

God's House

Call to Worship: Psalm 122

1st Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:1-3:13

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:14-15

Hymn Insert- *Here I Am to Worship*

Hymn #269- *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*

Hymn Insert- *Benediction Song*

Introduction

In our study of Paul's first letter to Timothy, we have found that his great concern has been centered upon ensuring that pure doctrine was being taught and received in the church. We recall that Paul left Timothy at Ephesus to ensure that proper biblical order was restored, as dangerous teachings were beginning to infiltrate the church. The law of God was being misused and additional manmade requirements were being added to it, people were led to believe that certain acts of self-denial (such as abstaining from marriage and from eating various foods) was a true road to advanced holiness, and there were all kinds of fruitless disputes about endless genealogies...etc. All in all, none of these things were serving to build up (edify) the body, and instead, they were actually causing disputes and division.

Within this context, Paul had begun to give godly instructions for the edification of the body (church), addressing matters such as the biblical roles of men and women, the qualifications for overseers (elders/pastors) and the qualifications for deacons.

This morning then, we move on to consider the very heart of the matter, which identifies the ultimate purpose of the letter, and the great motivation for why Paul stresses the importance of doctrine and proper church order. And it is here, as well, that we will, hopefully, come to grips with the great importance of all that we have considered so far, and of all that we will continue to consider, as we work through the second half of the Book. And so, when we recall any articles written or evangelical positions stated, that make light of (or contradict) what we have considered about the roles of men and women in the church, and the proper subjects and qualifications for church office bearers, this text should elevate the level of importance that we place on such practical matters surrounding life in the local church.

I. Paul's Purpose for Writing

Now, how do we know that this particular text reveals to us, Paul's main purpose for writing this letter? Well, in this case, we don't even have to search for an implication. Paul actually directly states this to be the case, doesn't he?

"These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that..." (vs. 14-15a). You see, Paul would have spoken these things directly to Timothy and the Ephesians when he got there, but being concerned that he might be delayed (and so that we could have a divinely inspired 1 Timothy), Paul had these instructions sent in written form, in advance. The situation was so urgent, that he did not want to delay his message to them. And so, Paul here literally states, "This is why I write. This is the purpose of my writing." [Note: Paul is concerned that he might be providentially delayed, which compels him to write this letter. God's providence always has a good and proper purpose, doesn't it? When He delays, though we may not understand why, remember how we got 1 Timothy]

What then is the purpose that Paul gives here? "...so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God..." (vs. 15a). And so, Paul's main purpose here is to provide Timothy and the Ephesians (and us) with a general template, that can help us understand how life in God's church ought to be lived out. Now, this is not an exhaustive list, but what we are given here, does address some critical matters related to church life. And for starters then, at the very least, this does show us that we cannot simply treat life in the church in some casual, nonchalant manner, as if, God is unconcerned with what goes on, when His people gather together as a body. The fact that Paul calls the church (which again, is the gathered assembly of God's people and *not* the building itself) "*God's house*," ought to immediately lead us to the conclusion that since this house belongs to God, we ought to carefully consider if there are any house rules that we must follow, before entering it. And we ought to consider what instructions might be given for all who would desire to be a part of it (since it is a "body" of people, in this case). Let me further affirm this with two illustrations:

1) Most people, even within our own church body here, have certain house rules. For cultural reasons, or cleanliness reasons, or preservative reasons, or safety reasons, there are general house rules, which we ought to gladly follow. Some might say, "Welcome to my home,

but can you please remove your shoes before entering" or "Welcome to my home. The children are welcome to play in these particular areas, but for safety reasons or because there are valuable items in that area, or because that is a private room...etc, we would ask that you keep your children from entering such and such an area." And so, when you go into people's homes, you seek to respect their rules, which are generally reasonable. And certainly, you add your own rules, as well. If you see your child jumping up and down on your host's couch, you will probably stop him, even though you might allow that at home. You would not let your child rummage through the host's refrigerator or drawers either...etc. It is just respectful to respect that which belongs to others, and so, we take precautions when we are invited into the homes of others, to ensure that we do not treat their property in a casual or careless manner. We respect both stated and unstated house rules.

Well, in a much more significant way, God has house rules for His church, particularly concerning how she ought to function and operate. He has designed her for a specific purpose, and *how* we go about seeking to fulfill that purpose, matters to God. While there are certain non-essential, circumstantial matters, where He leaves room for liberty, there are also certain essential matters, especially centered upon issues related to the order and worship of the church, which God does not leave in the hands of our creativity or whims, to figure out. And we will see why this is the case in a few moments.

2) When Paul uses the phrase "God's house" here, no doubt, we ought also to consider, in some sense, the Old Covenant temple/tabernacle, which was a picture of the New Covenant church. And when we do that, we recall that there were many careful instructions given to the Israelites, concerning the way in which the temple was to be cared for, and how it was to function. In fact, early on, the priests learned to respect God's house significantly, when Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, were immediately struck dead for trying to be creative in the way in which they offered incense to God. And so, at the very least, Paul's use of the phrase "*God's* house," is meant to compel us unto a mindset of reverence and sobriety, as we consider how the church ought to function, by way of the implication of the terms themselves, as well as, how they would have been thought of in the reflection of the Old Covenant temple (tabernacle).

All of that said, Paul adds additional descriptive terminology to compel this type of diligent reverence, in the remainder of the verse. To that end, we get a more vivid and clearer picture of *why* we ought to follow God's house rules, in the following descriptive statements. And again, this ought to serve to magnify the urgency of Paul's overall letter, for Timothy, for the Ephesians, and for us, as we seek to conduct ourselves (as a church) in a manner befitting the people of God.

II. God's House

"I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, *which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*" (vs. 15).

Now, for the sake of impact and clarity, let us address this statement in its two parts:

1) "Which is the church of the living God." Now, the emphasis in this statement is most to be placed on the word "living." In a place, where the goddess Diana/Artemis was worshiped by most, and a luxurious temple was erected for her, this statement held a lot of significant meaning. In essence, what Paul is saying here, is that, if the heathen had such great respect for a false, non-living god as Diana, such that they exercised great care in properly adorning her temple (and in the orderly worship that was conducted therein), how much more care ought the people of God to exercise in respecting the church of the *living and true* God, by ordering things in accordance with His divine will. Diana was a powerless, lifeless product of Greek imagination and mythology. Our God is the true and living, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal and infinite God! And so, when Paul here states that the church is the house of God, and the church of the living God, the quality of this God's being and the reality of His eternal existence, ought to compel the reader all the more to take care in how he conducts business in God's house.

Application: Sadly, sometimes the world puts us to shame, brethren, in the quality of reverence they show toward their idols, compared to the quality of reverence we show our God. This is not a social club or an Elk's Lodge or a meeting place of worldly significance alone. This is where we gather together to worship the true and living God. And that ought to affect our attitudes, significantly; when we arrive, how we arrive, how we worship, our fellowship with one

another...etc. Certainly, there ought to be joy, but there ought to be reverence as well. For, we gather together to worship the living God, as living stones, part of a living temple!

2) "The pillar and ground (foundation/mainstay) of the truth." This particular label, gives us the ultimate descriptive reason for *why* God is so concerned for how His church is ordered and functions. And as we consider this label, we realize that everything is at stake here. You see, in God's good providence, the very engine, which drives the entire ship of His glorious plan of redemption; the very rudder that steers the ship of the revelation of the glory of His Son...is divine truth. Everything about Christ; indeed the power of the gospel itself, is embedded in biblical truth; biblical truth...God's truth, which contends with every false idea and concept put forth by Satan and fallen mankind. God's means of change is through words; spoken, read, and most significantly, preached. His Word is the tool, by which, His Spirit shapes and changes lives. Thoughts, ideas, beliefs...all of these have consequences, because people are governed and driven by what they believe. As I've said probably a million times now, and will probably say, at least, another million times in the future, "What you believe always affects how you live." Convictions drive how we live. And so, when God's convictions (God's Words) are our convictions, we learn to live in a way which is pleasing to, and glorifies God. And so, it would be a gross *understatement* to say that God is concerned with truth. His truth, and especially, in so far, as it centers upon His Son, Jesus Christ, is paramount to everything that is anything in this life.

Now, hopefully, having established the fact that God's truth (God's Word) is everything, notice the label that Paul gives the church here. The church is "the pillar and ground (foundation/mainstay/support)" *of God's truth*. In other words, brethren, the churches (the gathered local bodies of Christ's people, combining to form the universal, visible body of God's people) is the primary vehicle that God uses to uphold and disseminate His life changing truth. Again, God has ordained to use truth as a means of bringing about salvation and change to this fallen world. And He has also ordained to use a specific vehicle for delivering that truth, in both word and example. And that vehicle is the church. Notice the strong language here. It is not merely the case that the church contains the truth in some sense or in some additional sense to other truth carrying means. Rather, the church is THE pillar which upholds the truth, and THE

foundation, upon which God's truth is set and fixed. God has ordained the church to be His truth bearer to the world! And that is no small thing, considering what we've said about the purpose of the truth and how God uses it, as that which contains the gospel and the power of God (in that gospel) to bring about life giving change! Christ is found in the truth! And therefore, by means of logical deduction (and very specific revelation), we can say that Christ is found in the church! When Jesus calls the church His body and His bride, we can further see that all that we are considering here makes perfect sense.

Brethren, we are the light of the world. People see and find Christ, in and by us! When Paul states in Ephesians that the apostles and the prophets are the foundation of the church, and Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone, he is stating that the teachings of the apostles (as delivered to them by the Cornerstone) are the stones, upon which, the entire church is built. And we continue to build on those foundational stones, echoing forth the same life-giving truth, to a world of darkness.

And so, herein lies the sobering emphasis of all that Paul has stated by these labels, which he has written to Timothy, unto the edification of the church. The church must be ordered, and it must function in accordance with God's own preordained design, such that the truth which she upholds is not marred, but is rather displayed in all of its purity, so that God's power (invested in that truth) will have its proper and effectual work, in all whom the Holy Spirit so chooses to work. And so, how the church is ordered and functions, can either adorn or distort God's truth. It can bless others by properly dispensing God's means of blessing, or it can harm others, by marring God's means of blessing, and thereby promote great harm, especially through a means that professes association with Christ. And those who continue to mar the truth, by means of corrupt words or actions, will certainly be in danger of having their lampstand removed by the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, who walks among the lampstands.

III. Concluding Thoughts and Applications

1) Brethren, our entire Christian walk with the Lord is a walk that is based on faith. By faith, we believe God's Word, and we obey it, and we rest upon it, and anything that contradicts it (including our own thoughts, feelings and emotions) we set aside, recognizing that we are flawed

and God's Word is infallible. Now, why do I say this? The Word of God clearly teaches that more than anything in this world, Christ loves His church...again, not the building, but the union of His people. That is why He calls her His body and His bride and the apple of His eye, and that is why He told Peter that if Peter truly loved Him, he would care for His sheep. Christ loves His church.

When we gather together, this may just seem like an ordinary group of people, or even a deplorable bunch, but you are in the presence of, and part of, what Christ loves most in this world. And you might say, "Well, the bride analogy is only an analogy." And you're right, because even that analogy of an earthly bride falls far short of the reality which it seeks to portray. Christ's love for His church is far greater than the love that a husband has for his bride. Christ has a perfect love for His bride, and He sought her and died for her and purchased her, when she was a rebellious harlot, who wanted nothing to do with Him.

Now, why do I say all of this? Because, I wonder if many times, we are not so prone toward neglecting to respect, love, serve and cherish His bride, in a manner that is even remotely worthy of the love that He has shown us, as individuals. How do you conduct yourself in God's house, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth? In what manner (and with what attitude) do you show up to be with the people of God? How often do you show up to be with God's people? Do you desire to be among the people of God? How much do you have invested in her...in using your spiritual gifts, in your sacrifice of time, resources, energy and finances? Do you consider that the unity and prosperity of this body, is a critical determining factor for whether or not God's glory is revealed or marred by her? Do you consider how your individual attitude, heart and commitment adds to or takes away from the testimony of Christ that is borne by this local body of believers? May these things be worthy of your own personal, conscious consideration, regularly.

2) Finally, let me leave you with a very relevant and important closing application. Now, everything that I have said is very much applicable to the whole body of Christ, as we have seen, because we all (who are in Christ) serve as part of this body. But, I would be greatly remiss, having to cast the entire context aside, if I neglected to place the greatest emphasis of application, where the text itself places it.

Notice something about the text, that I have not really mentioned up to this point. When Paul states, "I wrote so that *you* may know how *you* ought to conduct *yourself* in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," Paul is actually addressing *Timothy* directly here. Now again, the application is definitely broadened to the whole church, but Paul's first and primary target for sobriety is Timothy. How do we know this? Because the "you" that he speaks to here, is a singular "you" and not a plural "you."

Now, why is this relevant? In all that Paul is seeking to convey to Timothy, concerning dealing with false teachings and properly ordering the church, Timothy, as the leader, needs to feel the weight of accountability that he holds on his part, to ensure that these things get done. Paul knows that Timothy (like most men, including myself) is prone to allowing a fear of man to keep him from leading effectively, in the face of great opposition. With false teachers running rampant and seeking to drive the church astray with heretical teachings, Timothy must secure a strong backbone, setting things in their proper order, because the truth of God, within which, the power of God is attached, is at stake!

And so, I say all of this to simply avow that those in leadership positions are held to a higher standard, and they must boldly (graciously, but boldly, nonetheless) lead. Now, this doesn't mean railroading things down the body's throat, but it does mean preserving and protecting the doctrine and truth of the church at any expense. It does mean, to the best of our ability, seeking to ensure that Christ's church, which bears His glory, properly functions in a way which radiates the truth of God given in Scripture, centered upon the Living Word of God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ (note: the "regulative principle of worship"). This is our responsibility. And we need God's grace, and therefore, we need your prayers, to fulfill this responsibility faithfully, and without compromise! God's house is a house that is built on truth...if it is indeed, God's house. And therefore, the leadership must do all to protect and sanctify that truth, as it is revealed in and by the actions and words of the body. May God give us the grace to fulfill this responsibility faithfully, and may He strengthen us to take any stands that are necessary!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25