

## I TIMOTHY 3:14-15

### INTRODUCTION

In the final section of this chapter Paul gives us the reason why he has written 1 Timothy. It is so that we will know how to behave in God's church (v 15). It seems clear that Paul was intending to visit Timothy and the church at Ephesus some time in the future but he was also aware that his plans may not actually come to pass or at least not as soon as he hoped. Therefore in case Paul is delayed he has written these instructions so that the church knows how to behave.

Paul is thinking about all that he has written so far in this letter. It is not a matter of indifference as to how a church is governed, or as to how elders and deacons or women ought to function within the church. Paul says that this is how the church ought to behave; it ought to have godly elders supported with godly deacons. Women in the church ought to know their role and not try to usurp the God given authority given to the eldership.

It is for this reason that I have deliberately taken my time over this chapter in particular, for it tells us how we ought to behave as elders deacons women and of course as a congregation as a whole. I want to move on and look:

### 1. AT THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE CHURCH (v 15)

Notice that Paul calls the church by two names here. It is God's household and the church of the living God.

**A) God's Household** - When Paul thinks of the church as a household he is thinking of it as a family. The church is the family of God. Let me state the obvious; to belong to God's family you must be born into it and have the same Father. When it comes to God's family no one is born into this family naturally, you are not born into this family because you live in a Christian country or have or have had Christian parents. No! This family involves a different type of birth, a supernatural one a spiritual birth.

It's what Jesus calls being born again or anew or from above (John 3:1-21). This new birth is a miracle that God performs in one's heart so that we have a desire to be rid of our sin and a longing to be right with God and a yearning to live a life that pleases God. This miracle is what happens when someone becomes a Christian, we are born spiritually into God's family.

But I also said that we have to have the same Father. Over the last two weeks since September 11 I have heard a lot about the similarities between Islam and Christianity, so much so that some programmes have suggested that we actually worship the same God but we just do so differently according to our culture and upbringing. It is the same as saying that Muslims and Christians have the same Father. But it is just not true; Muslims are not members of God's family nor are Hindu's or any other religion within this world. But if that is a shock to some then let me be clear that the majority of people in the West, whether they be Protestant or Catholic or of some other faith are not members of God's family.

Remember what Jesus said 'no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' (John 3:3) But when you are born again then you have the same Father as every other born again Christian; no matter where they live on this planet. You are born again into God's family and therefore every true Christian is your brother or sister in Christ Jesus. You are related to them, we are born into the same family and we have the same Father, the Father of our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore there is this bond between fellow Christians that you almost can't explain, but it's a bond of true love and concern for one another. I always find it amazing that when I meet another Christian for the very first time; we immediately have things in common and it's not long before you get the feeling that you have known this person for years. It's because we belong to the same family, it's like finding a brother or sister that you did not know you had.

How does being a member of God's household affect us? Well it ought to make us think about how we live our lives. How we live will affect our fellow members in the family. If we do things that bring shame to us then it will also bring shame to God's family. The church is not like a club where you can go along enjoy the activities and to a large extent it doesn't really matter how we live our lives or how we treat others for the rest of the week. It will not affect membership in the club or the reputation of the club itself.

But actually how you or I behave outside of this building will affect the whole family of God's church, not just here but in many other places as well. We are not a group of individuals who come together once or twice a week for worship; we are a family who have responsibilities to one another and to the reputation of this family.

Therefore how you live at work affects the family. Have you never heard people say about young people who are misbehaving, you know they must come from an ill disciplined family? What they are saying is that the behaviour of that youth does affect people's opinion of his family, whether that opinion is right or wrong. So how we behave at work, in our community, or at home among our natural family will actually affect people's opinions of God's family. How we treat the Lord's Day, will tell people what the church thinks about our heavenly father. Our attitude to God's word will say volumes about how much respect we show to our Father and so on. Let me ask how does a family function?

Family life functions on two levels. There is the communal level when the family gets together for a meal or some other activity. More and more in our society this does not happen but it ought to happen and that is why people's experience of family life is so poor today. Family get togethers are important times in every family and God's family have communal times together. This is a family gathering this morning and this evening. The Lord's Table is a family gathering, so is our fellowship lunch, our bible study and so on.

It is always difficult for a family to function as it ought to function if certain members of the family are missing from the family gatherings. It's important to understand that when we choose not to gather with the family, then it actually affects both us individually and the family as a whole. We need to see this because our society is so individualistic that it gives the impression that my individual decisions affect no one else but me. But it is wrong, when a Christian decides to give a family gathering a miss; they are actually denying the members of God's household their presence and fellowship.

You know how disappointing it is when you have organised a family gathering for your natural family and someone in the family has decided not to come to it but have decided to do their own thing. Well that is how disappointed I feel and I'm sure others feel when we deliberately choose not to presence ourselves at a family activity.

But there is another level that families function and that is the informal. Families do things together but then there are also times when only some members of the family do things. We don't expect the whole family to be present but these informal times are important. In God's household these informal times ought to be going on as well. They may well be going on in this church because they are informal and do not involve the whole church. But there ought to be times when we show our concern for one another outside the regular family gatherings.

It might be a simple phone call, or a visit or doing something with others in the family, but it ought to be going on, because in our natural families there are times we phone our brothers or sisters in order to find out how they are. I believe it is particularly important to do this when someone misses out on the family meal. Just think of the impact it would make if we all phoned or called on someone who was missing at one of our family gatherings. Perhaps that person would think twice about missing another one, for they know that they are loved and solely missed.

**B) Church Of the Living God (v 15)** – Frequently within the Old Testament God is called 'the living God' in order to emphasise the difference between Israel's God and the gods of the pagan nations. Idols that was dead. But it is also used within the New Testament on at least 15 occasions to stress that He is the source of life and the one who communicates life to believers in Christ. The church is described in the New Testament as the temple of the living God.

The church is alive because God is alive and indwells every one of his people and indwells the church collectively as we gather as a family. Again just think about this for a moment. Do we behave as a church of the living God? Is it obvious to others that here is a church where God dwells? There is a sense of awe and wonder when those people meet; there is seriousness about their worship as well as a joy. They treat the preaching of the bible as something that is life changing and you know when those people leave that place they actually try to put into practice what they heard.

This is what it means to be a member of the church of the living God. Does our attitude to God, his people and his word reflect the fact that we truly believe that we are the church of the living God. As I said the title the living God was used in the Old Testament to reveal the difference between Israel's God and the deadness of pagan gods. In the same way does our behaviour and attitude reflect the truth that God is alive and is alive in this church? If someone in the local community were to examine our own church with say another church, which does not preach the gospel, would they come to the conclusion that we are alive and they are dead? I trust they would, but the challenge to us all is this; do we conduct ourselves and does the church function like a church of the living God.

## 2. CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY (v 15)

Our responsibility as a church is to be a pillar and foundation of the truth. This might surprise us a little for we are told that the church is actually built upon the foundation of the truth as given to us by the prophets and Apostles (Ephesians 2:20). This is true but the point that Paul is making is that the truth of the gospel continues within our society as the church upholds that truth. The church depends on the truth for its very existence but the truth depends upon the church to maintain it, defend it and promote it and to hold it forth.

This is an awesome responsibility for the church to uphold the truth of God's word. The church does not invent the truth nor do we alter it, but we support and safe guard it as well as promoting it. But how do we uphold the truth.

**a) By believing it** – This will mean that as we preach it and speak it forth we will do so without any doubts whatsoever that it is true.

**b) By practising it** – There is no point believing it unless we practise it. We will only uphold it as we apply it to our own lives. If it is not relevant to us, then it will not be relevant to others. If we don't practise it then we can't expect others to do so.

**c) By defending it** – This will involve being able to answer the questions of those who seriously doubt it. It will involve giving the reason for the hope we have.

d) By proclaiming it to the world. This will involve personal as well as church evangelism.

As I draw to a close let me ask; are you individually and are we as a church being foundations and pillars for the truth within our society. Do people know that they will hear God's word from us, or do they expect just another opinion? I don't have time to tell you what this truth is but you will find it in summary form in verse 16. The truth is embodied in Christ as the truth. Therefore as we preach Christ to this dying world we will be upholding the truth.

Let us resolve that we as a local church will seek to be a family, a living church and the foundation and pillar of the truth

Amen