



David W. Cloud

The Church: The Pillar and Ground of the Truth

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This book replaces *The New Testament Church*

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*“Church work is the most
serious business in the world.”*

- David W. Cloud

A Practical Book on the Church

This study on the New Testament church is very practical, dealing with questions such as the following:

- What is required for a church to be properly constituted?
- What are the characteristics of a New Testament church?
- How is the church a mystery?
- Can a church require members to be faithful?
- Are there apostles in the churches today?
- Are there prophets in the churches today?
- What do the terms “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop” mean?
- How many pastors should a church have?
- How does a man know if he is called to be a pastor?
- Why are the standards for pastors so high?
- Does the Bible say anything about the pastor’s wife?
- What is the Bible’s teaching about supporting pastors?
- What is a church’s responsibility toward the pastor?
- What authority does the pastor have? Does it have any limit?
- Can a church discipline a pastor?
- Can women be pastors or deacons?
- What authority do deacons have in the church?
- What standards does God require of deacons?
- How can problems between pastors and deacons be avoided?
- What is an evangelist?
- What standards should churches require of workers?
- What is the practice of ordination?
- What is scriptural baptism?
- Does Acts 2:38 mean baptism remits sins?

- What denominations practice infant baptism today and what does it mean?
- Aren't there examples of infant baptism in the Bible?
- How is the Lord's Supper to be conducted?
- Does a church have the right to restrict the Lord's Supper?
- What is the purpose of church discipline?
- How should a church practice discipline?
- What happens when a church disciplines a member?

These and many other questions are answered in the context of the following studies.

Sample

The Church

Memory Verses: Mt. 16:16-19; 18:15-17; 1 Ti. 3:15; Acts 2:41-44; 8:36-39; 20:28; 1 Co. 5:9-13; 11:23-30; 12:27; Heb. 10:23-25; Heb. 13:7, 17; Tit. 1:5; 1 Pe. 5:1-2.

The Meaning of “Church”

The word “church” is used 115 times in the King James Bible. In 114 of those passages the Greek word translated “church” is *ekklesia*. (In Acts 19:37, the Greek *hierosulos*, meaning “a robber of a sacred place,” is translated “church.”)

Ekklesia means a lawful, organized assembly. It is used in three ways in the N.T.

1. Israel in the wilderness (Ac. 7:38).
2. A political assembly (Ac. 19:32-41).
3. Christ’s assembly (Mt. 16:18). Of the 115 N.T. references to the “church,” 111 refer to Christ’s assembly.

The references to Christ’s church are divided into three categories:

1. The assembly on earth (Ac. 2:47; 13:1; Ro. 16:5; 1 Co. 1:2). This forms the vast majority of the Bible references to the church. Sometimes “church” refers to the church in a general, generic, institutional sense (1 Co. 15:9; Ga. 1:13; Eph. 5:24; Php. 3:6).
2. The heavenly assembly (“to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,” He. 12:23).
3. The assembly of all the redeemed of the church age (Eph. 1:22-23; 3:21).

First Mention of the Church

The first mention of the word “church” in the N.T. is Mt. 16:13-19. Consider some important lessons from this passage:

1. The church is not mentioned in the Gospels until after Christ was rejected by the Jewish leaders as described in Matthew 11-12. The nation Israel was put aside, so to speak, while God turned His attention to building the church by calling Gentiles from every nation through the preaching of the gospel. According to Romans 11:25-27, Israel is in spiritual blindness “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” That refers to the completion of the church by the preaching of the gospel to all nations. One day, known only to God, the last Gentile will be saved in this age and the Rapture of the living saints will occur. At that time, God’s program for Israel will be completed and her covenants fulfilled. The final week of Daniel’s 70 Week prophecy will be fulfilled, beginning with the coming of the antichrist as a man of peace, a covenant maker, a problem solver (Da. 9:27).

2. The church did not exist before that time. “I will build” is future tense. The church did not begin in the Old Testament and is different from the nation Israel. This is essential doctrine! See 1 Co. 10:32. (The word “church” is used in Ac. 7:38 for Israel in the wilderness, but this merely means that Israel assembled, which is the basic meaning of the term *ecclesia*; it is not the New Testament church.)

3. The church is built *by* Christ (“I will build”). This is one of His most important present occupations.

4. The church is owned by Christ (“my church”). The church is Christ’s possession, Christ’s plan, Christ’s program. Christ is the sole Head of the church. He has given this position to no man, not even Peter and his so-called successors! In Revelation, John sees the resurrected Christ standing in the midst of the churches, to watch, direct, protect, and judge (Re. 1:12-13). The church is a divinely

established institution. Church work is the most serious business in the world. Man does not have authority to change the biblical plan of the church in any way. Christ is the sole legislator of the church. The church has no lawmaking powers; its sole purpose is to obey those laws that Christ has given in His Word. Man is warned about defiling the church. Each Bible-believing church is the temple of God, and we are warned not to defile it (1 Co. 3:16-17). Every individual will give account to Christ for his life and ministry in the church (1 Co. 3:10-16).

5. The church is built *upon* Christ. The Rock upon which the church is built is Christ Himself—not Peter. It is built upon Peter’s testimony in Mt. 16:16, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Israel as a nation was saying that Jesus was one of the prophets, but Peter had been taught by God that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This testimony encompasses all truth about Jesus. As Christ, Jesus is virgin born (Isa. 7:14), God incarnate (Isa. 7:14), the mighty God (Isa. 9:6), the Seed of David who will rule upon the throne of David (Isa. 9:7), the rejected, suffering Saviour (Isa. 53:3-6), etc.

a. The context tells us that the rock is Christ. Peter had just said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16).

b. The Greek words in the passage tell us that Christ is the rock. Peter is called *petros* which is interpreted in John 1:42 as “a stone.” It refers to a stone or a piece of a rock. (*Cephas* is the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek *Petros*.) The rock upon which the church is built is called *petra* or a large rock.

c. Peter himself tells us that he is a stone in the living church and that Christ is the chief corner stone (Ac. 4:11-12; 1 Pe. 2:5-6).

d. Paul tells us that the rock is Christ (1 Co. 10:4).

e. In the Old Testament, The rock is God (Ps. 18:31), and it would be blasphemous to apply this to Peter. “Remember, He was talking to Jews. If we trace the figurative use of the word rock through Hebrew Scriptures, we find that it is never used symbolically of man, but always of God. So here at Caesarea Philippi, it is not upon Peter that the Church is built. Jesus did not trifle with figures of speech. He took up their old Hebrew illustration—rock, always the symbol of Deity—and said, ‘Upon God Himself—Christ, the Son of the living God—I will build my church’” (G. Campbell Morgan).

6. The church is indestructible (“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”). Following are some lessons on this promise:

a. The church in its fulness is already seated victoriously in heavenly places in God’s eyes and cannot be overcome; it shares in Christ’s resurrection power (Eph. 2:4-6).

b. The New Testament church cannot fail in its assigned task if it obeys Christ. The metaphor of “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” does not refer to the gates of hell attacking the church; it refers to the church attacking the gates of hell and prevailing. Ancient cities of Paul’s day had strong gates that had to be conquered by an enemy. It is the figure of the church on the offense through the preaching of the gospel, snatching souls from Satan’s grasp and from eternal destruction. The obedient church has Christ’s power (Mt. 28:18) and Christ’s presence (Mt. 28:20). The gospel that it preaches is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes (Ro. 1:16). The obedient, gospel preaching church is always caused to triumph in Christ, whether people believe or whether they disbelieve (2 Co. 2:14-16). “Fierce may be the conflict, strong may be the foe, But the King’s own army none can overthrow; ’Round His standard ranging, vic’t’ry is secure, For His truth unchanging makes the triumph

sure” (Frances Havergal, “Who Is on the Lord’s Side?” 1877).

c. True churches will continue to exist throughout the age in spite of the spread of apostasy. Nothing can prevail against them because Christ is with them until the very end of the age (Mt. 28:18-20).

7. The church is the only institution blessed with Christ’s authority (“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”).

a. “The keys” refer to the gospel, which opens the door of salvation to men. A key speaks of a door. Jesus is the door to eternal salvation (Joh. 10:9; Ac. 14:27). The key to that door is the gospel (Ac. 15:7-9; Ro. 1:16). The Pharisees took away the key of knowledge (Lu. 11:52), meaning they did not teach the people the truth about salvation. Peter opened the gospel to all three major groups of men: the Jews (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8), the Gentiles (Acts 10).

b. Mt. 18:19 makes it clear that the promise of binding and loosing is to the church and not just to Peter. The context is church discipline and the divine authority to exercise that discipline. Compare 1 Co. 5:4-5. “William Kelly writes, “Whenever the Church acts in the name of the Lord and really does His will, the stamp of God is upon their deeds.”

When Did the Church Begin?

We believe the church began to be built during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, that it was empowered on the day of Pentecost, and that it was organized and established by the apostles as recorded in Acts and the Epistles.

1. Matthew 18:17 implies that the church existed during Christ's earthly ministry.

2. Acts 2:41 says those who were saved on the day of Pentecost were "added unto" the congregation that already existed. The Gospels and the early part of the book of Acts describe a transitional period during which God was turning from Israel to the church.

A Properly Constituted Church

The book of Titus was written to describe the organization of churches. There were believers in Crete, but something was lacking (Tit. 1:5). We can use the epistle to Titus as a summary of the characteristics of a sound New Testament church.

1. Regenerate membership (Tit. 1:1-2). Paul begins with "the faith of God's elect" who have "hope of eternal life." This describes born again people. New Testament churches are composed of saved people. We see this in the first church. The members gladly received the gospel, were baptized, and "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Ac. 2:41-42).

2. Sound Gospel (Tit. 1:1-3). The "faith of God's elect" and the "truth which is after godliness" refers to the gospel of Christ whereby we are saved. The gospel is that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Co. 15:3-4). Salvation is through faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection; it is by God's grace without works (Eph. 2:8-9). It is salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Any gospel other than the gospel of pure grace is cursed (Ga. 1:6-9).

3. Qualified Leadership (Tit. 1:5-9). In setting in order the things that are lacking, the first thing that is dealt with is the ordination of qualified pastors (also called "elders," Tit. 1:5,

and “bishops,” Tit. 1:7). A church is not to be run by a deacon board, trustees, a regional presbytery, a denominational hierarchy, etc. It has been said that “everything rises and falls on leadership,” and the priority given to the appointment of qualified leaders in this epistle bears that out. Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every assembly that they founded (“when they had ordained them elders in every church,” Ac. 14:23).

4. Sound Doctrine (Tit. 2:1). Paul does not lay out the doctrine here, but he refers to it. It is impossible to “speak the things which become sound doctrine” without first establishing sound doctrine. A N.T. church must be grounded in the whole counsel of God (Ac. 20:27; Mt. 28:20), in sound doctrine pertaining to Christ, God, man, sin, death, heaven, hell, angels, the church, separation, prophecy, and every other Bible truth.

5. Sound Christian living (Tit. 2:2-12). A N.T. church will manifest godliness in Christian life and service. It will be instructed to live according to sound doctrine (Tit. 2:1), to “be in behaviour as becometh holiness” (Tit. 2:3). The true grace of God “teaches us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:12). We see this everywhere in the New Testament epistles. In Ephesians, the churches are taught to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1). This is the theme of Ephesians 4-6.

6. Discipline (Tit. 3:10-11). A N.T. church exercises discipline pertaining to doctrine and morals. Compare Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Co. 5; 2 Th. 3:14.

What the Church Is Not

1. The church is not a man-made organization that can be changed according to man’s thinking and whims.

2. The church is not a Bible study, a prayer meeting, or a group of believers. It is a body properly organized according to the N.T. pattern.

3. The church is not “Christendom” or an ecumenical body of some sort. True churches are composed of “faithful brethren in Christ” (Col. 1:2). Christendom is more properly identified as the Harlot of Revelation 17, and her daughters.

4. The church is not a national church or the churches of a particular area. The Bible uses the plural term “churches” to refer to churches in a region (1 Co. 16:19 -- in this verse we see both “church” singular and “churches” plural; Ac. 15:41; Ro. 16:4, 16; 2 Co. 8:1; Ga. 1:2, 22; 1 Th. 2:14; Re. 1:4). It is wrong to refer to “the church of Nepal,” or “the church in America.” There are churchES in Nepal, and churchES in America.

5. The church is not the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is future (2 Ti. 4:1, 18). Believers today are not building the kingdom; that will be built at Christ’s return (Ac. 1:6-8). Christians are to pray for the kingdom of God to come, referring to the future (Mt. 6:9-10).

6. The church is not a denomination. The Bible never uses the term “church” to refer to any particular denomination. It is not biblical to refer to the “Anglican Church,” or the “Roman Catholic Church,” or the “Presbyterian Church” or the “Baptist church.”

The Importance of the Church

The Holy Spirit in Scripture has exalted the church in the following ways:

1. It is the only institution Jesus is building today (Mt. 16:18).

2. It is the house of God (1 Ti. 3:15).

3. It is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Ti. 3:15).

4. It is where Jesus is standing (Re. 1).

5. It is the institution to which the Holy Spirit is speaking (Re. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

6. It is the headquarters for world evangelism (Mt. 18:15-17; 28:18-20; Ac. 13). It is the institution where the following activities are accomplished; all of these passages are directed to churches: the training of believers (He. 13:7), the exercise of spiritual gifts (Ro. 12:3-8; 1 Co. 12-14), instruction for Christian living (Ro. 12-13; Eph. 4-6; Tit. 2), prayer (Ac. 2:42; 12:5), the ordination of missionaries (Ac. 13:3), the support of preachers (Php. 4:16; Tit. 3:13-14), discipline (1 Co. 5),

7. It is the institution through which God is glorified forever (Eph. 3:21).

8. It is God's church (Ac. 20:28). The term "church of God" is used 13 times in the N.T. and it always refers to the local church.

9. It is purchased with Christ's blood (Ac. 20:28).

10. It is Christ's body (1 Co. 12:27).

Faithfulness to the Church

Hebrews chapters 10 and 13 give at least 9 reasons why every believer must be faithful to the assembly:

1. Steadfastness (Heb. 10:23). The believer needs the church so he can remain steadfast in his faith.

2. Fellowship (Heb. 10:24). The believer needs the fellowship and example of the believers.

3. Responsibility (Heb. 10:25). The believer has a responsibility before God to be faithful to the church.

4. Safety (Heb. 10:25). The believer needs the church because the days are evil and are becoming more evil as the time of Christ's return draws near.

5. Evidence of salvation (Heb. 10:26-27). By faithfulness to the things of God, the believer gives evidence of his salvation.

Those who neglect the things of God are proving that they are not saved.

6. Training (Heb. 13:7). The believer needs the church in order to be taught the Word of God. The church is responsible to warn and teach every member (Col. 1:18). This is not possible unless every member is faithful to the teaching ministry.

7. Example (Heb. 13:7). The believer needs the example of his church leaders and brethren.

8. Oversight, protection (Heb. 13:17). The believer needs the godly and loving oversight that God-called and qualified pastors provide.

9. Judgment (Heb. 13:17). The believer needs to be faithful to the church because God will judge him in this matter.

Lessons from Revelation 1-3

1. The churches are independent and autonomous. Revelation addresses the churchES (plural) of Asia, not the church (singular) of Asia. Each church had its own message from Christ. There was no reference to the existence of any kind of regional headquarters. Each church is addressed as an autonomous body.

2. Each church is an autonomous light. There was not one candlestick (singular) in the region of Asia, but seven individual candlesticks (plural). Each church is to seek to fulfill the Great Commission and has every right to do so—to preach, disciple, baptize, ordain, and send forth missionaries. Compare Ac. 13:1-4; 1 Th. 1:7-8; Php. 2:15-16.

3. Each church possesses the glory of Christ, which is symbolized by the “golden candlesticks” (Re. 1:12).

4. Christ is concerned with the churches. He is standing in the midst of the churches. In the millennial age He will be enthroned in the temple in Jerusalem (Eze. 43:6-7), and in the

New Heaven and New Earth, He will be enthroned in the New Jerusalem (Re. 21:22-23; 22:3).

5. The Holy Spirit is speaking today to Christians particularly through the churches (Re. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Though we know that the Holy Spirit speaks directly to every believer, He also speaks corporately through the churches.

6. The church is not mentioned on earth during the Tribulation. The church is mentioned 19 times in the first three chapters of Revelation, but it is not mentioned again until 22:16. Israel comes back to center stage during the Tribulation (Re. 7:3-8; 11:3-13; 12:13) because this is the seventieth week of Daniel (Da. 9:24-27). The Harlot “church” also comes to center stage in the Tribulation (Re. 17).

Church Services

The Bible says very little about the church meetings. It provides no set “liturgy” or rigid pattern of worship. We are given some information about how the early churches conducted their meetings, but not a lot. We do know that they had organized meetings (1 Co. 11:22; 14:23; Heb. 10:25). Paul rebuked the Corinthians for treating the church services like a common activity at home. Thus, even though the church services were typically conducted in homes in the early days, the services themselves were set apart from common Christian activities by an orderliness and godly respect befitting an occasion in which the church of God assembles before its Head to conduct the Lord’s business.

When Are the Services Held?

The only specific occasion for regular church services mentioned in Scripture is the first day of the week (Ac. 20:7; 1 Co. 16:2). This is the day Christ rose from the dead (Mr. 16:9) and the day Christ first appeared to the disciples (Joh. 20:19). This does not mean, of course, that Sunday is the only day

that churches can have services. Again, this is a matter that is determined by each church under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is largely a practical matter of the specific needs of that time and place. When the church leaders determine that meetings should be held, the members must submit to that decision and support the meetings with their faithful attendance and participation (Heb. 10:25; 13:7, 17).

What Activities Are Done During the Church Services?

1. The early churches had teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayers (Acts 2:41-42).

2. They preached the Word of God and ministered spiritual gifts (Ac. 20:7; 2 Ti. 4:2).

3. They ministered spiritual gifts (1 Co. 14).

3. They took up offerings (1 Co. 16:2).

4. They sang psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

5. They exhorted one another (Heb. 10:25).

The Order of Services

The Bible only gives a few very general instructions about the order of church services.

1. Everything is to be done "decently and in order" (1 Co. 14:40).

2. All speaking is to be done in turn (1 Co. 14:31).

3. There is to be no confusion; peace is to reign (1 Co. 14:33).

4. Women are restricted from speaking (1 Co. 14:34-35).

5. Nothing is to be done contrary to apostolic instruction (1 Co. 11:2; 14:37).

How to Conduct Yourself during Preaching

1. Sit respectfully and alertly

Things such as leaning on your elbows with your head down and chewing gum send signals that you are not

interested in what the preacher is saying. Remember that others are watching you and being influenced by you. Your attitude and bodily posture affects the preacher, those sitting around you, and the entire atmosphere of the service.

Young people should not be allowed to sit together unless they are spiritually-minded and serious about seeking the Lord, because they will distract one another as well as others. We have many spiritually-minded young people in our church who sit together and encourage one another to listen carefully and to take notes from the preaching, but when young people are only in church because they are forced to be and don't have a heart for the truth, they should not be allowed to sit together. This is for their sake, for the sake of the other young people who are influenced by their example, and for the sake of the entire congregation.

One reader wrote about teenage boys who sit together and play a video game during the service. "As one plays, the boy on either side watches until it is his turn."

Another reader described two young men who played video games on their phones the entire service, even when the congregation was standing and singing. The father of these young men was in the service and sitting on the same pew, but he didn't do anything.

This is a sad thing, and one wonders about the parents. In the case of a parent who would sit in a church service and allow his children to play games, where is his head! Such a parent is on the proverbial "cloud 9"! Like Eli, he honored his sons more than God and God's Word (1 Sam. 2:29; 3:13).

And why doesn't the pastor put a stop to it? What kind of pastor would allow people to play games in the house of God when the congregation is supposedly worshiping God? For a pastor to allow such a thing is not fair to those who are there to worship God and hear His Word. Such a thing is a great dishonor to Jesus Christ who owns the church and walks in

the midst of the churches (Rev. 2:1). Whom does this pastor really honor? Whom does he fear?

The adults might be afraid of “losing them” if they apply discipline, but they have “lost them” already. The bodies of such young people might still be in church, but their hearts are solidly in the world.

At least the adults can break up this unholy cabal and make the service conducive for others to hear God’s Word without the distraction of these foolish boys and their games. And who knows, if this cabal were broken up and these young people were required to sit quietly during the singing and preaching, God might get hold of their hearts and they would repent of their disrespect of holy things and be born again before it is too late.

Along this line, the church must make sure that young people are not hiding out somewhere and playing. I have seen young men in the sound room and sound booth talking and playing games during the services. Only spiritually-minded young people should be involved in such ministries. Otherwise, this is the type of thing that happens.

2. Don’t distract others

Examples of things that distract others are talking and writing notes back and forth between persons, texting, and playing video games, making noise (i.e., cracking your fingers, stretching and moaning), picnicking (eating and drinking and passing around candy and gum), playing with babies, children gawking at the people behind them, and children running back and forth in the pew when the congregation is standing to sing. Parents need to be aware of what their children are doing and make certain that they are not distracting someone.

One reader wrote, “Some families spread the pew with mounds of candy and other snacks, sticky and otherwise, and the children gorge themselves. Then of course, it’s not long before parent or grandparent will take each child, one at a

time, back and forth to the restroom to wash sticky hands, etc. And no, they do not sit in the back.”

Another example is leaving the service to go to the restroom. Parents should make sure that their children don't develop this distracting habit. The child quickly learns that it can control the mother by asking to go to the restroom after the service starts. It is the all-too-common case of the child training the parents. This practice is extremely dishonoring to the Word of God being preached. There is plenty of time to go to the bathroom before and after the services. Of course, if a baby is involved or if an individual has a medical or health problem that requires him or her to leave the service, that is a different matter altogether. But such a person should sit in the back and slip in and out quietly.

One reader gave the following feedback after reading an earlier edition of this report:

“The section regarding ‘Don't Distract Others’ really hit home to me. I prefer to sit up front ‘near the action’; however, because of my work, I am on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and there are occasional calls on Sundays, so I sit at the back so that I may slip out should I receive a call. However, I have seen others that sit near the front and walk all the way to the back for one reason or the other, and, upon their return, walk all the way back to the front. It is human custom to watch movement. I have tried my best to train myself to pay attention to the preaching and to not be distracted by people moving around. When I was young, we were taught that in any group, if one had to leave, one sits near the back, and even if one is sitting up front and needs to leave, upon returning, a seat should be taken in the back. I don't know why people aren't taught this (rather basic) group courtesy.”

3. Listen well

Listen with respect toward God. The preacher is preaching God's Word. He is to speak as “the oracles of God” (1 Pe. 4:11). God's people need to listen to the preaching with the

understanding and attitude that they are hearing from God Himself.

Listen with compassion toward the preacher. God uses all kinds of men and not all are powerful, fascinating speakers. It appears that Paul wasn't (2 Co. 10:10). Jonathan Edwards preached one of the most famous of sermons, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," but Edwards was not a great speaker. In fact, he simply read the sermon. The preacher who was instrumental in the conversion of Charles Spurgeon was not a mighty speaker. Spurgeon described him as a very simple, uninteresting speaker, yet how greatly God used him! Remember that God can use weak men. An example is Solomon. He had some serious issues, but God used him to write three important books of the Bible, including the book of Proverbs, which is the book of wisdom. Our eyes must be upon God and not upon the preacher. Listen to the preacher as you would want people to listen to you. Avoid a critical attitude.

Listen prayerfully. Nothing significant is accomplished apart from prayer (Ro. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Th. 5:17). Pray for yourself. Pray for the preacher. Pray for others who are in attendance.

Listen attentively. Listen as if Jesus Christ were speaking. The preacher is to preach as the oracles of God (God's mouthpiece), and the people should listen to him as the oracles of God (1 Pe. 4:11). If you listen carefully and seek something from the Lord, you can be edified even from a seemingly boring message. See also Luke 8:18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22. Lazy minds don't learn and grow. Don't let your mind wander to other things. Don't do something else when you should be listening to the preaching. I have seen people read novels in church! More often they read the hymnal or pass notes or other such things. You won't get anything from the preaching if you don't listen attentively.

Listen with an open, submissive heart. God's invitation is extended throughout the message and not merely at the end. Let God speak to you, reprove, rebuke, and exhort you. Don't think that the preaching is for someone else. Don't make excuses for your sins and faults.

Listen with faith (Heb. 4:1-2). The Word of God is ineffective unless it is "mixed with faith." Some listen to preaching as a form of entertainment. They enjoy it but they don't believe it enough to change how they live. This was how the Jews were listening to the prophet Ezekiel: "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Eze. 33:31-32).

Listen discerningly. The Bible warns that we must not put our trust in man (Jer. 17:5). We must carefully test all preaching by the Word of God (Ac. 17:11; 1 Co. 14:29; 1 Th. 5:21).

Listen studiously (2 Ti. 2:15). Have paper and pen ready so that you can capture something from the message. Write things in your Bible (important things, such as cross references, definitions, important thoughts, what God is saying to you through the message). By the way, you should have your own Bible rather than merely looking on with someone else. Take notes of the important points. Write down things to study later, things to check later, and things to share with others. This will help you remember what is preached. If you are studious during the preaching, you will be a good example to others. I remember fondly a young man in the first church I joined. He was always there in his place with his big study Bible and his notebook and his pens and pencils, ready to capture something from the preaching.

4. Treat the invitation seriously

Respond to the invitation as the Lord leads, and pray for others.

It is important to be quiet until the last prayer is finished. Some people are so spiritually insensitive that they start preparing to leave during the invitation and final prayer, shuffling around, folding papers, zipping up Bible cases, putting on jackets, digging keys out of purses, etc. This is very distracting to those to whom the Lord might be ministering.

Sample

Descriptions of a New Testament Church

This section consists of expository messages on key Bible passages that provide the pattern for the church for the entire age.

The pattern is not found in the church fathers, the Waldenses, the Lollards, the Anabaptists, the Lutherans, the Anglicans, the Reformed Presbyterianism, the Geneva Calvinists, the Brethren, Pentecostalism, Charismaticism, Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, New Reformed Calvinism, denominational Baptists, or any of the streams of Independent Baptists.

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A purifying church (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

A turning, serving, watching church (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10)

A church that is full of goodness, filled with all knowledge (Romans 15:14)

A church is perfecting every member (Colossians 1:25-28)

A ministering body church (Ephesians 4:7-16)

A missionary church (Acts 13:1-4)

A Christ-owned church (Revelation 1:10-20)

The House of God, the Pillar and Ground of the Truth

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

This is a foundational passage about the church with far-reaching implications. It teaches the pre-eminence of the church in God’s plan.

The church is “*the house of God*” (1 Ti. 3:15).

Under the law of Moses, the house of God was the tabernacle (1 Ch. 6:48) and later the temple in Jerusalem (2 Ch. 3:3). Today the house of God is the church.

In the context of 1 Timothy 3:15, the “house of God” clearly refers to the assembly with pastors and deacons. It does not refer to a “universal church,” nor does it refer to a mere Bible study or prayer meeting.

That the church is God’s house means *the church belongs to God*. This is emphasized by the repetition (“*the house of God, the church of the living God*”).

That the church is God’s house means *the church is the most famous and important house on earth*. The most famous is not George Washington’s or Bill Gates’.

That the church is God’s house means *the church is only for God’s children*. It is necessary to be born again to be qualified to be a church member, as we see in the example of the first church (Ac. 2:41-42). Haste and carelessness in this is the most fundamental cause of apostasy. The church is always one generation away from spiritual destruction if the door is not guarded by the principle of a regenerate church membership. The church is the restoration of man’s relationship with God through redemption. It is better than Eden.

That the church is God's house *means the church is a family*. The church is where the people of God are loved, protected, nurtured, educated, developed, disciplined. It is where they learn to know the Father through the Son. It is where they learn the will of the Father. It is the nursery for spiritual infants and the training school for spiritual warriors.

That the church is God's house means *the church is where God's business is conducted*. It is the headquarters of world evangelism (Acts 13). The church should be at the center of every believer's life. How can I say that I love and honor God, if I don't love His house in the sense of being committed and engaged and faithful?

That the church is God's house means *the church is to be operated by God's laws*. We must behave ourselves by His rules. Man has never had the authority to make a different kind of church than the church that is revealed in Scripture. In the church, nothing is insignificant! Everything must be considered carefully, prayerfully, and weighed by God's Word. ***To operate the church by human thinking and tradition is a great evil; it is no small thing.*** We don't want an American church, a British church, an Australian church, a Spanish church, a Nepali church; we want a biblical church! **This is written first of all to church leaders. They are responsible to make sure that God's will is done in the church, and they will give account to God for how things are conducted.**

The church is “*the church of the living God*” (1 Ti. 3:15).

He is the true and living God as opposed to dead gods. “Living” encompasses all that God is. The church is the possession of the God who is the source and sustainer of all life. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, unchanging, unconquerable, utterly trustworthy. The church is BIG business!

The church is the *pillar and ground of the truth* (1 Ti. 3:15).

Truth is the church's chief business. Nothing is more important and more valuable than truth in this dark world of lies. The truth is God's Word ("thy word is truth," Joh. 17:17). The truth is Christ ("I am the truth," Joh. 14:6).

Ground refers to the foundation, and **pillar** refers to the proclamation. Being the pillar is the chief work of the church, so it is mentioned first in this verse. What good is it for the church to be the foundation of the truth if it is not also the pillar of the truth to broadcast the truth to needy sinners? Bible study without evangelism is not God's will. But since in practice the ground must precede the pillar, we will discuss the church as the ground first.

*The church is the **GROUND** of the truth by possessing the truth.* The apostles and prophets delivered the truth to the churches, and the churches received the truth (1 Th. 2:13). Christ promised that He would send the Spirit which would guide the apostles into all truth (Joh. 16:13). We see this process in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, where Paul said he received the gospel from Christ, and he then delivered it to the churches, and in 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul said he received the Lord's Supper from Christ. The New Testament church is where every person must come who wants to find the truth. They must come to the despised New Testament church! Not to the great religions, the great universities, the great philosophers, the great scientists, the United Nations.

The church is the ground of the truth by preserving the truth. The church is tasked with preserving the Bible. The completed canon of Scripture has been placed into the hands of the churches to be kept. It is to be passed on from generation to generation by being committed to faithful men (2 Ti. 2:2). Each generation is to be taught to observe all things that Christ has commanded, which refers to the entire canon of Scripture (Mt. 28:20). The Old Testament was

preserved by Israel (Ro. 3:2), particularly by the Levites (De. 17:9-13). The Jewish Masorete scribes kept every jot and tittle. They counted every letter on a page, and if they made a mistake they destroyed the whole page. The churches should care about God's Word like this! The Bible text version issue is fundamental! Should the word "God" be in 1 Timothy 3:16? Should Acts 8:37 be in the Bible? Is there a question about the divine inspiration of the last 13 verses of Mark?

The church is the ground of the truth by understanding the truth. It is not enough that the church possess the Word of God; it must understand it. The church should not merely have a Bible Institute, it should be a Bible Institute.

The church is the ground of the truth by defending the truth. Compare Jude 3, "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." Because there are many enemies of the truth, no position can be maintained without constant indoctrination and aggressive defense. It is said that "no position can be maintained without a campaign." It is like a castle being attacked from every side. If the defenders do not watch one of the walls or towers, it will be taken from that side. The full New Testament faith is the church's castle, and each doctrine of the faith is assailed by "doctrines of devils" (1 Ti. 4:1). The apostles give the example of defending the whole truth. The church must be so well educated in Bible truth that it can maintain the truth against every error.

The church is the ground of the truth by serious Christian living. Doctrinal orthodoxy is not enough. The truth must be demonstrated. Note in the following passage that living blameless lives is necessary to shining as lights in the world. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Php. 2:14-15). Verse 14 describes the church as the ground of the truth, and verse 15 describes the church as the pillar of the truth. This is the

theme of Titus 2. The godly living described in that chapter is what “becomes sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1). Every category of Christian is named: aged men, aged women, young women, young men, and servants. All are given their instructions about good Christian living, and it is this that causes the Word of God *not* to be blasphemed (Tit. 2:5). It is this that adorns the doctrine of God (Tit. 2:10).

The church is the ground of the truth by discipline, which keeps the light of the gospel pure. We see this in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. The church that pleases God is likened to a pure loaf of unleavened bread, and this requires discipline. If the church members live wicked lives and aren't disciplined, the church's light becomes corrupt; the world cannot see the pure truth about Christ. I think of a church member who did not pay her debts, did not pay her rent on time, and got into fistfights with unbelievers. She gave the truth of Christ a bad name until she was disciplined for her sin.

All of this is foundation work, ground work. It is not a small task, and it is not something that can be done and then forgotten. It is a big and continual work. The church's foundation must be deep and strong, and it must be maintained so that cracks do not appear and spread.

The church is also the **PILLAR of the truth** (1 Ti. 3:15).

The church is the pillar of the truth to hold it up high before the world. The church is the pillar of truth by proclaiming God's Word, by preaching the gospel. The church as the pillar of truth is the church as the candlestick of Christ (Re. 1:20). To be the pillar of the truth is to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mr. 16:15). It is to “hold forth the word of life” (Php. 2:15). It is to be witnesses of Christ to all the earth (Ac. 1:8). It is to be “ambassadors for Christ” who proclaim the message of reconciliation with God (2 Co. 5:20).

As previously noted, the pillar is mentioned first, before the ground, though the ground or foundation is what upholds the

pillar. Perhaps the pillar is mentioned first because it is often the first thing to be left off of the church's program.

The church must be both the ground and pillar of the truth. As we have said, to be the ground of the truth is not enough. To love and study and preserve God's Word is an essential business of the church, but it is not an end in itself. It is the foundation from which the Word of God is to be proclaimed to a needy world of lost and dying sinners. A church that focuses on Bible study for the saints but neglects the evangelization of the lost is a selfish, disobedient, and dying church. Likewise, it is not enough for a church to be the pillar of the truth while neglecting the ground. Many churches have emphasized evangelism while ignoring serious Bible study and godly Christian living.

1 Timothy 3:15 summarizes the church's main business, which is Christ's Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). Churches must not get sidetracked to less important things, such as entertainment, sports, politics, and any type of social gospel. Other institutions in this world can do those things and do them better than the churches, but only the churches can fulfill Christ's Great Commission.

The Church a Mystery

Ephesians 3:1-13.

Paul starts to pray in verse 1 and pauses mid-sentence to describe the mystery of the church in verses 2-13. His prayer is completed in verses 14-19.

Paul defines "**mystery**." It is truth that was hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in the New. "***Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit***" (Eph. 3:5). Compare Ro. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26. The Spirit of God is the revealer and the Author of Scripture. Compare

Zec. 7:12; Mr. 12:36; Joh. 16:13; Ac. 1:16; 1 Pe. 1:11-12; 2 Pe. 1:21.

There are several mysteries revealed in the New Testament. Following are some of them: (1) The mystery of God's plan for the ages that all things will be one in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10). (2) The mystery of the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 13:3-50). This is the progressive apostasy of the church age during which the devil sows error (leaven, tares) and creates a false Christianity. (3) The mystery of the Rapture (1 Co. 15:51-52). "The O.T. prophets saw the return of Christ to the earth with His saints in power and glory, but not His coming to the air for the saints." (4) The mystery of the church as the body of Christ composed of saved Jews and Gentiles of this age (Ep. 3:1-6). (5) The mystery of the indwelling Christ (Col. 1:26-27). (6) The mystery of the incarnate Christ as God manifest in the flesh (1 Ti. 3:16). (7) The mystery of Israel's temporary blindness, that Israel would be blinded and set apart while God called out a people for His name from among the nations (Ro. 11:25-27). (8) Mystery Babylon (Re. 17:5, 7). "The Babylonian system is seen throughout the O.T. narrative, but this final form of a one-world religion as a tool of the Antichrist is N.T. truth." (9) The mystery of iniquity (2 Th. 2:7). This is the revelation of the devil's program to bring in the Antichrist.

The mystery revealed in Ephesians 3

- "***that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel***" (Eph. 3:6). The Old Testament reveals that Gentiles will be saved by Christ (Isa. 49:6), but it does not reveal a spiritual body in which Gentiles are one with, and fellow heirs with, Jews. This is the church which is being formed today of those who believe the preaching of the gospel (Mr. 16:15-16). This body is not Israel. Israel's covenants are clearly revealed in Scripture, including the New Covenant, and her entire future is described in great detail, and Israel