

COMMITTED TO THE CHURCH

Did you know there is an Olympic athletic event called the heptathlon, which consists of seven competitions? The idea is that the heptathlon establishes the best all-around women's track and field athlete. It derives its name from the Greek word *hepta*, meaning seven. It involves. 1.) The 100 meter hurdles, 2.) The high jump, 3.) The shot put 4.) The 200 meter race 5.) The long jump, 6.) The javelin 7.) The 800-meter race. In the heptathlon, you cannot just focus on one or two events to the exclusion of the others. You may excel in one or two, but you cannot neglect any of them. You could not just say, for instance, I want to run but not jump, or I want to jump, but I don't want to throw the javelin. You have to work at all seven. In the same way as followers of Jesus, there isn't just one thing we are called to do. That's not too surprising. As parents, we want our children to develop how? Physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Imagine a child saying, that's overwhelming. I just want to focus on my social life. You say *no*. You need to be well-rounded. As disciples of Jesus, we may have an area in which we are especially gifted, but our discipleship has multiple elements or what we're calling facets.

As a disciple of Jesus, you can't just focus on a few areas in your life to the exclusion of others. In our series on the seven facets of discipleship this morning, we've come to the sixth facet, which is *commitment to the church*. We talked about the importance of the church a lot during our series on the book of Haggai in September-October. So I will try to be brief today to leave time to share a helpful resource for growing in all seven facets at the end of the message.

We might wonder what that theme has to do with Advent but doesn't the text we have just read show us the connection? In 1 Timothy 3, Scripture talks about the church and how one ought to behave in it. Notice how it is described in **1 Timothy 3:15** says it is *the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth*. Then in the next verse, he reveals the nature of the particular truth that the church must uphold and strengthen. It is the story of Jesus, and it begins with the message of Christmas: *He, the living God...*

*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.

So it all begins with the living God, *manifested in the flesh*. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. As the hymn *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* puts it, *Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity*. The church has a particular role to play in proclaiming the truth about Jesus.

One truth that comes through in the life of Jesus and in 1 Timothy 3, the Scripture we just read, is the importance and value of the church.

I. THE CHURCH IS A UNIQUELY IMPORTANT FELLOWSHIP OF PEOPLE CALLED TOGETHER BY THE LIVING GOD.

The word "church" in **1 Timothy 3:15** is the same word Jesus used in **Matthew 16** when he said, *I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it*. He said it is his church. He is the one who will build it. And he says, *"I will build my church," future tense*. After Jesus said, I will build my church, throughout the book of Acts and all the remaining books of the Bible, the church is central to the life, identity, and welfare of the disciples of Jesus and his mission in the world.

To understand what the church really is, we need to go behind the English word "church" and look at the Greek word it translates. That Greek word is *ekklesia*. It comes from the Greek word "to call." *Kaleo* and "Ek" out. It describes a fellowship of people who have been called together out of the masses of humanity to belong to Jesus.

2 Timothy 1:9 speaks of God as the one who saved us and called us to a holy calling, *not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*. If you are a believer in Jesus, it is important to know you are called. It is also important to understand that although God has called you personally and individually, you have been called together with others to be a member of the church, the fellowship of people called together by the living God. God has given us Scripture like this to teach people like us to have a more enlightened sense of the importance of this church in which we are involved.

Looking again at **1 Timothy 3:15**, we know this verse is not speaking primarily about the universal church of Christ but about a particular fellowship of believers just like ours. *There are two ways we know that.*

First, the whole book of 1 Timothy is about the local church. It talks about choosing elders and deacons and caring for the widows, and praying and preaching in the service. It is clear that it is picturing all the

aspects of life in a particular local fellowship of believers. Second, in **verse 15**, the word "the" does not appear in the Greek. it literally reads, "a church of the living God." All of these powerful words are being used to describe what is true of us. We at Christ Community Church must never lose the realization that our church is a uniquely important fellowship of people called together by the living God.

Now we are not only the people called together by the living God. Verse 15 also tells us that ...

II. THE CHURCH IS GOD'S OWN FAMILY.

He speaks of "*The household of God.*" The Greek word "*household*" here means family. One of the greatest mistakes people are making today is failing to realize that an indispensable facet of authentic discipleship life is a committed involvement in a particular family of believers.

A friend of mine once sent me an article titled "*The 'Ten' Philosophy.*" According to this article, the "ten philosophy" is the mentality of always looking for the 'tens' in life. A 'ten' is the best of anything. That is a destructive and even dangerous approach in life. It's damaging because it ignores the fact that we live in a world full of problems because of the reality of sin. It is destructive because it creates fault-finding people who search for perfection instead of learning to solve problems.

The author writes these words;

We are creating a nation of relational nomads who go from person to person or from organization to organization, looking for a "ten." Therefore marriages dissolve; churches divide; academic institutions are maligned, and businesses are the objects of strikes. To put it in a sentence - our biggest problem is getting to be that we are unable to solve problems. This is because we keep looking for the person, place, or thing that has the fewest problems. That is the philosophy that is sapping the life from Biblical believers.

There will be challenges because the church is a family of redeemed but not yet perfected sinners. But as we are committed to the family we will learn lessons in forgiveness, patience, understanding, service, and humility that we would never have learned otherwise.

The God who has called you to himself has called you together with others into a family. The third truth about the church and the third

reason we should be committed to the church is that...

III. THE CHURCH IS THE PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH.

The word “buttress” means a support. As the pillar and support of the truth, the church displays holds up and firmly supports the truth about God and the gospel. The God who graciously called us into His family wants us to work together as a family for the cause of truth and for the gospel. This has always been a part of our great commission, and it is a deeply felt need in our current cultural and historical moment. We need strong churches with committed members upholding and displaying truth in a world of deceit and confusion. We live in a time when the very idea of true truth is questioned. In **John 14:6**, Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* He also said, *“I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it”* and he said that in part because the church is one of the ways, God sustains a witness to the truth throughout the ages.

The witness of the church is crucial. Come back to **1 Timothy 3** and look again at **verse 16**. It says, *Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness.* What follows is a hymn of praise to Christ as God. You see, the truth that we are to uphold and support in our teaching and in our living is the truth about Christ. It is given in six lines that present three pairs of opposites.

1. *He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit,*
The flesh that veiled his glory, and His deity revealed His love and His compassion. The presence and power of the Spirit of God in His life and resurrection vindicated, that is authenticated Him as Lord and Savior.

2. *He was seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,*
The angels and the nations have this in common; neither would have ever known the depths of God's loving-kindness for sinful men and women apart from Christ. So Christ was beheld by angels and proclaimed among the nations.

3. *He was believed on in the world, taken up in glory.* Jesus promises you eternal life, the forgiveness of sins. He even promises to take you one day to be in glory with Him. But the one condition He puts on it all

is that you believe on Him in this world. That's where everything begins. You have to believe on Him in this world.

Conclusion

Why must disciples of Jesus be committed to the church? The real answer ultimately leads us back to Christ. We are His called people, His family, the pillar and support of the truth about him.

Many of you have either seen or heard of the Indiana Jones movies. The third was called "*Indiana Jones and the Lost Crusade* ."The central story of the movie centers on the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail is the legendary cup from which Jesus drank at the last supper. In the movie that cup from which Jesus drank is supposed to contain tremendous mystical power and to be worth millions of dollars. The father of Indiana Jones, Professor Jones, is the world's leading expert on the Holy Grail. He is kidnapped by criminals who know that he knows where the grail is hidden and can lead them to it.

One of the key moments in the movie is when Professor Jones is brought to a little grotto in a cave where there are dozens of grails, chalices, and cups. He must pick the right one, the one from which Christ drank. There are all shapes and sizes. Some are gold, others silver, and many are beautifully decorated and bejeweled. He looks at them all and then reaches in and chooses one. The one he chooses is simple and plain. There are no jewels on it, no gold or silver. It's small, unimpressive to the eye, and carved of wood. It's the lost treasure that many have been looking for. But only a well-trained eye would have understood and appreciated that this simple cup was the cup that Christ held in his own hand.

I see a little parable about the church of Jesus Christ and a parable about our church in that story. I believe, and I hope you will believe with me, that the church of Jesus Christ may not look impressive to many observers, but it actually is of great importance and of value in the eyes of God. Do you have the eyes to see that? Even many people in the church look at the church today and are completely oblivious to its true value.

Let's open our eyes to the importance of the church to Jesus and embrace a commitment to it as part of what it means to follow him.

Amen

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Almighty God. I have heard your holy calling. You have convicted me of my sin and lostness. I turn to Christ as my Lord. I believe that in his crucifixion he suffered in my place and paid for my sins. I confess that in his resurrection you made him Lord and Savior for all who turn to him in repentance and faith. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Grant me the eternal life promised to all who come to Christ in faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord God, like the disciples, who were so slow to believe and so full of weakness, we also have stumbled and sinned against you. We have undervalued the body and bride of Christ. Grant us eyes to see the church as you see her, beloved and valued. Help me to deepen a commitment to the church that will strengthen her witness to Christ and the gospel. Help us each to find our individual and unique ways to help build the body of Christ in love and in truth. Amen.