

“The Church”

1 TIMOTHY 3:14-15

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Some of you know that at our house this week we did a little bit of celebrating as we looked back on twenty years of marriage! To some here this morning, that might seem like a very long time – I know that some of you are still basically newlyweds. And then, of course, some of you have been married for two and in some cases almost three times that long. Some of you, of course, are not married at all, but I would invite you to think with me about a scenario. I would like for you to try to imagine what might happen if you come up to me and start talking about everything you do not like about my wife. Try to imagine what you might do if someone started in with a list of things they did not like about your wife. What would we think about that? How might we handle that situation? Imagine someone starting in, “You know, your wife has a really whiny voice, and her glasses make her face look strange, and the things she wears really are not very flattering to her figure.” Imagine how we might react to that. Those of us who love our wives would probably get pretty defensive about that. We would jump in stop the person, “How dare you talk to me that way about a person I love.” And at a minimum, we would bring that conversation to a very quick end.

With that scenario in mind, I want us to remember this morning that the church is described in the Bible as being the bride of Christ. And with this scenario in mind, I would remind all of us that whenever we speak to another person about the church, we are actually talking about the Lord’s bride, purchased with the blood of God’s own Son. I think about my own bride – I know her strengths and her weaknesses (as she knows mine) – but when I talk to somebody else, or when somebody talks to me about her, I do not want to focus on the negative. Years ago, I preached for a church in Tennessee, and one day we all went to somebody’s home for dinner, the men and women split up after dinner, and when those men got together all they did was share one story after another concerning how terrible their wives were. One older guy would start out, “My wife burned breakfast this morning,” and another guy would continue, “Oh yeah, that’s nothing – my wife did this or that,” and on and on, and I sat there a little stunned that these men would admit to such poor judgment in marrying such horrible women! And then I remember thinking to myself, “I hope I never get to that point in my own marriage.”

From time to time, I will hear people speak of the church in a similar way. Years ago, I remember a man from another state pulling me into a conversation, and this man was speaking of the church and he said, “We never preach on grace and love in the church.” And I remember my reply. I said, “Be very careful how you use the word ‘we.’” And then I said, “If ‘we’ means me, you don’t know what I preached on last week, and if ‘we’

means you, then you need to knock it off and start preaching on grace and love as you should.” I hope I wasn’t too firm with the man, but it really irritates me when people make broad sweeping negative statements about the Lord’s bride – especially when we may not have all of the information.

And it seems that we can learn a lesson here concerning how we speak of the church. Let us never forget that the church itself is the bride of Christ, and when we start talking about the Lord’s bride, we can be aware that there may be room for improvement, but let us also remember to speak of His bride with the utmost of reverence and respect. I think of this congregation in particular. There are certainly ways for us to improve as a congregation. And yet at the same time, there is so much that I love about the Four Lakes congregation. Last month, we began our 14th year with this congregation, and over the past month or so, I have done some thinking. Several weeks ago, I mentioned how much I love the low roar of conversation that takes place between class and worship on Sunday morning. I love the Wednesday night crowd. I love how people stick around and talk after class each Wednesday. In our Sunday class several weeks ago, somebody mentioned the idea of having “small groups.” As I see it, our Wednesday get-together IS our “small group” here at this congregation. I love hearing the good news as well as the struggles we’re having during the week. I love seeing all of the kids here at this congregation. This past Wednesday some of us were out looking at the outside of the building thinking about some plans for the future, and it seemed like there were kids everywhere – there was just a swarm of children running around all over the place – I love that about this congregation! As most of you know, I invited all of you to give some input concerning what you love about this congregation, and over the past two months I received 14 responses – some on handwritten cards, some by email, and some on the church’s Facebook page.

- One Christian woman loves the genuine connections everyone has. She loves that all of the members are real people trying to keep on a true path to get to our destination.
- Another Christian sister says, “I love Four Lakes because this is my long-time family. I have a long history with this group of people and have memories with each and every person.”
- One of the men of the congregation says this, “What I like about the Four Lakes congregation is the authenticity of the people that make up the Four Lakes Church of Christ, which I am happy to call my brothers and sisters in Christ. I love the sound preaching straight from the Bible.”
- An out of state visitor from last summer saw the question on the Facebook page and replied, “Very friendly people when we visited.”
- A Christian sister replied via Facebook as well and said, “Where do I begin? First, it’s my Christian family no matter where everyone comes from we all meet there for hugs and smiles, outreach to the community, all the lessons are straight from the Bible, the songs are great, everything about Four Lakes Church I love.”
- Another sister responded via Facebook and said, “I love the simplicity, the love, the family! It’s the one place ya hate to leave and the place you can’t wait to meet up again. I know firsthand, because I left and could not find another church like it over a five-year journey. Coming home was the best.”
- Someone else wrote a note on a card and loves that we are a small group where everyone cares, that there is a welcoming feeling here.
- Another loves that we are God’s children and loves the fact that we love God.
- A Christian sister loves this congregation because she believes that “it is Christ’s scriptural church.” She goes on to say that there is love here and caring for each other and for outsiders. She also notes that she regularly prays for elders.
- A Christian couple answered this one together, “We love and appreciate the Sunday school class, the open and honest questions and answers from our family members. Never feeling embarrassment

when asking a question. The sincere concern when someone is ill. Potluck dinners and picnics. Also, to know that there are others who have doubts at times. It is nice to watch the young people in our congregation grow and mature in the Lord.

- One of the kids loves everything, and when asked to explain why, answered, “Just cuz.”
- Another Christian couple answered together, “Our brothers and sisters at Four Lakes Church of Christ have always been there to support and encourage each other. They love and care for each other. We are blessed to be a part of God’s family at Four Lakes.”
- A Christian brother (in a very manly fashion) gave his answer in bullet points. I love this congregation: 1.) Christian fellowship, 2.) Loving Christian people, 3.) True to God’s word, 4.) Continuous learning, and 5.) Loving support.
- And finally, one of our senior men says that he loves this congregation because we are “way more than friends – it’s a family! Brothers, sisters, and young-uns. Might not always agree, but we are still family, and we care about all.”

I am so thankful for your comments over the past several weeks, and this morning, as we think about what is right with the church, as we think about what we love about this congregation, I would invite you to turn with me to a passage in the New Testament that tells us how important the church should be to us. The passage is found in 1 Timothy 3:14-15 (p. 1856). The book of 1 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul (an older man at this point) to the young preacher Timothy. Timothy was preaching in the city of Ephesus – it was a tough job. Ephesus was large and immoral, and Timothy had been dropped off there with the assignment of preaching the word of God. Paul was hoping to visit, but in the meantime, he wrote an inspired letter. That brings us to 1 Timothy 3:14-15 and the words of the apostle Paul to the young preacher Timothy – 1 Timothy 3:14-15,

¹⁴ I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; ¹⁵ but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

As we look at these two verses, and as we think about what we love about the church, I would like for us to notice two pictures Paul paints for us concerning the church.

I. First of all, we notice in verse 15 that THE CHURCH IS PICTURED AS THE HOUSEHOLD OR FAMILY OF GOD.

The church, therefore, is much more than just a club. It’s not like 4-H or the Boy Scouts. It’s not like the Elks or the Moose. It is so much more than the Democrat Party or the Republican party. It’s not like some kind of team. The church is not like a business – yes, we may purchase some copy paper here and there, but we are so much more than that. As Paul says, the church is the **“household of God.”** From time to time, I will hear someone say, “I want to be a Christian, but I don’t really need the church.” And yet when we think about it, that’s like saying, “I want to play football in the NFL, but I don’t want to be a part of any particular team.” It doesn’t make sense. You cannot be one without the other. All Christians are a part of the church, the family or household of God.

And to me, it is interesting that we have a similar picture elsewhere in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, we remember Jacob’s vision of the angels going up and down the ladder with God standing at the top of the ladder. Following that vision (in Genesis 28:16-17), Jacob said, **“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.”** The Bible then says that he was afraid and said, **“How**

awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” In a sense, then, Jacob experienced a little foreshadowing of the church. The church is awesome. The church is the place where God lives on the earth. The church is the household of God.

We see similar wording elsewhere in Paul’s writing. In Ephesians 2:19-20, for example, Paul says, ***“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.”*** Several months ago, we looked at the passage in Hebrews 2 where the Bible says, ***“For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.”*** The Lord Jesus, then, is described as our older brother, and he is described in that way because we are a part of God’s family, God’s household.

Of course, as a part of God’s family, we need to acknowledge the fact that the people we love the most are sometimes the ones that we fight with the most. Think about husbands and wives. Some of the sharpest disagreements we will ever have in this life occur between a husband and a wife. The same is true of brothers and sisters. The same is true of parents and children. Sometimes we disagree. Sometimes we strongly disagree, and yet in God’s family as in our physical families, we work through it. We work through it because we are family. I remember some advice my grandfather gave us before we got married. He said that no matter how strong an argument might get, that we were never to even use the word “divorce.” The same goes for our children and for our physical brothers and sisters. We might have some issues here and there, but we expect the family bond to hold us together. The same is true in the Lord’s church. We are the family of God.

To me, it has always been interesting to observe how different we are from one another – not only here at Four Lakes, but also in the early church. We think about how the church was established in Acts 2. There were people from everywhere, from many nations, and they all came together in one body. And the diversity continued throughout the book of Acts – some were Jews, some were Gentiles; some came from a God-fearing Jewish background, and others were basically atheists or pagans. But when they came together in the church, the Bible tells us that they had everything in common. They united on the apostles’ teaching, and fellowship, and the breaking of bread, and prayer. They were together and had all things in common. They shared their meals with gladness and sincerity of heart, even to the point where they sold their possessions to care for the poor among them. They had this unity because they were all born into the same spiritual family.

What is right with the church? We are the family of God! What do I love about this congregation? We are the family of God!

II. As we go back to what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3, we find he paints a second picture of the church, and that is, THE CHURCH IS THE PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH.

We know that when Timothy first received this letter, he was preaching in the city of Ephesus, and Ephesus was home to the Temple of Artemis (or Diana), and the Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Historians and archaeologists tell us that the temple was supported by 117 60-foot tall columns. This was a massive structure – 420 feet long by 240 feet wide. To give us some perspective, the city block that we are on right now is 230 feet wide (from Jade to Turquoise) – so, the Temple of Artemis was 10’ wider than this entire city block. As far as length is concerned, heading West on Jade, each property is 66 feet wide; so, to get to 420 feet, we would need to go nearly 7 properties down Jade – halfway down the block, at least two lots beyond where Crystal cuts in – the temple, therefore, was as wide as this block and went the equivalent of 7 properties down. It was a massive structure, and it was supported by these 117 60-foot tall

stone pillars. And so, as the young preacher Timothy spent the best years of his life reaching out to the citizens of Ephesus, he did so in the shadow of this massive temple. And I would imagine from this date forward, whenever Timothy saw that temple, he would think about Paul's words here – the Lord's church, God's family, is the ***“pillar and support of the truth.”***

In the Old Testament, you might remember that the Israelites were led through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and by a pillar of fire by night. Solomon's temple had two main pillars – one was called ***“Jachin”*** (He Shall Establish), and the other was called ***“Boaz”*** (In It Is Strength). And there again, with these two examples, we have some foreshadowing of what was to come. In the book of Revelation, in the Lord's message to the church in Philadelphia, he had a profound message, ***“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name”*** (Revelation 3:12). The Lord was saying, there, that we as Christians are pillars. As Christians, we are the church, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

The church, in fact, is the only place in this world where God's truth is honored and upheld. In the Sermon on the Mount, you might remember how Jesus gave a special blessing on those who built their lives on the rock. He was talking about his own words. If we build our lives on the words of Christ, we become a foundation, a pillar, supporting the truth of God's word. In the church, we learn the truth. We study God's word. We hear the word preached for our instruction. We honor the truth every time we get together. As I looked at your comments concerning what you love about this congregation, those comments fell into two main categories: 1.) This church is a family, and 2.) This church teaches and preaches the truth. That is what Paul is talking about here.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would like to thank you again for passing along your comments concerning what you love about this congregation. And as we close, I would like for us to once again ask the “So what?” question. What does this passage really mean for us. And to answer that question, we need to ask what this passage first meant to Timothy. Notice again what Paul actually said,

¹⁴ I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; ¹⁵ but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Notice: In Paul's absence, his writing was Timothy's authority. Paul wanted so badly to be there in person, but in his absence, this letter served as a reminder concerning how the Christians in Ephesus were to behave themselves in the household of God. Most of us have rules in our home. Maybe you have to take your shoes off when you come in the front door. Maybe you have a rule that you can't be texting at the dinner table. Maybe you have rules for who does the chores. In the same way, the book of 1 Timothy outlines God's rules for the church. We flip through the book and we find rules on what needs to be taught in the church, we find rules on prayer, we find rules on gender roles within the congregation, we find rules on the qualifications for elders and deacons, we find rules on how the preacher needs to behave and what he needs to be doing, we find rules on how to take care of widows, we find rules on how to manage our finances. And as the family of God, the pillar and support of the truth, these rules apply just as much to us today as they did to the Christians in Ephesus nearly 2000 years ago. The same goes for the rest of the New Testament. As God's family, we are

thankful, and out of deep reverence and respect, we are called upon to honor the truth of God's word. And that is what this passage really means to us.

What is right with the church? We are God's family, and we are the pillar and support of the truth. I am so thankful for this congregation, and I am especially thankful for your help with this lesson. If you are not yet a part of this congregation, we want that to change – we want you to be a part of us. But the terms of membership in God's family are not up to us. The Bible teaches that we are born into God's family when we repent of sin, when we confess the name of Jesus as being God's Son, and when we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism. At the point of baptism, our sins are covered by the blood of Christ. If you have any questions, let us know. If you have something we need to pray about, write it down and bring it to the front. But if you are ready to obey the good news about Jesus right now, if you are ready to be born into God's family, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com