

PM 1 Timothy 3:15

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[0:00] To read verses 13 to 22. You may think this is a strange sort of passage to read, but if you concentrate on what's here, then when we read the New Testament passage, you'll understand why we read this.

Hopefully. 1 Kings chapter 7 at verse 13. And King Solomon sent and brought Hiram from Tyre. He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in bronze.

And he was full of wisdom, understanding, and skill for making any work in bronze. He came to King Solomon and did all his work.

He cast two pillars of bronze. 18 cubits was the height of one pillar, and a line of 12 cubits measured its circumference. It was hollow, and its thickness was four fingers.

The second pillar was the same. He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars. The height of one capital was five cubits, and the height of the other capital was five cubits.

[1:20] There were lattices of checker work with wreaths of chain work for the capitals on the tops of the pillars, a lattice for one capital, and a lattice for the other capital.

Likewise, he made pomegranates in two rows round the one lattice work to cover the capital that was on the top of the pillar, and he did the same with the other capital.

Now, the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars in the vestibule were of lily work, four cubits. The capitals were on the two pillars and also above the rounded projection which was beside the lattice work.

There were 200 pomegranates in two rows all around, and so was the other capital. He set up the pillars at the vestibule of the temple. He set up the pillar on the south and called its name Jachin, and he set up the pillar on the north and called its name Boaz, and on the tops of the pillars was lily work.

Thus, the work of the pillars was finished. Just to there. We'll sing now another Psalm 3. 1 Timothy chapter 3.

[2:37] The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach. The husband of one wife. Sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.

Not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive.

For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

[3:52] They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, and let them also be tested first. Then let them serve as deacons, if they prove themselves blameless.

Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves, and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. 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 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 angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

May God bless to us these readings in his word. We want to look at 1 Timothy chapter 3. We'll read verses 14 and 15.

[5:21] 1 Timothy chapter 3, reading verses 14 and 15. 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 buttress of the truth.

Here is what the church is. The household of God, the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

If we go to the Bible and ask, what is the church? How should it function? I don't think we get too many theological statements about it, although these are there obviously.

But what we do get are pictures. And we've looked at a couple of these pictures already, as you may perhaps remember. The church is a body. It functions in some ways like the human body. All the parts of the human body are different in form and in function. Yet in the healthy body, they work together in complete harmony and unity.

[6:36] That's the way that the church is. That's the way it works. It functions. We're all different. Different background. Different genetic construction.

Different standards of living. Different outlooks. In some cases, a church is composed of many different nationalities. Different. Different. But nonetheless, united in Christ.

Different in their gifts and so on. But united in Christ. That's the church. That's what a congregation should be like. Everybody, with their differences, should nonetheless work together in complete harmony and unity.

That's a picture of the church. The church is also a building. It's a spiritual building. We have the foundation that is Jesus. And we come and we lay ourselves upon him.

He's the foundation. We'll build up on him. And the church, therefore, is in process of becoming a house. A spiritual house.

[7:40] That is, a spiritual temple. Not like the temple in the Old Testament that was material. And everything in it was based upon material things. But all these things have their spiritual equivalent in the church of today.

We are a spiritual house. A spiritual temple. And there's different ways in which the New Testament looks at that picture. And we looked at it only in one way last time.

But here we've got other descriptions of what the church is like. There are three things that are said here about it. We are God's household. We are a community of the living God.

And we are a pillar and buttress of the truth. Now some of this overlaps with what we've already said. But there's new ideas here as well. And all that we want to do this evening is look at these three descriptions of what the church is.

And we're not talking about the church generally. Although this is true of it in general. We're talking about how the local church should function. How it should be organised.

[8:47] We should live in such a way that we are seen to be the household of God. The church of the living God. A pillar and buttress of the truth. Okay, the first thing is the church is the household of God.

Now this word household actually could be translated house. Not just does it refer to the people living in the house, the household.

But it can refer to the house itself. And actually I feel that that would make quite good sense in this passage here. Because it goes on to speak about matters connected with a construction of a building.

But I'm going to take this the way all English translations have it. We're not talking about the church as a house. We're talking about the church as a household.

And the church is meant to function the way a household functions. So what does that mean? Well, it depends upon your outlook about what a household is.

[9:56] Nowadays in our setting there's no one pattern. Many households will be one generational. Where two old folks live together that's all that there are.

Or where a young couple live together. Or a single person lives alone. One generation in each household. Traditionally in Scotland we would I would have thought thought in terms of two

generations.

What is a household? Mum, dad and the kids. But if you go further back in Scotland and certainly if you go to other parts of the world you'll find that there are three generations usually in a family. The parents and the children and maybe nephews and nieces and maybe even cousins as well. And then the older generation a widowed mother an uncle or aunt that had no family they're all together in the one household.

So a household for these people was broader than what it normally is in our thinking today. And it might not just contain those that are biological or related to each other.

[11:09] There might be a couple of live-in servants for example that will help in the domestic work. or a couple of live-in men that will help in the vineyards or in the fields or whatever.

So a household was a family an extended family unit that functioned together a unit one that functioned together. And it had its functioning it had its work aspects it had its economic aspects and that's the way I would like us to think of the church.

The church has to function like a household like a family unit with its work ethic and its other aspects as well.

It is a functioning entity the household that's the way that we're going to look at it. And that asks of us the question what does this look like in practice?

We're meant to function like a household like an extended family in all our operations? What does it look like in practice? I'm interested to notice here that actually Timothy does use this concept in the way that he gives his instruction here.

[12:25] He says do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Now in those days before there was ageism that discriminated against older people in those days the older people were respected and younger people wouldn't lightly criticise older people and if they did so they might be in deep water.

And this obviously constitutes a problem in the church as we found in Africa for example that young men in the ministry if they said anything that might reflect upon their elders it was culturally not acceptable and as suspected in Jewish society at that time there was something like that operative as well.

So what are they meant to do if they're going to try and help older men young elders pastors what are they meant to do with these older men?

And they're told not to concentrate on the negative side of things do not rebuke but they are to concentrate on the positive side of things encourage them and in that way they'll be able to deal with them in a way that is useful and acceptable.

They have to treat them as fathers. They have to treat them as fathers. There you see is the outlook of the family circle that has to be used in the way the church operates.

[13:51] And it's not just only about the older men that this idea of working in accordance with family structures and values comes into the picture.

He goes on to say treat younger men like brothers. Older men sorry older women like mothers. Younger women like sisters in all purity.

And you see family values have to come in to our dealings with one another. How do we treat our brothers? That's the way we have to treat younger men.

How do young men treat young women? And obviously there are certain norms that we've got to fulfil but also there are certain delicacy in this because of the way that the sexual element often comes in in the relationship between man and woman.

Well what we've to do is treat our younger women like sisters as if they were in the same family circle of us of the same blood we might see.

[14:55] And there of course incest was a terrible thing then as it should be now. and to think of them mistreating their sisters was just unthinkable and that's the way it has to be in the church in all purity.

But the bottom line you see is this the family circle the values of the family circle is what must dominate in our dealings with one another. There must be respect mutual respect there must be a recognition of each member's position in the household and we have to deal with them like an ideal family relates to one another.

That's the idea then. We are the household of God who work together in a family spirit. Every year we have a general assembly when the ministers some of the ministers and elders meet together in

the general assembly.

And if you speak in the assembly you come up to the front and you're meant to begin with the words fathers and brethren. And that is a way of speaking that many people deride nowadays and think it ridiculous.

And okay you could modernize it but we shouldn't neglect the fact that according to this passage that is an excellent way in which to begin speaking in such a context.

[16 : 24] It shows humility towards those that are older with us. It shows brotherliness to all. It shows a family spirit. And what is a business meeting or a court of the church nonetheless becomes in some sense a family gathering.

If we don't just use these words but use the concepts that work behind them. So it's an excellent thing to stand up in the midst of elders and ministers and say fathers brothers and brothers because it's just the sort of thing that Paul is speaking about here.

We are the household of God and we deal with each other in terms of the way that we deal with others within a family. And that's the way it has to be in our lives from day to day in the local congregation.

Now we have a unique congregation here of course where half of you are related to the other half. And what do I say when you have such family relationships and the vast majority of the congregation are all connected by family ties.

It's obviously you're going to deal with each other as you do with members of a family circle because you are members of a family circle most of you. And I don't really have anything practical to say except make sure that those that aren't related to you are treated in the same way as those that are.

[17 : 47] But that's the principle. We are a household of God. A family spirit must prevail in all that we do. We are not just the household of God.

We are the church of the living God. Now this word church, we know what a church is, a church building. We use the word constantly.

Some people want to go to its origin and point out that this means called out. And that's what the origin of the word is.

It almost is literally called out. And many people of a certain disposition especially point out that it's used not just of a religious gathering but of any assembly, a secular assembly.

And so some branches of the Christian faith talk about assemblies rather than churches because they're trying to go to the basic idea in this word. So you might get a secular assembly where the municipal authorities call together all the citizens for some community project or something of that nature.

[19 : 01] That's what the word meant in society in general. So that's what we are. We are an assembly. We have been called out from the world to serve God.

and it's not a civic assembly. It's not there for municipal purposes or anything like that. We are the church of the living God.

The one that dominates here is God. It's a religious assembly and it's the living God that is the head of this assembly that calls us out and makes us an assembly of his people.

Now this concept of the living God it seems to me is important in this context. I haven't checked it out but I do think you realise that to talk about the living God is something that is done quite often in the scriptures.

You are the Christ the son of the living God says Peter. And we put other examples of that as well. Now why do they call it the living God?

[20 : 08] And I think it's because of this that in their context so many of the gods were not living gods they were dead gods. Anywhere where you had idolatry there you had a God that was just wood and stone or something of that nature.

There's something that was lifeless and what is important in our situation is that's not the sort of God we've got and it's not according to that sort of principle that we should work.

We are the church of the living God. God. Now there's a psalm that we could have sung but we didn't that talk about this fairly clearly.

All the gods are idols dumb which blinded nations fear. They have mouths but they do not speak. They have eyes but they do not see.

They have ears but they do not hear. They have noses but do not smell. They have hands feet but do not walk and they do not make a sound in their throat.

[21 : 14] That's the gods that they knew. The gods of idols. The gods of graven images. The gods that were dead. They didn't have any faculties.

There had no life about them. And the damning the condemnation the damning feature of those that follow them is this. Those who make them become like them.

So do all who trust in them. If your god is a dead god, you're dead. If your god is an image or you worship him as represented an image, you've no life in you because they've no life in you.

And that's an important thing to reflect on because what it means to be a church of the living god is obviously the opposite of that. Our god is alive.

He hears. He sees. He acts through his hands and through his feet. He speaks. He knows. He sees. It's a living god that we've got.

[22 : 19] And the importance of that for our practical experience is this. If we are the church of the living god then we will be characterized by the life of god. Just as those that worship dead images are dead, so those that are called together by the living god are alive.

spiritually alive. And that should be the basis of our experience and what we illustrate in the quality of our lives. We do not worship dead gods, therefore we are not dead.

We worship a living god, we know a living god, therefore we express our relationship with him through the life that the spirit does. so the basis of our church life is not that we all have allegiance to a certain denomination or even a certain congregation.

But the basis of our coming together is not that we are always coming to the same building or something like that. The important thing is that we share the same life.

That we can all say what I am is what I have been made by the spirit of God coming into my life causing me to be born again. I was once dead in my trespasses and sins but by his grace the spirit was sent into my life and it changed my experience and gave me a life that I did not have before.

[23 : 47] It brought me forgiveness, it brought me the experience of God but the basic feature of it was that it was God coming to reside in the soul of man we might say.

Life, that's what characterises the church, the true church, the church of the living God. That's the basis of it and that's what we express in our corporate life, it's real life.

We are a lively church if we're a church of the living God and that means that we produce the fruit of the spirit. It's not just that the spirit has come to us and changed that's it, that there must be growth and development because we're dealing with a living God so there must be spiritual life resulting from that and one way of describing that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit or we might say we come together for worship and what motivates our worship?

We worship in spirit and in truth because we're worshipping not a dead idol or a dead concept of God but because we're worshipping the living God and take the characteristics of the God that we worship.

Now that's important for us to reflect on. This is the basis of our lives, spiritual life and we could well reflect on that.

[25 : 13] Have we come to know his grace? Can we say I've been changed, I've been forgiven? Have we known that he has wiped away our sins through the blood of Christ? Christ. It was the spirit that did that.

It was through the spirit that that came about. We've been born again and that's the big thing that counts, that makes us what we are, an assembly of the living God. So let's look at our lives and see that we've got that basic experience and make sure that the big thing that we want to demonstrate in church life is that that life of the spirit is there and is growing and flourishing and making a difference in us.

But thirdly, we are a pillar and buttress of the truth. Now if you know different versions of the scriptures you may realise that there are different ways of translating this but this happens to be the one I like best and that's the way we're going to deal with it.

A pillar and buttress of the truth. And in fact I'm not really going to say much about a buttress because I don't think there are two things that are mentioned here but one idea under two aspects. So what I say about pillar can be said also about buttress. But I use pillar more so than buttress because that's a word that is used in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well in a relevant fashion.

[26 : 38] Now this has become a theological issue. What is the relationship between the church and the truth? And some say the church or the truth is dependent upon the church because the church is a buttress to the truth, it's a pillar, it's foundational and you first have the church and then the church tells you what truth is because the church is a pillar of the truth and that's the way of course that Roman Catholicism thinks about things.

Here we are, what counts the church, what the church says, the authority of the church and what the Bible says is a derived authority. It's given authority because the church said it was authoritative and so this has become a theological issue and we must deal with that very briefly really. There's all the difference between a pillar and a foundation. The pillar is not the foundation of a building. The pillar rests upon a foundation and it's only got a subsidiary supporting role and nothing more than that.

Jesus is the foundation of the church. His truth is the foundation of the church and what his church is is something that supports the truth.

It is not based, the truth is not based upon the church's authority. unity and I think that's the way we would normally look at things. First of all you've got the Bible and on that the church is constructed through the teaching about Jesus and this foundational role and our role now is to support the truth, to display it, to defend it, to promulgate it and that's the role that the church has as a pillar of the truth.

[28 : 40] It's a supporting role, not a foundational role. And this might be backed up by the idea that is so frequent in Paul's writings and in Timothy in particular, the need for preaching the truth and teaching the word because in that way when the church does that they're employed in a supporting role to display and defend the truth.

And so he says in 2 Timothy, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, rebuke, exhort and reprove.

And you see, he's saying when you engage in this ministry of preaching the word, that's you acting as a pillar of the truth. You're in a supporting role demonstrating it and defending it. and that's a way we have to understand things. We could say more but we won't. Because I don't think we should approach this from a theological point of view at all.

Paul isn't giving some theological discussion about what the church is. Paul is just giving an illustration of what the church is. And we've got to think more deeply about what the pillar actually does in a building.

[30 : 02] Now I searched on the web in vain for a building with pillars in Dumfries. There are plenty, I know, but I couldn't find it on the web.

And I was going to use the illustration of, if you know Edinburgh, at the foot of the bound, there are two art galleries and they're all pillars on display there on the outside of the buildings.

What are they there for? They're not supporting anything. They're there for decorative purposes. Then I discovered when I drove into the street that there are four buildings in the street that have pillars outside them.

Two of them, at least, are houses and they've got this extra wee porch thing at the front of the house and supported by two pillars. And there's two public buildings as well that have got pillars. What are they there for? Decorative, ornamental. It's meant to leave these houses, it's meant to make these houses look grand and stand out from the others. It's a distinctive feature of them, but it's not a practical thing that they're there for.

[31 : 12] It's a decorative feature. And that's the way I think we're meant to look at this. We are pillars of the truth because we adorn the truth. We are ornamental, we look good in our support of the truth.

we are a demonstration of what the truth makes people. And I say that, you see, because of that reading, in part I say that because of the reading that we had in 1 Kings.

Here are two pillars, what were they for? Well, on a second reading it may be that they do support something. But they're basically there for decorative purposes.

What magnificent things they were. And you're not told that the building was laid upon them or held up the walls. What are they there for? To make the thing look grand.

To make people say, isn't that magnificent? Aren't these things wonderful? So they were tall pillars with great capitals at the top. And they were very broad, round in diameter.

[32:17] And they didn't have a practical purpose as far as I can see. Except to enhance the structure of the building as an adornment. And that's the way I think we should be thinking about this.

There's a verse in Revelation chapter 3. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. He'll have this role if he overcomes his temptations, his problems, and if he holds his faith fast to the end.

He's going to be like a pillar in the temple of my God. Like these Old Testament pillars that were erected for their beauty and their dignity. That's what the overcomer, the conqueror, is going to look like.

He's going to be a pillar in the house of my God. A decorative, ornamental. And that's the way that we have to function as a pillar and bulwark of the truth.

We have to be ornamental. We have to adorn the doctrine of God. So that when people look at us, they see something beautiful and attractive to us.

[33:23] Now there are some verses in the scripture that speak about adorning the doctrine.

Slaves are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

by good lives, by honest conduct, by unselfish actions. They have to display their faith so that it is an adornment to the faith.

In 1 Timothy, chapter 2, verses 9 and 10, the women are told to dress with modesty because their adornment has to consist of good works.

When people look at the women of the church, what are they wanting or what are they going to see? Not the attractiveness of their cosmetics or their adornments or their outward attire.

They are meant to see good works that make them look beautiful with an inner beauty. That is the adornment of God. And that is what the pillars were, adornments.

[34:36] And Peter has the same idea. Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the impartial beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

Not outward adornment, but inward adornment. And that is where we are if we are the pillar and bulwark of God.

So what does that mean? Well, many churches look and ask themselves the questions. How can we be more attractive to unbelievers?

How can we draw in unbelievers by what we do or what we say or how we say it? And it's maybe not a bad idea to ask that.

But too often the answer is we want to embellish our worship. Or we want to do something that makes it attractive to the outsider.

[35:35] And we're looking for something outward. Whereas Paul was looking for something inward. The adornment of the people of God, good works, holiness of life, attractive character.

That's what counts. Not a beautiful building so that everyone would say, oh what wonderful church that is. Not wonderful music or a loud band if that's your style if that's what appeals to you.

That's not what counts. What counts is the beauty of our lives. The attractiveness of our characters. And that's what this is speaking about here.

And that really is a very important thing. It seems to me that Jesus uses different words but he's got the same idea when he says in the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven.

And there he's saying your outward conduct is something that should make people notice and say what a God you've got. And that's what makes us a pillar in the temple of our God.

[36:52] An attractive character. I may have mentioned it before but I heard once about the child's prayer. Lord make the bad people good and the good people nice.

And I remember once as I would probably be a young teenager we had a visiting preacher. My father was away and we had this visiting preacher.

He wasn't a minister I don't think at all. But he was a good man no doubt. And when my mother in the afternoon was out making the afternoon tea he addressed me on spiritual matters.

And apparently I didn't give the right answer or all that he looked for. So he glared at me as if he hated me and he said you are trusting in the Lord aren't you?

That's the way it came over to me. Now I'm sure he was just trying to be earnest and serious about it. But the way it came over to me was this guy hates me.

[37:55] That's not winsomeness. We've got to be winsome in our approach. Attractive. And that's to me the most serious aspect of this. How can we not be convicted of sin in this respect?

Is our life attractive because of our holiness of life and the nature of our character? And it's a very pressing matter for all of us I'm sure.

And we've got to simply say, put up our hands and say we have failed. And repent of it and seek something different. But the bottom line is let's make sure that we try and adorn our religion by good works and gentle and sensitive and caring disposition.

that will make people be attracted to us by the adornment that God has given to us through his spirit. So these are the three things that we've got here.

And it seems to me that we've come to a very practical matter here. We've ended up there. But you see that's where we started as well. if you look at the place that this has in this chapter.

[39:16] I hope to come to you soon but I am writing these things to you so that if ideally you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God. And what he's saying is this.

There's got to be a correspondence between what you are in theory and what you are in practice. In theory you are a household of God functioning like a family unit.

In theory you're the church of a living God characterized by life by spiritual life. In theory you are an adornment to the gospel. Make sure you're like that in practice.

That's what he's saying in the introduction so that you may know how one ought to behave in the church of God. He's saying there must be a style of life that is in accordance with your profession of faith.

In accordance with the theology that you have in regard to what the church is. And he doesn't just tell us that. He tells us how we can achieve that. I've written these things to you so that you know how you ought to behave.

[40:29] The apostolic word, the writing of the apostles, the scriptures of the New Testaments, that's the guide for us to do this so that we may have a lifestyle that is in agreement with our theology.

And that is the way I want to leave it. Okay, I think that there's a real sense of something lacking, some failure we have in this respect at least for myself as here.

So let's make sure that we repent and we say I'm going to look at the scriptures, I'm going to read the scriptures, I'm going to develop my life in accordance with the apostolic teaching so that I may behave in the church of God in a fitting way, considering what I think the church is.

The church of the living God, the household of God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. May God bless to us his word. Thank you.