

1 Timothy 3:14-15 - The Pillar and Buttress of the Truth

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. When it's all you have, it's all you'll ever need. That's so good, isn't it? The blood of Jesus for us. That's our hope.

That's our joy. That's why we're here. That's why God has called us together as His people. We have the great joy this morning to celebrate that.

Also today to celebrate the installation and ordination of elders and deacons here at Southwood. It's an exciting day for us. God has called them to lead His church here in this place.

Before we do that this morning, I want to talk one more time about the mission of the church. We've been talking the past few weeks about the purpose for which God has us here.

[1 : 01] What I mean by that is His people individually, where He's placed us. His people corporately in the world at all. In Southwood in particular, placed here in Huntsville.

We've heard from different parts of Scripture, from different preachers in the last few weeks, what God's heart for His church is. What's the mission that should drive each of us where we are every day in our individual lives and should direct us as a body as we work together for God's glory.

God, through His Word, has given us a number of angles on this, images to think about from the last few weeks. What's the mission He gives His church? Which, review with me for a second, in case you missed one.

We've said things like this, that it all focuses on Jesus, where we come needy to Him so that He fills us with His grace to overflowing. And so we're to be on His mission.

It's about Jesus, not us. We're to be on His mission to seek and save the lost, those who are unwanted, those who are broken, rather than asking Jesus to bless our missions.

[2 : 15] We said the church seeks the advance of Jesus' kingdom in word and in deed. So people experience Jesus, they feel the thawing of winter, and they come to know the true King Himself.

And we've seen that His kingdom advances through passing along the vision of His greatness to the next generation. And His kingdom advances as the church is a buddy bench, where the beauty of relationship in God's family removes loneliness in the world.

Last week, we remembered that we're in spiritual warfare, that God has called us to fight in that for the priority and progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you hear the music of the mission of the church as I read some of those different lyrics? Those are all different ways of getting at the same thing. Does it get you excited?

Do you think, yes, that's why I'm here. That's why God has brought us together. Are you beginning to be renewed in your zeal for why God created you, for why He redeemed you?

[3 : 23] Not to mention why He brought a bunch of crazy people like us together in the same place. What in the world was He doing? Why would He do that? What does He have for us?

Listen, I know we've had installations and conferences and parties and a lot going on in these few weeks while we've been talking about these things. I don't want us to miss what He has for us.

I don't want us to miss what all those things are really about. Why would we be excited about any of those particular things? Why are we here? I want to give us one more picture of that this morning.

It comes from one of the most famous brief descriptions of the church in all of Scripture. It's in 1 Timothy. In 1 Timothy, Paul is writing to Timothy who's basically the pastor of the church in Ephesus.

He's telling Timothy how the church should function. How does church work? He's told him all sorts of things. In particular, in chapter 3, he has been telling them about the qualifications for church officers.

[4 : 27] Very appropriate for this morning. What these men who are to serve as elders and deacons are to be marked by. And the whole purpose of all the things he writes about. How we conduct ourselves in worship.

Why we pray. Why we need godly leaders. Timothy says all of that is about this. 1 Timothy 3 at verse 14.

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. The grass withers. The flowers fade. But these words of our God will stand forever. Pray with me. God, our desire is that we be a church that follows your word.

That we would be passionate about the things that you're passionate about. That we would order ourselves in the way that you would have us to be ordered. That our priorities would be your priorities.

[5 : 34] That we would love what you love. Father, that's not who we are by nature. And so we need your spirit to come.

To meet with us. To speak to us. To speak loudly to our hearts. Challenge our hearts. Inspire our hearts. That we indeed would be as zealous for your glory as we ought.

Would you do that work as we open your word together this morning. Not for our sake. Not so Southwood would be the best church around. But so that your name would be made great through us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. The church. A pillar and buttress of the truth. A pillar and buttress of the truth.

What does that mean? That's a famous description. A one-liner. But what is Paul talking about? First, let's make sure we're clear what Paul means when he writes of the truth.

[6 : 39] If we're to be a pillar and buttress of the truth, what is the truth? The truth here in this passage is the good news of Jesus Christ. Of who Jesus is as the promised Messiah and the King.

And of what he has done as the Savior of the world. It's the message about him. The verses following these clarify that for us in this passage.

But that's how Paul uses the truth throughout these pastoral letters that he writes to Timothy and others. He talks about the truth in several contexts.

And it's always the gospel message that he's referring to. Over and over. In 1 Timothy 1, he says it this way. Verse 15.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. That's the truth, he says there in chapter 1.

[7 : 40] It's the glorious news that we get to celebrate and remember every week in our corporate gathering. And every day in our relationships with each other. In our lives.

The truth that though we are sinners. That we are great sinners. We have a greater Savior. That's the good news of Jesus.

That although there is nothing in us to commend us to God. Though we could rightly feel ashamed to walk into his presence to pray this morning.

Jesus, the Son of God, has died for our sins and given us his perfect record. So that we are God's sons and daughters by faith in him. That's the good news.

That when God looks at you this morning, he's delighted. Delighted when he looks at you. Not because you just gave a big check a few minutes ago. Not because you dressed really well this morning.

[8 : 41] But because he sees Jesus who paid it all for you. Who dressed you in the beautiful robes of his righteousness. So that your God sees him and you are beautiful when he looks at you.

That's good news, isn't it? It's not what you've done. It's what Jesus has done for you that establishes your relationship with the Father. The true King has come to set wrongs right.

To fix what is broken. To remove our loneliness. To restore all of creation to the way God intended it. Including and especially our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

That's the truth. And some of you need to hear that. And rejoice in that. And rest in that. And completely tune me out for the next few minutes.

That's honestly, that shouldn't be too hard. Just stop there. Praise the Lord. That's the truth. That's the good news that we have.

[9 : 45] Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of whom I am the foremost. Praise the Lord. Lord. It's important to know that the church here in this passage is spoken of not merely as the arbiter of truth in general.

Not merely as responsible for many true things. Although that is the case. But particularly the truth about Jesus. The good news that's about Him.

That He came to restore. To save even the greatest sinners. Don't miss that. And one other perhaps obvious aspect of this that we shouldn't miss this morning.

The church is not itself the truth. The church is the pillar and buttress of the truth. Not in itself the truth.

The church is about something else. It's a good reminder to us that it's not ourselves that we proclaim but Christ. Right?

[10 : 52] That it's not ultimately about us. The church has been known for a very condescending attitude that says we're the truth. We're right.

And we're going to let you hear about it. And we want you to know how wrong you are. When we make ourselves the truth. That attitude comes quickly. The church is not the truth.

The church is the household of the living God. It's where God Almighty dwells. So that the church is a gathering of people about something else more important than themselves.

And their own individual preferences. And how they'd like to see things done. The church is a gathering of people about the glory of God. Not of Southwood.

About the message of Jesus. Not the message of will. So what is the church's relationship to the truth? If we're not ourselves the truth, how do we relate to the truth of Jesus?

[11 : 54] What does it mean to be a pillar and buttress of the truth? Those Greek words are, as they appear in English, architectural terms. And if you're like me, that may not mean a lot to you.

I don't know a lot of architecture. But a pillar and a buttress of the truth. You can think of it as a building. And you'll have the appropriate image in your mind. With pillars and buttresses which often come off to the side.

Holding it up. Supporting it. So that the structure is strong. And so first, these words mean protecting the truth. Protecting the truth.

Strengthening it and giving it a firm foundation. So that it is protected against decay. And doesn't crumble into disrepair. Paul speaks this way in 2 Timothy.

When he talks about guarding the deposit that's been entrusted to us. Protecting the message of Jesus. The gospel of grace. So that the truth of God's word is preserved.

[12 : 56] This means we don't allow false teaching about Jesus to creep in. This means we don't allow ideas and practices to be added to Jesus.

And do it our own way. And so detract from his glory. This means we must learn. And always be learning of God's word.

So that we can defend the purity of the gospel from attack. The church of God has been entrusted with protecting the message of Jesus that we were just talking about. That we say is so glorious and we find great joy in and we're charged to protect it.

The church in our day has failed in many ways to protect the truth of God from error. To defend the clear message of scripture from the tantalizing lies of the prosperity gospel for example.

From the self-promoting lies of legalistic righteousness and performance Christianity. From the lies of liberal theology and a naturalistic worldview that would compromise on the uniqueness of Christ.

[14 : 05] And the authority of the Bible. And from many, many others we failed to protect the truth. But you know sometimes in our zeal for this protector role.

In our fear that we may fail as a church in defending the truth. The church has fashioned itself into a fortress. Within which we can guard the truth very closely and very safely.

From which we can launch out our truth missiles into a lost and confused world occasionally. When we think they need a dose of this. We'll just launch that out from the fortress.

And so our job becomes to make sure no one dirties the truth with their grubby hands. That they can't get close enough to touch it. It's one of those times we also confuse ourselves with the truth.

And think we need to be protected from them too. We're not the truth. So we protect the truth by hiding it behind our fortress.

[15 : 07] And let me be clear. It is our job to protect the truth of God from the error that so easily creeps in. But one way to protect something valuable is by hiding it where no one knows it or sees it.

And that hopefully only the people who figure out where it is will be safe people who won't ever mess it up. That's one way to protect something that's valuable. There's another way to protect something valuable, isn't there?

You can actually put it up somewhere where everyone can see it. So it's constantly being protected by people guarding it and watching it. Think of the crown jewels of England, right?

They don't hide them in a secret vault, although that's one way to protect something. They have them out where they're closely watched and guarded by all sorts of people. Everyone can see them and they're valuable, but you can't take them because they're always watched carefully.

That's actually the picture that this passage gives us. That the church as the pillar and buttress of the truth is an image not merely of protecting the truth, but of promoting the truth.

[16 : 16] To hold it up, to hold it out for all to see. I was going to say to promulgate the truth, but I wasn't really sure what that meant, although it sounded good.

So I went with promote. But the idea is the truth resting firmly atop the pillar, right? You can picture that the way a building does, the way a house with pillars is resting atop of it and supported by it, where everyone can see what's propped up on the pillar.

It should be seen by all, not hidden in a fortress. Yes, the false teaching should be fended off and guarded against, but the truth of Jesus should be proclaimed from the rooftops, so to speak.

Kids, do you know that song, This Little Light of Mine? Does anybody know that one? Raise your hand. Hold your finger up, not your hand. Yep. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine.

Do you know what that, there's a verse that comes after that. Kids, can you help me with this? It says, hide it under a bushel? I didn't hear you. Hide it under a bushel?

[17 : 25] No. Thank you for helping, parents. We'll work on that. We'll work on that dialogue. No. Kids, do you know what that little song means when it's saying that?

You may have known it for a long time. What it's saying is that when you trust Jesus, when Jesus lives in you, you want everyone else to know and love Jesus too.

That's really what that song means. That you're having a relationship with Jesus and trusting him to save you. He comes in you. The light of Jesus in you is something you want everyone else to see so that they know and love him.

Jesus said that in Matthew chapter 5, didn't he? Jesus said this to his followers. You're the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, by the same analogy, Jesus says, the same one we use in kids' songs.

[18 : 31] Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Hide it under a bushel? No.

No way. That's not who we are. If the good news of Jesus really is the good news we say we believe it is, put it up on top of the pillar, right?

In every conversation, in every relationship, in every aspect of your life. Let others see it, hear of it, experience it. Not to praise you, not so you can be so wonderful, but to praise your Father in heaven.

He's the good one. Not you, right? Not me. Put the truth of the good news of Jesus up on that pillar that they too might know, love, and trust Jesus.

That's the mission of the church. That's who we're charged to be. A pillar and buttress of the truth. We've been talking about it for several weeks now.

[19 : 35] I'd simply ask you this morning, is that your mission? Is that your passion? I love the quotation from Ray Ortlund that we used as our meditation this morning.

It's time for us Christians to stop perceiving church as a weekend option and start seeing it as ground zero for world reconciliation.

Let me read that again. It's time for us Christians to stop perceiving church as a weekend option and start seeing it as ground zero for world reconciliation.

Ground zero for world reconciliation. Is that a new idea he came up with? No. I'd suggest to you it's an old one, as old as at least this passage and the rest of God's word.

That's the task we've been given. We are to implore the world on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5.20 That's what it means to be the church.

[20 : 40] To be about the mission that God has given to his people. To be the church doesn't mean that we consider dressing up and coming to a building once a week while otherwise keeping the truth of Jesus Christ to ourselves.

That's playing church. Not being the church. Being the church means being a pillar and buttress of the truth, promoting it.

Because everyone must know in every context of the good news of King Jesus. That's being the church. Alex and Suzanne Saron were here with us last week.

They're on mission to be the church in France. In France, where Alex told some of you last week that there are atheists. And in light of the recent terror attacks over there, many of these atheists have been starting to ask questions about God.

And even though the terror attacks themselves came from people connected with Islam, who are they finding to answer their questions about God? Muslims. Muslims. That more of them are converting to Islam than to Christianity because there are more Muslims around that they can find to answer their questions.

[21 : 57] And the Sarens are on mission being the church there. I talked to one of our elderly members recently. He lives in a retirement home.

He's on mission being the church there. There are a lot of people around him who are nearing the end of their life and are without hope for what comes next.

He said it can be a dark and depressing place sometimes. And he loves to go around and spend all day talking with people about Jesus. Telling them about the truth, the hopeful message that Jesus offers them life and hope after this life.

He's on mission. He's being the church there. You don't have to go to France or go to a retirement home to be the church.

But you do have to be on mission to be the church. Are you on mission in Huntsville? In your neighborhood? In your workplace? Has our Christianity become a weekend option for our social calendars?

[23 : 07] Church is an event that takes place at 1030 on the convenient Sundays. Or is church, is being called out to be a gathering of God's people, is church for you ground zero for world reconciliation because we're on mission together?

A city on a hill, a pillar holding out the truth of Jesus until everyone knows and experiences our Savior. We won't run out of time on that mission.

There will always be more to do. The story is told of a dangerous seacoast where lots of ships used to wreck.

And they would crash on those shores. And in that area of the world, there was a small life-saving station. Just a little hut with one tiny boat.

But there were several people who took that boat and went out on rescue missions, looking for those day and night they would go out, searching for those lost at sea.

[24 : 11] They saved many lives in their little boat together. And many of those stayed and joined in the life-saving work at the mission. But that little mission, that station grew because some of those people started to join them and there were more of them.

And so over time, things changed. First changes came because they were so thoughtful of others. They wanted to make their little hut into a place that was a better refuge for people being rescued from the shipwreck on sea.

And so a new building, a little bit larger, was furnished with beds for them and some furniture so that they could actually experience the refuge as they came in. But over time, what happened was that they began to think more of themselves than they did of others.

They began to so enjoy their new environment, this beautiful building that they'd created, it became a wonderful gathering spot for them. And they loved the members of the station getting together to spend time in it.

And so they did that often and they began to think of it more as a club. In fact, as they got older, many of the members didn't enjoy going out on the missions anymore. So they hired others to run the boats they'd accumulated for them.

[25 : 28] One night, there was a large ship that wrecked on the sea. And some of the people who were running the boats brought in many who were dying. And it was a particularly bad evening and they were wet.

Many of them had gotten sick. They were dirty. And among those rescued were many of different skin colors who spoke different languages from them. And it made the clubhouse not exactly the way they pictured it.

In fact, before they even had a meeting, some had erected a shower house outside so that any future people rescued could be cleaned up before they brought them in to muddy the clubhouse. The next meeting of the membership split them down the middle. Some arguing that these life-saving missions were unpleasant and an interruption to the real activities of the club. And others insisting that life-saving was the very purpose for which they existed. That group lost the vote though and they moved down the coast to build their own life-saving station.

[26 : 33] Only to see the same pattern happen there a few years later. Here's the epilogue to this story. If you visit that seacoast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore.

Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters. But now most of the people drown. Southwood, we are a church.

We exist. We exist. The very purpose of our existence is to be a pillar and buttress of the truth. To proclaim the good news of Jesus and the advance of his kingdom to everyone all around us and throughout the world.

God has privileged us with getting to labor on his mission. God has given us a mission. So each of us must consider how we order our individual lives for that mission rather than our own.

It's a hard question. We more naturally think of our own missions. What will that mean for our schedule? For our family? For our money? Hard questions.

[27 : 42] Elders and deacons. Something for you particularly this morning. As you pray and plan for us corporately this coming weekend, you must keep God's mission for his church our priority.

You must make decisions focused on the extension of Christ's kingdom, not our own. You must lead us to think first of the needs of others, the souls of our neighbors, ahead of our own comforts. Pray for that. Congregation, pray for us as we meet. May Southwood increasingly be a people through whom the truth, the good news of Jesus Christ is protected and promoted for the glory of God.

Let's pray. God, your word is not unclear about our mission. We've heard it over and over.

We've heard it in different ways and at different times. Might we be more than hearers of your word? Might we also be doers of your word?

[28 : 56] Those who are so changed by it that we live differently. Might we be so overwhelmed by the glory and the greatness of our Savior that we want our children, that we want our neighbors, that we want our coworkers and even our enemies to know his love.

Would you work that your kingdom would come here in our hearts, that it would come as our passion and priority, that it would come in Huntsville and throughout this world, that your name would be made great.

Father, your kingdom come here as it is in heaven. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.