

10/22/23 - 1 Tim. 3:14-4:5 - "The Church, the Construct of Truth"

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Date: 22 October 2023

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[0 : 00] The passage today that we'll be reading is in 1 Timothy verse 3, starting in verse 14, reading all the way to chapter 4, verse 5. 1 Timothy 3, 14 starts out saying, I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things 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. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by the angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. Now, the Spirit expressly says that in later times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from food that

God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the Word of God in prayer. This is God's Word.

1 Timothy seems to be a book that is at times neglected and avoided in a corporate gathering sense. I think due to the contention within the book and the hot-button topics that no one likes to address, I think often the remedy and solution would be to neglect it so that the church may be unified.

And I would say perhaps for a while until the church's identity gets neglected in the process, creating a distortion that falls short of a New Testament church. The church is vital in the New Testament because it's vital to God. Mark Dever says in his book, *The Church, The Gospel Made Visible*, says, the doctrine of the church is like a decoration on the front of a building. Maybe it's pretty, maybe it's not, but finally it's unimportant because it bears no weight. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. The doctrine of the church is of the utmost importance. It is the most visible part of Christian theology, and it is vitally connected with every other part. Now, considering that Dever authored that book in 2012, I believe living in a post-pandemic, post-COVID world, this assessment seems all the more prophetic. I mean, Christians today often ponder, why bother with all this Sunday morning stuff? Why bother with the Sunday morning crowds? I mean,

I got to get dressed, I got to take a shower so that I keep my friends. And hey, you know, after all, you know, we have the most famous preachers within the click of our thumb on our phone. And best of all, we could watch the most famous preachers in our pajamas in bed.

[3 : 37] Is this truly what we've become, being what God intended of the New Testament church?

If we were to investigate Scripture, we will discover a much higher view of the church, the church being an assembly of believers, people who Jesus Christ founded, who Jesus Christ died for, who Jesus Christ identifies with, the body and the bride of Jesus Christ.

And today's passage will reinforce the high value God has for the church and the privilege and responsibilities that we have as His church, as Jesus Christ's representatives upon this earth here and now. I want to dive into this sermon this morning. The sermon title today is, *The Church, The Construct of Truth*. Let's pray as we dive into these sections.

Father, I come to You this morning asking You for Your blessing over such a message. Father, that truth may be found and reinforced within Your body, known as the church, that this is no ordinary gathering like a social club. This is a living organism known as Your church. Help us, Lord, to soften our hearts to Your Word this morning. Help me as a herald of Your Word to speak clearly and directly towards the issues that Your church faces today. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. The first section that we have today is seen in 1 Timothy 3, verse 14 through 16 in a section titled, The Purpose of the Church, Represent Truth. Paul says, 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 a buttress of the truth.

[6 : 09] This verse in 14 and 15 is the central argument of Paul's entire letter. It ties into the purpose of his letter. It taps into the very purpose of the local church, and the local church being a body of believers, siblings in the Lord, brothers and sisters in the faith who together illuminates godliness in an ungodly world. This is the purpose of the church, to represent truth. And Paul uses two references regarding architecture to reinforce some language that he mentioned in his first letter to the Ephesian church. In Ephesians 2, verse 19 and 20, he says, 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. And so, he continues in this language and mentions the church of the living God, a pillar and a buttress of the truth. Now, if I were to go around in the church today and take a survey,

I guarantee not many of us will know what a buttress is without AI or Google helping us. Or maybe even pillar may be vague in our minds. But without having imagery in place, if you could imagine standing right up against a wall and place your arms out against that wall and then getting a stance where you're supporting and you're holding that wall up, that is what an architectural buttress is intended to do. It stands on the outside holding it up, just like a person with their arms stretched out holding a wall up. And pillars obviously are a part of the building that holds and supports the roof and the structure, everything above. It holds it up. The buttress is not the foundation, but the supporting structure that stabilizes walls and pillars of a large building. And pillars hold up that roof.

You see, He says, 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. The household of God being the church, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Therefore, the church is the strongest construct in life. Throughout the ages, truth has been proclaimed, been defended, and been displayed from the church. It's our central purpose of existence.

It's difficult to look around the world today and see that sermons that should be heralding God's Word to this world and building up these churches and Christians. That sermons have been replaced today with TED Talks. Gatherings seem to be looked at as pep rallies to go fight the devil. Or circuses with people convulsing, rolling around on floors, falling down, running around the sanctuary like madness and chaos.

All of which reduces the pillar and the buttress design of the church down to mere childish Legos.

[10 : 17] Give me the truth, the mystery of godliness. Give me Jesus Christ. Verse 16, he says, great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by the angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in glory. Being manifested in the flesh means that this mystery of godliness, is now revealed, which was once concealed, is now revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And you might see in your Bible here in verse 16 as being like an indentation, sort of like a separate poem. You might think that it's a reference from maybe Deuteronomy or something, but it's not. This is a Pauline Creed. It's a Pauline Creed which centralizes upon the facets of the gospel message. Meaning that to say that Jesus, the mystery of godliness that's revealed, we confess as confessional Christians, we confess that He was manifested in the flesh, that He appeared in the body. At the body of His birth, in the body through His life, and in the body of His death. It was a real body, physical body.

The Apostle John wrote in his letter something that you can see, that you can touch, you can look upon with your eyes. Jesus Christ truly came, lived, and died. And not only that, but He was vindicated by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit proved Jesus Christ as the Son of God in His earthly resurrection. The Spirit testified in the resurrection. And not only that, He was seen by the angels. As we see in our translations, this angels can be referenced as messengers. Meaning that not only was Jesus seen in the heavens by angels, eyewitness of angels when He resurrected, but also He was seen on earth. Eyewitness testimony by the apostolic body of His resurrection. Not only that, proclaimed among the nations. This is the essential plan of God to redeem the proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected and believed on in the world. You and I sitting here today are a testimony of God in the world. You and I sitting here today are a testimony of that truth that God is still making history by way of the gospel. Not only that, He was taken up in glory, referring to His ascension, and Jesus Christ radiates the glory of God in His ascension. This is the Pauline Creed. So, in verse 16, if there be any truth that the church proclaims, that the church defends, and that the church displays in the world, it is directly related to the truth of Jesus Christ encapsulated in this creed-like verse.

If you are a Christian, you are a confessional Christian who confesses the mystery of godliness. It is essential to the purpose of the church. The mystery that was once long been concealed has now been revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and therefore the church becomes a representative of that mystery of godliness. The gospel, as summarized in verse 16, is the cornerstone that the foundation that the foundation is built upon. The very foundation the local church stands upon as a pillar and buttress of that truth. You see, God's design for the church, as we've seen all the way from chapter 1, dealing with false doctrine within the church, leading to 2, and how we need to organize in prayer, and what men should be doing, what women should be doing. All of these constructs are found within the design of God's church. It's a purposeful design that sets the church apart from the world. Well, no wonder then why the culture is attacking biblical gender roles by way of their ideologies of what makes sense for them. The church stands tall and distinguished from the world, not upon our will, but the will of God, upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the cornerstone. We are the pillar and buttress of truth in a world full of lies.

Not only that, but we see something shift in chapter 4. In a section titled, The Responsibility of the Church Defend Truth.

[16:06] Verse 1 in chapter 4 says, Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from food that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Now being that Paul just established the massive construct and strength of the church, we might find it odd to see such a shift in emphasis here. Because what does verse 1 of chapter 4 say about the strength and the surety of such a structure? Isn't the church unmovable, unbreakable, and enduring? What in the world is going on here?

We must see something important. It is not that which is outside the church that will harm her, but that which is within her. In other words, Satan could care less about the structure of the church, the massiveness of the church. He wants to get inside. He does this by breeding false theology. This is a problem in the church in Ephesus that Paul is instructing Timothy to address back in chapter 1 verse 3. You see, false theology is the concern of Paul writing to Timothy. He says, "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith." It's his concern of writing to Timothy. Not only that, in Acts 20, 29, it was also a concern there. "I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them." It was his concern in Acts.

It was even Jesus Christ's own concern to his disciples in Matthew 24 verse 10, a passage that just got out of referring to the time of the time of tribulation that will cause trial upon Christians. He says, "And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another, and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray." False theology, church, will lead to apostasy.

This is the Greek word *apostasyia*, which means rebellion, abandonment, defection. This means that Satan is far less concerned upon a demolition project of the church. He would love it, but he's far less concerned.

[19 : 45] He's wise enough to know that that will not work against the Almighty God. But he indeed loves to pull the fire alarm system to vacate the building. In other words, the lure of Satan capitalizes upon the community of God by using seductive or deceitful spirits and false teaching to vacate the assembly. This is his oldest military trick since Genesis 3. Jesus Christ gave Satan the high status of being the father of lies in John 8 to 44. And while I don't believe that Christians can necessarily be physically attacked and assaulted by Satan, they can be lured into danger by Satan, into error and into lies. Satan, after all, is the first liberal theologian. And guess what? He's got his doctorate. He knows what he's doing.

Listen. Can't we see that a church that loses orthodoxy will grow in apostasy? How? Verse 2, false teachers' consciences will become seared, meaning burnt and numb. If you took a piece of charcoal from the fire or the smoker of our men's retreat, you would probably find that when you put that piece of hot, glowing charcoal on your skin, it will burn deeply down to the nerves to the point when your healing process takes place, you'll lose all feeling within that place. This is what Paul is saying.

False teachers, the attribute of false teachers are whose consciences are seared, that they're numb to any error. They're completely burnt. They are the ones who are desensitized to error. And I've got to hand it to you that there are numerous unrepentant false teachers today who put Jesus Christ as a bow in wrapping paper, but within that gift is Sinai. It's a claymore of false theology. Teachers like Joel Osteen or Joyce Meyer, Bill Johnson, Mike Todd has been straying for a while here. Francis Chan has just newly been straying over the past 10 years. Andy Stanley has affirmed that he is leaving orthodox theology. Or even the list can go on, John and Lisa Bevere and many, many, many more.

These are ones who, upon calling error, calling them to repent or challenging their teaching, their consciences are seared, their consciences are numb to the error. And now these are a list of people that are known within the church today, that are known for having false theology.

And in Paul's day of writing to Timothy, the deceitfulness contains sort of just enough truth to resist detection, to go undetected by the church. And now, considering the strength of the church that we just got out of the church, we would probably imagine that the false teaching and things that were arising in Timothy's day were something like Joyce Meyer or Joel Osteen, who are denying the deity of Jesus Christ time and time again. But that's not the case.

- [23 : 44] While it is the case of our day to day, it's not the case. And this passage will challenge us in the other realm of the spectrum of Christians who make non-essentials essentials. And when you make non-essentials essentials to the faith, you depreciate the essentials. The essentials being the sufficiency of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ, the Trinity, and much more.

You see, in verse 3, we see that they have been making non-essentials essentials. They've been promoting myths and promoting speculations back in chapter 1, but here we get specifics.

There's prohibitions of marriage and food, abstinence from food. And there's nothing wrong in principle with being a single person or being a vegetarian. Or might I be so bold of being a single vegetarian?

But it is an error to ever make such practice an essential to the faith. This legalistic mindset is a problem in the church today. And you see this within legalistic circles.

You see a lot of people watching Vaughty Bauckham or James White who are godly men who are promoting godliness and people take their words to such an extreme to demonize Christian parents who can't homeschool or can't afford a private Christian school and say that they're not Christians.

- [25 : 46] Christians. Or if a Christian by their conscience thinks that it's helpful for them to get vaccinations, that all of a sudden they're not a Christian anymore.

Non-essentials have become essentials. By making non-essentials essentials, this is going to cause severe damage and distortion within a Christian in the long run.

Come to 10 to 20 years down the road, they will, if history is true, these individuals and these groups will find themselves knee-deep in a Gnostic-like cult.

This happened to the church in Ephesus, according to Revelation 2.4. They lost the love that they had at first. They were good at addressing false doctrines.

But what grew and what bred within this community was a loss of love. They depreciated the value of Jesus Christ.

- [27 : 04] You see, the church of all ages must make their central and most essential striving the gospel of Jesus Christ. Verse 16 and verse 16 alone.

Paul goes on to say in verse 4, Everything created by God is good.

Specifically in this context, referring the non-essentials that they're making essentials, like food. Food is good. Marriage is good. But you could still be single, and you could still fast or be a vegetarian.

It's up to your conscience. They do not determine a Christian. You see in verse 4, God's goodness was intended to be embraced, not rejected.

In essentials to the faith and practice of the household of God, the Lord does build up His witness to the nation of truth. And this is not to be a distortion of essentials and non-essentials.

- [28 : 27] This is an embracing of verse 16. The gospel is essential. Jesus is essential.

John Stott says on this verse that the purpose of pillars is not only to hold the roof firm, but to thrust it up high so that it can be clearly seen even from a distance.

Just so, the church holds the truth aloft so that it is seen and admired by the world. Indeed, as pillars lift a building high while remaining themselves unseen, so the church's function is not to advertise itself, but to advertise and display the truth.

You see, church, we must not only be able to detect doctrinal error, but to discern non-essentials of the faith.

How do we do that? Well, we know now. We turn to verse 16. We turn to the gospel.

[29 : 47] If we can just study the gospel and get the gospel right, we'll be able to discern non-essentials from the faith, things that are false doctrines to the faith, we'll be able to distinguish it all.

Just as John MacArthur says in his book, *Reckless Faith*, he says, federal agents don't learn to spot counterfeit money by studying the counterfeits. They study genuine bills until they master the look of the real thing.

Then, when they see the bogus money, they will recognize it. And so too, friends, is it for the church today. We must know the gospel and be able to distinguish the gospel from false theology, distinguish essentials from non-essentials.

If this is true, what a vibrant original the church can refer to in verse 16. In our assembly, therefore, we strive to be the best version of the constructs and design that God intended with thanksgiving and set apart by God's Word and prayer.

Amen. So, a couple encouragements for you this morning. May our love for God and one another be the fiber of our unity.

[31 : 17] A love that strives for reconciliation in church discipline even, or weeping with those who weep, mourning with those who mourn, rejoicing with those who rejoice.

May our love for God and one another be the fiber of our unity. This means that we can disagree on non-essentials to the faith and not be disagreeable.

This is an important message to the church today. May we also stand upon a firm foundation that is unmovable, unshakable, unbreakable, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the cornerstone, and standing firm on that foundation as our united assembly is constructed into a bold witness of truth to the nations.

We testify truth in a world, a fallen, depraved world and society that's full of lies. The church is a beacon of truth.

May we also be able to sniff out false theology and false motives before they ever get a chance of taking root in our local body here in Youngstown.

[32 : 50] May we also strive for spiritual maturity to know the right hills to die on as we unite in essentials and bestow liberty in non-essentials and in all things acting in charity towards one another.

And finally, may we never forget that the gathered church was never intended to be an accessory to our family life or our work life.

We are never meant and organized to be an accessory to anything in life. But the church, the construct of the church, is the central nucleus of which all life is revolved around.

It is not up for opinion. It is an objective truth according to God's intention and design in the New Testament.

So, I'll close with this. In Jesus, truth was embodied. He did not merely speak the truth.

[34 : 12] He was the truth. He did not come to simply tell the world about God. He came as God. And so it is with His people.

We speak the truth of the gospel with our lips. And we show the glory of the gospel by the manner in which we live life together and on mission as His church.

Amen. Let's pray. Let's pray.