

The sermon

Intro

Today in America there's a distaste for organized religion. Why?

People don't want unpopular doctrines. People don't want restrictive commands. People don't want accountability.

People want 21st century American values. People want a say in how religious life is lived. People want manmade spirituality. They don't want the Bible. They don't want God to have a say in the matter. They want to do things their own way.

In God's word, the local church isn't optional. We're saved for structured community. Community structured by God's word, not 21st century American values.

BIG IDEA: The local (and universal) church matters!

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

5 points on the church.

Point 1: The church must be ordered in certain ways (or There are right and wrong ways to do church - 3:14-15)

Paul's goal in writing is to provide Timothy with instructions on how to order the local church in Ephesus. He's concerned that church life be conducted in a certain way.

Application: church order

"these things" would include 2:1-3:13: how to pray when the church gathers, how to dress when the church gathers, how to receive truth when the church gathers, who should teach when the church gathers, who should be an elder, who should be a deacon.

"these things" = the Sunday morning service and church offices (positions of responsibility; elders and deacons). Why was 1 Timothy written?

"so that...you [Timothy] may know how one ought to behave in the household of God" = so that Timothy may know how to order church gatherings and church offices. *"ought to"* means must, need to, required, it is necessary. It's the same word in Matthew 16:21 where Jesus *"must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."*

"an overseer must be above reproach" – **1 Timothy 3:2**

"he [the overseer] must be well thought of by outsiders" – **1 Timothy 3:7**

These aren't suggestions. These aren't one option among many. This is the way church must be done! The statements *"the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth"* refer to the universal church, the entire church throughout the world. Which means the instructions in chapters 2-3 are binding on Palermo Christian Church. If Paul's instructions are binding on the whole church, they're binding on our church. The guidance we find in 1 Timothy 2-3 is the way to do church everywhere!

Illustration: different ways of doing church

I've observed numerous ways of doing church over the years.

Some churches begin with the question, what will attract people? What will increase our numbers? What will work?

Related, some churches begin with the question, how can we create an exciting Sunday morning experience?

Some churches never question why they do what they do. Why is this the way we do church? Because it's what we've always done.

When I became a member at a church in Washington D.C. I witnessed an innovative, revolutionary approach: what do we find taught in the Bible?

It sounds so basic. But this church was unique. They strived to bring every single practice in line with Scripture. This meant learning Scripture. Re-evaluating structures. Making corrections. Every single relevant Scripture was brought to bear on matters of church life. Every practice examined from every angle. Things like what we do on Sunday morning, what offices we have in the church, how we install people into those offices, who we install into those offices, how we counsel people who've committed sexual sin, etc.

You guessed it. This is the model I support. God's ways are wiser than our ways. God's ways protect and edify.

God cares how we do church life. So we have 1 Timothy. God's left some clear guidelines. God allows freedom in other areas (how many elders? how many songs? how long are the sermons?).

So I love it when someone asks questions like, I'm a woman, am I really allowed to be a deacon? I've been divorced. Am I really allowed to be a deacon? These are the questions we should be asking.

These sorts of questions give the Bible authority in our church.

Point 2: The church is a like a family (3:15)

“so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God”

The church is called a household. It's not talking about a physical structure. The foundation, the windows, the roof. It's talking about the family unit. The Christian home. The people that dwell together. Earlier in chapter three, household management was leading one's children (3:4).

Family

What goes on in the family unit?

1. In the family unit you have order and roles.

The father, mother, and children each have different functions.

2. In the family unit you spend time together and share experiences.

You eat meals together. You go places together (lakes, sporting events). You do things together inside the home (puzzles, board games). You go through joys and trials together.

3. In the family unit there's care and affection.

Parents care for the needs of children and give them affection. We weep with each other. We rejoice with each other.

4. In the family unit there's guidance and support.

Parents provide Bible instruction, counsel, and a shoulder to lean on.

5. In the family unit there's development and growth.

The infant grows during their time in the home. Members develop over time in the sphere called family.

6. In the family unit there's correction.

Parents correct their children with the rod and verbal instruction so they turn from sin.

7. The family unit's connected for life.

You don't choose your family, but you're family for life. Ideally the bonds remain until death. There's a permanence to family.

Summary

So to refer to the church as family means something like the local church is a place of order and shared experience and affection and support and spiritual growth and correction and connection.

In the American church, sadly, Christians often aren't connected for life. Christians switch churches. There's moving from place to place for jobs. And there's numerous options because of the rise of denominations. In Ephesus you didn't have different flavors to choose from. You likely were stuck with the same people for life.

Point 3: The church belongs to the living God (3:15)

"which is the church of the living God"

"the church of the living God" likely means two things. The church belongs to God. We're his possession.

And the church originates from God. God has *"caused us to be born again"* (1 Pet 1:3).

1 Peter 2:9 illustrates both truths.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. – 1 Peter 2:9

We're God's possession. We belong to him. Because we belong to him, we exist to proclaim his excellencies. Why do I exist? There's more than one right answer. But one answer is to tell others how excellent God is.

Also, our origins are from God. He's chosen us. When we were in darkness and dead in our sins, he called us out of that sphere by making us alive (Eph 2:5). This is regeneration, being born again. God always gets all the credit and all the glory in our salvation.

The church is from God and exists for God.

"living God"

The fact that God is living means God exists. And God is active.

God has always been and he'll always be. He never dies. Never decays.

God was active in creation. God's active in providence. Today he's preserving his creation and directing history. And saving sinners.

We don't serve a dead, lifeless manmade statue. We don't serve a dead, lifeless manmade philosophy. We serve a God who's building his church (Matt 16:18). We serve a God who's convicting "*the world of sin and righteousness and judgment*" (John 16:8). We serve a God who's successfully drawing sinners to himself (John 6:44). We serve a God who's working in us, causing us to will and to do what's pleasing to him (Phil 2:13). We serve a God who's working all things for our good (Rom 8:28). We serve a God who's working "*all things according to the counsel of his will*" (Eph 1:11). We serve a God who controls whether or not a sparrow falls to the ground (Matt 10:29). We serve a God who turns the king's heart wherever he desires (Prov 21:1). We serve a God who's holding all things together, upholding "*the universe by the word of his power*" (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3).

God indeed is alive. Galatians 2:20 captures well what this means for us.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. – Galatians 2:20

The indwelling, living God is improving our understanding. Bringing wisdom where there's confusion. Altering our desires. Provoking godly ambitions. Provoking love for one another. Bringing grief over sin. Strengthening our faith. Sustaining us in weakness and despair.

God lives. Be confident God is acting in you. And God is acting for you.

Point 4: The church supports the truth (3:15)

"a pillar and buttress of the truth"

There's such thing as truth. And there's one truth. The Christian gospel. The story of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ: forgiveness of sins and the future restoration of our broken, sinful world.

There is truth. There is falsehood. The truth can be known. With certainty.

pillar = the church serve a load-bearing function in regards to the gospel. A pillar bears the weight of things like the roof. Like load-bearing walls uphold our ceilings.

buttress = a structure projecting from a wall that supports the wall, protecting it from collapse. Other translations use "foundation" or "support."

The church serves a load-bearing function. What does this mean for us?

1. The church's load is the gospel.
2. It's our responsibility to make sure the truth doesn't collapse.

Yes, Jesus is building his church so the ongoing existence of the church isn't dependent on us. Yes, God's word is living and active (Heb 4:12) and powerful to convert sinners (Jas 1:18) so the responsibility to convert sinners doesn't rest on us. The gospel is powerful on its own without us.

3. But we, the church, have a duty to ensure the gospel doesn't collapse by protecting it from distortions taught by false teachers.

Timothy was charged to prevent the teaching of different doctrines (1:3). And Timothy was entrusted with a gospel to guard.

O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," – 6:20

Christ is building his church. We play a part in this.

Application

We, the church, exist to support the gospel by protecting it from false teachers. We prevent the gospel from collapsing by rejecting error, refuting error, silencing error, and preserving the apostles' doctrine.

The church has a preservation function.

Point 5: The church is confessional (3:16)

In case you grew up in Catholicism like me I'm not talking about confessing your sins to a priest. Or even a spouse or a friend.

When I say confessional, I mean we're a people united around a set of beliefs revealed in Scripture. We state these beliefs. We believe these truths. We pledge our loyalty to these beliefs. We publicly state our agreement on these matters in our doctrinal statement.

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

"the mystery of godliness" = the Christian faith, which includes the six truths that follow. Six truths that belong to our confession. Six truths we preserve. Six critical elements of the Christian faith.

He was manifested in the flesh,

The eternally existing Son of God, Jesus Christ, humbled himself by taking on human flesh and dwelling with mankind (John 1:14, 18; Phil 2:5-8).

Meaning Jesus exposed himself to the physical limitations and sufferings common to mankind: exhaustion, hunger, thirst, sickness, physical pain (Heb 2:17). So he can sympathize with you (Heb 4:15).

vindicated by the Spirit,

The crucified Jesus Christ was vindicated when the Holy Spirit raised his human body from the grave. The resurrection confirms Jesus was the Son of God (Rom 1:4). We can bank on his promises!

seen by angels,

Both at his birth (Luke 2:9-14) and at the resurrection (Matt 28:1-7). The angels testified to Jesus' identity and resurrection.

proclaimed among the nations,

After Jesus was *"taken up in glory,"* his disciples proclaimed *"repentance for the forgiveness of sins...to all nations"* (Luke 24:47), testifying to Jesus' atoning death, his resurrection, and his offer of forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

believed on in the world,

When the disciples proclaimed the gospel, new disciples were made. Jesus' promises came true. He was building his church (Matt 16:18). His *"other sheep"* (Gentiles) listened to his voice (John 10:16). And the smallest of seeds was becoming a tree that the nations made nests in (Matt 13:32).

taken up in glory.

After his resurrection, there was a 40 day period where Jesus physically appeared to his disciples (Acts 1:3). Following the 40 days, Jesus returned to heaven (Acts 1:9-11), he sat down at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33), all authority was given to him (Matt 28:18), and he was restored to his former heavenly glory (John 17:5). We call this the ascension.

Application

There's no Christian faith without preserving certain beliefs. The local church is confessional. We draw borders. We preserve the truth.

Cross

The cross is left out but assumed.

The message "*proclaimed among the nations*" and "*believed on in the world*" is the message of the cross. That we're law-breakers who need to repent and have our sins forgiven. That Jesus died on the cross as a worthy, atoning sacrifice sufficient to bring forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who believe.

How do we respond to the cross? We admit our sin. We appeal to God for forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' death. We trust God's promise. And believing what the gospel teaches about sin and God's mercy, we follow Jesus because we love him.

I invite you to personally trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and attach yourself to Palermo Christian Church, the family of God where we preserve the gospel of the living God and confess these truths to the world.