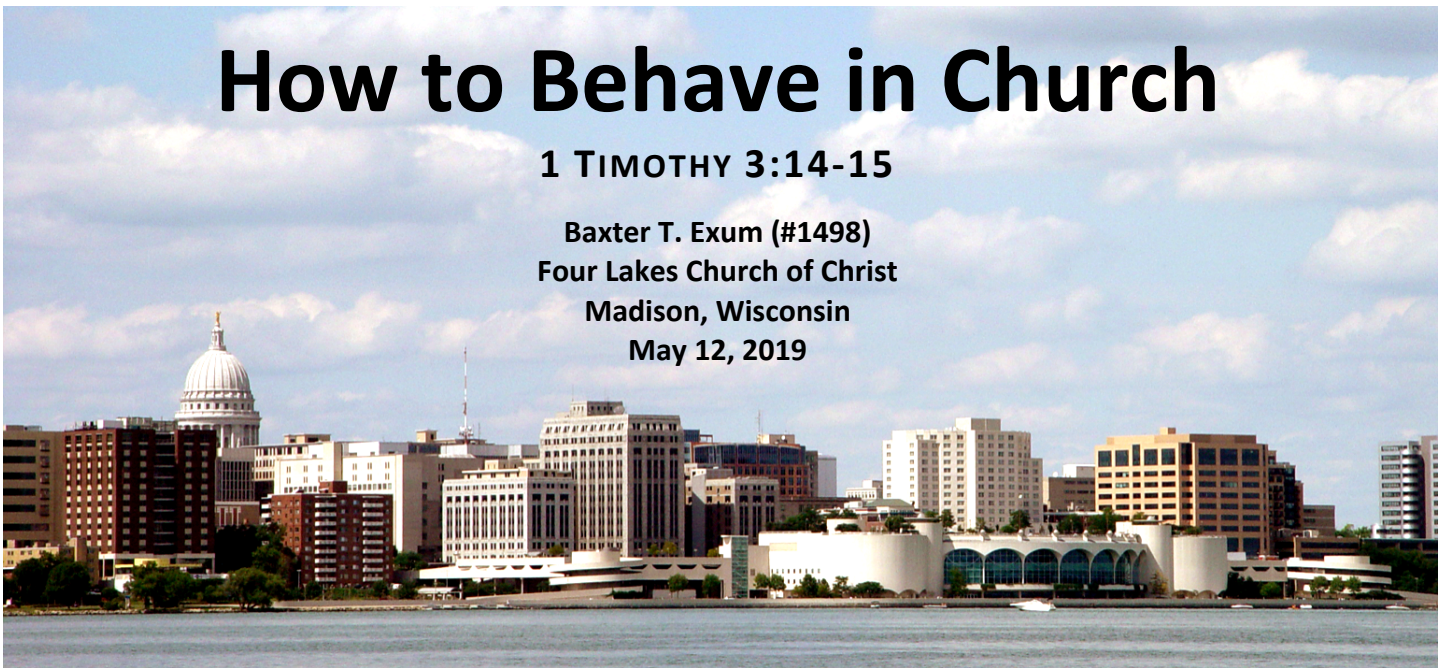


# How to Behave in Church

**1 TIMOTHY 3:14-15**

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This morning we return to our series of lessons from the book of 1 Timothy, and this morning we come to a passage in 1 Timothy 3, a passage that we have considered something of a theme verse in this book. It's a theme, because in the two verses we'll be looking at this morning, Paul gives us the reason why he is writing. And it goes back to Paul's goal of teaching Timothy and the congregation in Ephesus how to behave in church. The passage is 1 Timothy 3:14-15 (p. 1856).

Now, if somebody starts talking about "how to behave in church," many of us probably start thinking about growing up, and maybe we think of our parents or maybe our grandparents or maybe some other influence in our lives, and we think of how hard it is for little kids to sit still and pay attention for any length of time. Or maybe we think of the building itself and some of the rules we might imagine. Don't run in church! Take your hat off in church! Don't talk in church! Don't pass notes in church!

On this Mother's Day, I'm thinking of one of my earliest memories (as I have mentioned a time or two through the years), but this early memory goes back to the church in Freeport, Illinois. I remember my mom taking me out of church by my ear. I don't remember exactly what I had done to deserve getting dragged out of church by the ear, but whatever it was, I'm pretty sure I never did it again. I had apparently misbehaved in church.

And yet, as important as it might be to stay awake and not create distractions in the assembly itself, today's passage very clearly addresses something much deeper and something much more important, because we realize that "the church" is not really a place. The church is not the building. In fact, we know almost nothing about where the early church met except for a few scattered references to various homes and then that one reference in Acts 20 to a young man falling asleep and falling out the second story window to his death. That right there is one very good reason not to fall asleep in church. But "church" is obviously not the place. But instead, church is who we are. And so, in a sense, we are the church, we are a part of the church, not just when we are here in this building, but we are also a part of the church as we are waiting in line at the Post Office, and when we are driving on the Beltline, and when we are eating at Laredo's. Our behavior, then, needs to reflect that. We are in the church no matter where we actually are. And as a member of the Lord's church, the Lord's body, the Lord himself expects certain behavior. He expects us to conduct ourselves appropriately - not just in this building, but everywhere.

And to make that point, to emphasize how important this is, the apostle Paul describes the Lord's church by using some vivid and profound pictures, summarized in three short phrases. And the main idea this morning is that because of what the church really is, our involvement in it requires certain behavior. This morning, then, let us notice how Paul describes the church. Our passage for today is 1 Timothy 3:14-15,

***<sup>14</sup> I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; <sup>15</sup> 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.***

We notice in verse 14 this very personal note as Paul says that he really wants to come and to see Timothy in person. He wants to visit; however, he knows that he might be delayed. This past Wednesday, we looked at a study guide on the life of Paul, and we looked at all of his travels and imprisonments and shipwrecks. Paul knew that he might be delayed for any number of reasons, and so he gives this letter as a reminder, "I want to communicate these things face-to-face, but in the meantime, this letter will tell you what you need to know, this letter explains how you need to conduct yourself, and this is why it is so important." And with this as a motivation, Paul describes the church.

**I. And we notice, first of all, how Paul describes the church as being THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD.**

And this is where we learn that the church is God's family, God's household. Maybe six years ago, I passed out some cards and posted on social media, asking, "What do you love about the Four Lakes congregation?" I was expecting some interesting answers, but I was surprised at how many of those answers were tied in to God's church being a family. One Christian sister said, "I love Four Lakes because this is my long-time family. I have a long history with the group of people and have memories with each and every person." One of our men said, "What I like about the Four Lakes congregation is the authenticity of the people that make up the church, which I am happy to call my brothers and sisters in Christ." A Christian sister replied via Facebook 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 and said, "I love the simplicity, the love, the family! It's the one place you hate to leave and the place you can't wait to meet up again. I know first hand," she says, "because I left and could not find another church like it over a five-year journey. Coming home was the best." One Christian couple answered the question together and said, "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." One of our senior men said that he loves this congregation because we are "...way more than friends - it's a family! Brothers, sisters, and young-uns." That right there makes me think that might have been Harold. He went on to say, "[we] might not always agree, but we are still family, and we care about all." And there were several more, but the idea is: The church is a family.

But this is where it matters: When bringing stability back to the church in Ephesus (after they had been through a hard time), Paul reminds them that the church is God's household, God's family. And when we are born into a family, not only do we belong, not only are we accepted and protected, but we are also expected to live by the family rules. Most of us have family rules, or traditions, maybe expectations (however we want to word it). We have responsibilities. Certain behavior is expected - no phones at the table, we knock before barging in the bathroom, or whatever. One rule I remember as I was growing up was that we could never leave anything on the stairs - especially overnight. I'm assuming there was a good reason for that rule. At

some point, somebody probably tripped over something on the stairs. But most of us have some rules we live by - expected behaviors. And in context here, Paul seems to be saying the same thing about the church. In God's family, we behave, we conduct ourselves in an honorable way - not just when we come together, but all the time. We live up to the family name. There is so much more we could say about the church being God's household, but the point here is: We conduct ourselves well (we behave) because we (as the church) are God's household, God's family.

**II. And this leads us to the next picture of the church as we find it described as the CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD.**

Thinking about Ephesus, and thinking back to what Paul went through in Ephesus (the riot in the amphitheater where the tradesmen making little silver Artemis doo-dads were a bit upset about Paul making fun of their made-up god), as Paul now writes to Timothy who is preaching in Ephesus, he emphasizes righteous living by pointing out that the church is not the church of a dead or made-up god, but it is the ***“church of the living God.”*** As we've noted before, the temple to Artemis in Ephesus was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was absolutely huge, but it was all based on a lifeless made-up god. As I remember it, a meteorite had fallen to earth many years earlier, it looked a little bit like a woman, so they built this huge temple around it and started to worship it. So, it seems that Paul is making a contrast. Unlike Artemis, our God is real. Unlike Artemis, our God is alive. And because we are a part of the church of the living God, we need to be living like it. Unlike those who worship Artemis, what we do actually matters.

And so, in a sense, we are God's temple. We are the church of the living God. And knowing this changes the way we live. Paul was making this point in 2 Corinthians 6 when he wrote this, ***“For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be MY people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord.”*** And so, instead of dwelling in a building, God dwells in his church, the ***“church of the living God,”*** and we are that church.

By the way, the phrase ***“living God”*** is found 28 times in the Bible - 15 in the Old and 13 in the New. So, when we get together for worship, we are not just another organization, we are not just another 501(c)3 corporation (as we are in the eyes of the government), but we are 1.) God's family, and 2.) God's church - the church of the living God. We belong to him. And our behavior matters - not just when we are together, but also when we are out there in the world. As his church, we belong to the living God - all the time.

**III. As we come to the end of this passage, we also notice that the Lord's church is described as the PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH.**

Most translations use ***“pillar”*** for the first part of this. We do have some variety with ***“support”*** (as we have it in the NASB). Some translate it as ***“foundation,”*** or ***“ground,”*** or even ***“buttress.”*** The church, then, is the ***“pillar and support of the truth.”*** This doesn't mean that we create or manufacture truth. This doesn't mean that without us the truth would disappear. But it means that we as God's people support the truth. We hold it up. We preach it. We tell it. We spread it. The church upholds God's truth.

We think of what pillars and foundations do. They support. They hold up. **\*\*PPT\*\*** We think about the ramp out here. The contractor couldn't just start pouring concrete on top of the dirt out there, but he had to dig down. Some of us remember the huge hole out there. Footings or foundations were poured under the stairs. Under the ramp itself he drilled down several places and set these large pillars that went down under the frost

line. And so we have some sense of stability and permanence. In perhaps a similar way, we as God's people hold up the truth. We make it visible. We promote it. The truth would certainly exist without us, but we hold it up for others to see.

Or maybe we could think about the temple of Artemis right there in Ephesus. As we've mentioned before, it was a huge structure. Several years ago, I looked it up and compared the temple of Artemis to the city assessor's map of this block we're on right now. And as you can see, it would have taken up the entire width of this city block, from Jade down to Turquoise. Lengthwise, it would take up roughly seven properties going down Jade all the way past where Crystal cuts in. It was 225 wide by 425 long. Historians tell us that it had 127 columns, 60 feet tall, supporting the roof. And to put this in perspective, the temple to Artemis in Ephesus was roughly twice the size of the Parthenon in Athens. So, it was a huge building, and as you can also see, the pillars were quite obvious. It was a building of pillars! And so when Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus and says that God's church is the **"pillar and support of the truth,"** he's writing to a congregation that could probably look across town at this building. Paul had this place in mind, and he is saying to these people, "As the church of the living God, you are the pillars supporting God's truth."

The church, in fact, is the only place in this world where God's truth is honored and upheld. This doesn't fall on government, or on a political party, or on our schools, or anything else, but God's plan is for his church to support and uphold the truth. We aren't to be holding up personal opinions or the religious traditions handed down to us by our parents and grandparents, but our mission is to support the truth. What is truth? Well, in John 14:6, Jesus said, **"I am...the truth,"** and in a prayer to his Father on the night before he died, he said, **"Your word is truth"** (John 17:17). Jesus is the **"word"** of God (John 1:1). The truth we uphold, then, is the word of God. The truth we uphold is Jesus.

What does this mean for us? It means that one primary mission of this congregation is to present the truth of God's word to the world, to hold it out there, to support it, to preach it, to teach it. This is God's mission for us. There isn't another way. God doesn't go around whispering his truth to people directly. Even in Bible times, even back in the New Testament, even back in the age of miracles, God never told people directly what they needed to do to be saved. But instead, God sent his people to do that. God sent Ananias to Paul, he sent Philip to the Ethiopian Officer, he sent Timothy to Ephesus, he sent Paul to Lydia, and the Philippian Jailer, and to the Gentiles. God doesn't communicate his truth directly, but instead, he has given us that responsibility. God has delegated the role of truth-telling. We think of some of Jesus' last words on this earth as he said to his disciples, **"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned"** (Mark 16:15-16). Jesus, there, was passing off that baton to us, the church. We are the **"pillar and support of the truth."** And Paul's point here is: You, as members of the church in Ephesus, need to be living like it. If you are the pillar and support of God's truth (which you are), then your lives need to reflect that - not just when you come together, but at all times.

### **Conclusion:**

So, as we go back to the theme here, the idea of how to behave in church, it's not really about how we behave "in church," is it? This passage is actually about why we should behave AS the church. Since we are the church, since we are God's people - because we are the 1.) household of God, 2.) the church of the living God, and since we are, 3.) the pillar and support of the truth - because of this, we have Paul's words here in 1 Timothy as an authoritative guide. This book is our manual. And looking back at verse 14, this is clearly what Paul intended. He wanted to come and to be with Timothy face-to-face to handle some of these issues, but in his

absence, this letter serves as Timothy's inspired guide. We have the importance of healthy preaching and teaching (in Chapter 1), we have the importance of prayer (in Chapter 2), we have the special roles assigned to men and women (in the second half of Chapter 2), we have the qualifications of elders and deacons (in Chapter 3), and we will go on to learn a lot more in the rest of this book - how the preacher needs to behave and what he needs to be doing, how to take care of widows, how to manage our finances, and so on. And all of it is important to us. This past Wednesday, I got a great report from my daughter concerning the teen class. They had just studied the idea of having a work-life balance in 1 Timothy 6. We will get to this in a few weeks, but it was a practical class on personal finances. 1 Timothy applies to us today. 1 Timothy (and the rest of the New Testament) is relevant. This book represents God's family rules. Just as we might have rules about texting at the dinner table or taking our shoes off when we're in the house, so also God has some expectations of us as his children.

If you are not yet a part of God's family, we want that to change. We would love to see you born into his family. He sent his only Son as an invitation to make salvation possible. We accept his offer when we believe in him, when turn away from sin, and when we obey his command to be buried with him in baptism. At that point, our sins are forgiven and we are born into his family. If you would like to study it further, please get in touch. But if you are ready to obey this good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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