tozer put it:

Has it ever 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 tuned, 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.

How are we to behave? By looking to Christ first and only. Align with him and lo and behold, we, the local church are unified. Look to one another and we simply chase the wind of trying to appease and thus...are never one in Christ.

## **BEWARE**

Paul gave clear instructions of who should lead the local body. To discount this by allowing redefined cultural desires change the word lead to a liberalization of scripture that results in local churches who have forsaken the truth. Thus...buildings that say church on the signs but are absent of the Spirit.

Wrong leaders in the local body hurt the flock for generations. We know this.

Cloudiness on the calling of leaders results in the categorical positioning of the unqualified. Thus, the entire church suffers and sheep are hurt, physically at times, but spiritually and emotionally all the time.

The church is called here the “pillar and buttress” or “foundation” of the truth.

These architectural metaphors reveal that what we believe, what we teach, how we speak, how we act...matters.

This is what we live for – the truth. This is what Christ lived for as he is the way, truth, and life.

This is what Christ died for – the truth, the church, his church, for the glory of the Father.

Christ did not die for a club, a study group, a parachurch organization, a weekly intensive bible teaching group, a children’s ministry, a camp, a



senior trip, a youth event, a choir, but for the glory of the Father and for the redemption of the ekklesia – the church.

I fear we as a culture of Christians have so minimized this reality that our gathering on the Lord's Day has become optional, if there's nothing else to do. Our worship of family time, fun time, rest time, kid time, has superseded our true love as children of God.

This is not a guilt trip. This is a revelation of a slow, generational slide into church as performance and another thing to do rather than the beloved assembly of the redeemed.

And I am as guilty as anyone here of losing this.

And just because you attend every week doesn't mean you haven't lost it too.

## **BELOVED**

**<sup>16</sup> Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:**

**He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated by the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory. <sup>7</sup>**

The mystery of godliness – how incredible. How humbling. How amazing. Christ loves his church.

I want to love the church like he does. Don't you?

## **CLOSING – “CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH”**

---

<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 3:14–16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.