

Title: A Mature Church knows Her Purpose

Text: 1 Timothy 3:14–16

Imagine the Clampetts from the Beverly Hillbillies using their billiard table as a dining room table and the cue sticks as "fancy pot passers." They have this incredible piece of equipment designed for playing a skilled game, yet they use it simply for passing food at meals. While it serves a purpose, it completely misses the full potential and design of the billiard table and cues.

In the same way, the church must understand its true purpose and foundation in God's Word. Without this knowledge, it might do good things but fail to fulfill its intended mission of representing Christ and standing on the truth.

Just as the Clampetts missed out on the proper use of their billiard table, the church can miss out on its true calling if it doesn't stay grounded in biblical truth.

Main Idea: We Must Know How to Function in Christ's Church

There are two ideas that come out of this text that I intend to answer today. The first is...

1. We Must Know How To Run Christ's Church (vs. 14-15)

1 Timothy 3:14–15 (ESV)

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 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.

Paul is writing his young son in the faith, Timothy this important letter.

Why is this letter so important? Because it gives instructions on how to "do church."

I have so many books on how to "do church" and some of them are very helpful.

They have helped the elders me and some very good insights on best practices within this local congregation.

However, there is no better directive found anywhere on how church is to function than is found in the three pastoral letters. 1 Timothy, 2nd Timothy, and Titus.

Of course, our focus is on the first letter of this biblical trilogy.

It is always wise when studying the Bible to find the passage that speaks to the purpose of the letter.

For example, [Acts 1:8](#) gives the purpose statement for Luke's letter to Theophilus...

Acts 1:8 (ESV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

This verse describes quite succinctly the content and direction of Luke's letter.

So it is with [1 Timothy 3:14-15](#)...

Paul desired to come to Timothy soon in Ephesus, but he was delayed in Macedonia. In lieu of a physical visit, Paul wrote to Timothy and he tells him why. He clearly states his purpose in verse 15...

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

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.

This is the purpose statement of this letter!

Paul wants Timothy to know how the people of the local church in Ephesus were to behave. They need to know how to conduct themselves - How to act within the local church community.

I want you to notice the words that Paul uses here when speaking about the church. He purposely chose them to best describe the church and individual members of it.

First he says to Timothy that **HE** may **KNOW**...

Timothy is the lead elder in the church at Ephesus. He was the spokes person. I believe he was one of a plurality of elders who exercised oversight and authority within the body.

He was one of many. But he was also the leader among leaders.

He was most likely the main preaching/teaching elder.

Paul spoke to Timothy so that Timothy would convey Paul's teaching to the other elders and the rest of the body in Ephesus.

Second, I want you to notice the individuality Paul accentuates.

"if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave..."

Each individual Christian has a glorious privilege and responsibility to walk in holiness as a **"little Christ"** within the congregation He has established.

When I was a kid and we were going to someone's home for dinner, my mom would grab me by the arm, look me in the eye and say firmly, "You had better behave!" I knew exactly what she meant when she said that word. I had better act in a way that brought no shame on my family but instead honor.

"Behave" - conducting oneself in a way that pleases the Lord.

Notice the language of **"family"** in this verse?

"If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God."

I think this is an important descriptor of the church. Check out verse 5...

1 Timothy 3:5 (ESV)

for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

In this verse we see that for the office of overseer, they are called to manage their personal "Household" well so they can then manage the "church" well.

So we know if verse 15 then that Paul is referring to the church when he calls it a household.

ekklēsia - gathering of believers

oikos - household.

Paul purposely calls the church a **household** so that we as Christians remember that we belong to the family of God.

This is a crucial perspective when it comes to the life of the church - the called out ones.

We are family.

The truth is, in some regards, the church not only supplements our earthly, human family, but supersedes it.

If we are in Christ, we will sometimes feel closer to our church family than our blood relatives.

In addition to this, Paul uses this descriptive term to help us understand how we best relate to one another.

Churches used to use the term "**Brother**" or "**Sister**" when referring to one another.

Brother Bob or Sister Sue.

Think about this - other than God as our heavenly Father, there are no fathers or mothers, grandpa's and grandpa's, aunts and uncles, or cousins in heaven.

But there are and always will be brothers and sisters in Christ for all eternity.

Even Jesus is referred to as "our brother."

And together, with God our Father as the head we comprise the "Household of God."

If we are IN Christ and Christ is IN us, then we are the **ekklēsia**, we are His Church!

And to be a part of His church is a high and holy calling.

It is an eternal privilege.

It is the greatest position a human could ever possibly hope for.

Paul often uses the image of a building to visualize the church.

Ephesians 2:19–22 (ESV)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Do you notice the **gravitas** Paul brings to this description of the church?

We must understand and feel the weight of the crucial importance of this institution!

1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)

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.

The true church, which is comprised of true believers, belongs to, not a dead God, but **THE LIVING GOD!**

Our God is not dead.

He is no figment of our imagination.

He is not some grand hoax or made up fairytale on the level of Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, or the Easter Bunny!

He is the All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Everywhere Present, Creator of all that is and ever will be.

If it were not for the Sovereign will of this LIVING God, you would not even exist.

If it were not for the Sovereign will of this LIVING God, you would not take your very next breath.

If it were not for the Sovereign will of this Living God, He would not have sent the Christ to offer salvation to all those who would receive Him.

John 1:9–13 (ESV)

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

It is those that receive Christ. Those that are born-again by the shed blood of the Savior of the World who are now the church.

You, christian, are an integral part of the Living God's church.

Do you see in verse 15 how we, the church, is described?

1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)

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.

So what does this mean? What is a pillar? What is a buttress?

Paul's imagery may have referred to the magnificent temple of Diana (Artemis) in Ephesus, which was supported by 127 gold-plated marble pillars. The word translated "ground" appears only here in the NT and denotes the foundation on which a building rests. The church upholds the truth of God's revealed Word. - MSBN

Now don't miss the power of Paul's illustration.

You and I (the church) are the Pillar and foundation of the truth.

Pillar - Just like the 127 gold-plated marble pillars accentuated and beautified the temple of Diana, so you and I make the church beautiful to the world. As the world sees us love and care for one another well, we become attractive to the world around us. They will notice the beauty of the church because she loves well.

John 13:35 (ESV)

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Are you a beautiful pillar?

Buttress - Foundation: The church's foundation is the Word of God. Everything thing we do as a church must run through the grid work of God's Holy Scriptures. His Word is our Manuel for this life and how to obtain the next.

So many churches have forsaken the one thing that will ensure their survival and profitability - the Word of God.

Share Nicole's testimony

The church is built on the Word of God. It is our foundation.

The B.I.B.L.E., yes that's the book for me!

I stand alone on the Word of God, the B.I.B.L.E.

We, the church. This church stands alone on the Truth of God's Word.

This was Jesus prayer for His disciples back then and now.

John 17:17 (ESV)

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

What's the point? We must know how to run Christ's church. We must understand well how the church is to function so we can keep her strong and influential.

Paul has spent the first three chapters of this letter telling the church how to behave, how to function.

From warnings against false teaching to clearly articulating the gospel, to the roles of men, women, elders, and deacons.

This letter is a letter of instruction on how to best be the church.

When we follow God's truth, it works.

And now Paul lets the church in Ephesus know that they are to represent Christ beautifully in the lost world and to do it standing on the foundation of truth, the Word of God. This is her function!

Imagine a sophisticated coffee machine designed to brew the perfect cup of coffee every morning. This machine is state-of-the-art, with all the latest features: it grinds the beans to just the right consistency, it heats the water to the precise temperature, and it even froths the milk to perfection. However, despite its impressive capabilities, the machine starts making hot chocolate instead of coffee. The hot chocolate it produces is delicious and rich, but that's not what the machine was designed to do.

The machine's owner, a dedicated coffee lover, is disappointed. No matter how tasty the hot chocolate is, it doesn't fulfill the purpose for which the machine was created. Eventually, the owner decides to stop using the machine altogether and finds a new coffee maker that does exactly what it's supposed to do.

Similarly, the church is designed by God to represent Christ and stand firm on the truth of His Word.

When the church strays from this purpose, even if what it does seems good or pleasant, it fails to fulfill its true calling.

Just as the coffee machine was put aside, a church that does not stand on the foundation of truth and represent Christ may no longer be used effectively by God.

This illustration emphasizes the importance of the church staying true to its divine purpose, as described by Paul in [1 Timothy 3:14-15](#).

Our goal is to be a mature church so we can be a reproducing church.

What is a mature church?

A mature church

- Doesn't tolerate false teaching.

- Knows, preaches and teaches the gospel at every opportunity.
- Knows and joyfully walks in the various roles for men and women.
- Has godly, qualified men who can handle the word of God accurately and passionately
- Has godly, qualified men who shepherd the people of the church well.
- Has godly, qualified servants leading the way in service to the Lord and one another.
- Has a body who makes the church beautiful to the world while unwaveringly standing on God's truth.

The church of Jesus Christ is God's chosen vehicle to reach the world for Christ.

The church is not a bunch of programs keeping us busy - it is a purposed disciple-making machine.

The church of Jesus Christ is not a spectator event - it is everyone who is born again and determined to use the gifts God has entrusted to them through the Holy Spirit for the strengthening of the body so she can worship God well and make disciples of all nations.

The biggest threat to the church today is fans who call themselves Christians but aren't actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them. - KYLE IDLEMAN

My fellow Christians, hear me on this - Salvation is free through Christ. But it will cost you everything. If it hasn't cost you anything, you are not saved.

And the primary place you will work out your salvation is in Christ's church.

Yes, the church is that critical to your salvation and growth in Christ.

The church is not an add on to your life, she is your life. So we best know how to make the church run as well as possible.

Review - We Must Know How to Function in Christ's Church

- We Must Know How To Run Christ's Church

2. We Must Know Why We Run Christ's Church (vs. 16)

Why Church? Because she is God's chosen vehicle to deliver the truth of God's Word to mankind.

Why do we run God's church?

Because the church is inextricably linked to the gospel message of Christ!

The job of the church is to clearly articulate the Good News of Jesus Christ to a desperate, hopeless world.

This is what Paul is talking about in verse 16.

In fact, most scholars agree that verse 16 is a verse from an ancient hymn Paul and the church would have sang together.

This hymn contains great theology speaking to the great value of running Christ's church well. It speaks to the purpose of the church...

1 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

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.

They confess the "mystery of godliness" What is this mystery?

"Mystery" is that term used by Paul to indicate truth hidden in the OT age and revealed in the NT (see note on v. 9). Godliness refers to the truths of salvation and righteousness in Christ, which produce holiness in believers; namely, the manifestation of true and perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ. MSB

But the mystery that was in the Old Testament is now fully revealed in Christ in the New Testament. And the rest of the verse of this hymn makes the mystery no longer mysterious. (The following list is from the BKC).

1. Appeared in a body refers to the Incarnation of Christ.

John 1:14 (ESV)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

2. Was vindicated by the Spirit refers to God's demonstration through the Resurrection, by the Holy Spirit, that the crucified Jesus is Lord and Messiah.

Acts 2:24 (ESV)

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Romans 8:11 (ESV)

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

3. Was seen by angels refers to His exaltation before the heavenly realm.

Colossians 2:15 (ESV)

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Hebrews 1:6 (ESV)

*And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,
“Let all God’s angels worship him.”*

4. Was preached among the nations.

Colossians 1:23 (ESV)

if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

5. Was believed on in the world refer to the progressive fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan through His preordained means.

Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

6. Was taken up in glory refers to the Ascension.

Ephesians 4:10 (ESV)

He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

This is the full Gospel. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was a mystery in the Old Testament. He was talked about over and over, but not in an overt way. Looking back from the New Testament lens, we can see the Messiah clearly in the Old Testament texts.

Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,*

and you shall bruise his heel.”

Psalm 22:1 (ESV)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

Isaiah 53:3–6 (ESV)

He was despised and rejected by men,

a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

and as one from whom men hide their faces

he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs

and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken,

smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions;

he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have turned—every one—to his own way;

and the LORD has laid on him

the iniquity of us all.

When we look back at these texts from the perspective of the New Testament, it is no longer mysterious to those of us who are believers.

The “Why” or the Purpose of the church is clear...

“The local church exists to glorify God through worshipping him, edifying his people, and evangelizing the world.” - Tim Challies

So, if the purpose of the church is this clear, how well are we doing as a church?

I think this is a fair question.

I know the elders of ABC are grappling with it currently.

We just sent out a Ministry Audit to see how well our ministry leaders are viewing the ministry in light of her purpose, vision, mission, and values.

Instead of once per month, the Elders have decided that because of our growth and ministry needs, we will now meet two times per month. One time for **Shepherding** and prayer and the other time for **Future Planning**.

Future planning? Yes, thinking through what God desires for our church to pursue in the future.

Jim Gerakinis said this before we moved in the building as we were thinking through how best to use the new facility God had so graciously given us.

"Just because we can do something doesn't mean we should do it." - Jim Gerakinis

I think this is a very important maxim for us to follow. We must be selective in what we pursue as a church for a host of different reasons.

But the main reason is whatever we pursue must ring true with the gospel, enhance the gospel, share the gospel, and grow in the grace and knowledge of the gospel.

We cannot simply do things because they might have worked in the past or because we've always done it that way.

I just saw this quote from a pastor friend of mine.

"The hardest thing to do in a church is to stop doing something that used to work."

We must pursue initiatives that will **propagate** and **elucidate** the gospel of Jesus Christ that is relevant to today's culture not yesterdays. Things that will make disciples **quickly** and **thoroughly**.

This is why we, as a church, exist! We are a local congregation of believers in Christ committed to loving and reaching our neighbors for Jesus Christ. We are here to make disciples who, in turn, make disciples. This is our "why!" This is our purpose!

Review - We Must Know How to Function in Christ's Church

- We Must Know How To Run Christ's Church
- We Must Know Why We Run Christ's Church

Conclusion

While I have never worked in the military world, I have worked in the business world, in the education world, in the non profit world, and the church world.

I must confess, there is nothing like running a church. Frankly it is unlike anything I've ever been a part of.

I mentioned a week or so ago that the ecclesiastical (church) structure, as prescribed in the Bible (elder lead, congregational governed) is not efficient. But it is good. Why? Because God designed it.

It is His will. The church must be run on her people conducting themselves in a way that is pleasing to Christ - exuding the fruit of the Spirit. And having everything that we do come from the foundation of the Word of God.

A car functions best when we follow the owner's manual.

A dishwasher functions best when we follow the owner's manual.

The church of Jesus Christ functions best when we follow the owners manual.

I am convinced that we are on the right tract to be the mature church God desires for us to be.

Why? Because we are doing everything we can to be like the church God describes in His Word.

Connection Group Reflection Questions