

Title: Finding the instructions  
Text: 1 Timothy 3.14-15  
Theme: What is the church?  
Series: 1 Timothy #1  
Prop Stmt: God has given clear instructions for how his church is to function.

I love Jesus; I just hate organized religion. I love Jesus; I've just been burned by people who claim to follow him. I want to love Jesus, and I would like to trust a church, but it seems too risky. I'm intrigued by some of the things in the Bible, but some of the people who claim to know it, are so opinionated and divisive that I don't even want to talk with them. If this describes you, or people you know, then it may seem odd, that we are launching a study on the church. But, part of my task is to disassemble what so many of you think, when you think of a church. This morning we are launching a study of the book of I Timothy. For those of you who are cynical, or cautious about the church. I think you will find this study intriguing. In fact, I think that for some of you, you will find that the church is designed by God to be so much different than you think, or experienced.

Read Text:

A church down the road a bit, recently had a sign that said, "The church is a gift from God, some assembly required." There's truth to that, but the problem is that people do not agree on the assembly instructions.

Some people believe as if the church is a building. The bigger, the more costly, the more ornate, the more somber, the more historic, the more ceremonial, the more impressive, and the more intimidated one is supposed to feel. The building is the means by which people are supposed to feel holy, or in tune with God. The emphasis is on the building and doing everything you can to keep the building open, clean and operational. Failure is defined as not being able to pay the costs to renovate the building.

Some people think that the church is a weekly event. A lot of emphasis is placed on managing every detail of the event. The attenders are more like customers or audience members, while the leaders are very audience savvy. They have studied their target audience well and know what kind of mood to set, what kind of vibe to establish, what kind of flow will work, what kind of music and talk will be appealing. Like Disney Land, there is no unimportant detail. They get regular feedback from focus groups and are always adjusting things in an attempt to get the desired response. You cannot go too long, you cannot talk about certain things, you cannot be too preachy, you cannot judge, you cannot use the Bible too much, the leaders really need to look the part and above all, use humor. You have to use humor. Buzz, pop culture feel and décor, knowing what is hot, what is trendy is the oxygen of these establishments. Failure is defined as not getting 5 stars on social media sites.

Some people think that the church is a collection of ministries, sort of like a shopping mall. You have the kids section, the student section, the young adult section, the adult

section, the older adults who don't want to admit they are older adults section, and the leaders are managers of each section whose success or failure is based on percentage increases from year to year. The guy at the top is successful because he is able to get the most out of each section manager and is skilled at assembling the right team, and motivating each person. Organization, structure, efficiency and management techniques are emphasized. Failure is defined as not meeting targeted goals for attendance and revenue.

Some people think that the church is a structure of power where the guys at the top rule in secrecy and mystery. The pawns at the bottom are supposed to do what they are told and not challenge the status quo. Obvious questions from the rank and file, such as, "where on earth did you guys ever come up with that rule, because I don't see it anywhere in the Bible" are met with responses of, "don't question the holy people at the top." Guilt is a great weapon in this system. And success is marked by just working the system.

Some people think that the church is a local family business. If you are in the family, then you are expected to get a job there. In this case, the goal of the church is to keep the business going so that everyone has a place to work. Everyone knows where the power is and who the decision-makers are. Sometimes the pastor is in the family and sometimes he isn't. But, if he isn't in the family then he won't get anything done unless he has the approval of the family and if he wants to keep his job as the pastor, he had better keep that family happy. Power, control, tradition are emphasized here. New people are fine, as long as they know their place. Anyone who is not in the family who gets too much of a following has to be dealt with. Failure is defined as losing control of the ability to make decisions and call the shots.

In each of these models, there is an accepted list of instructions of what to do along with warnings about what to avoid. What is sadly missing is how little attention any of these church styles give to the Scriptures. When you try to operate a church apart from the clear instructions of the Scriptures, your default will be pragmatism. Pragmatism is the approach that is defined by: "*does it appear to work?*" Pragmatism says that if it appears to be working, then go with it. If it will keep the building open, do it. If the people will be amazed and entertained, then go with it. If it will increase the attendance and revenue, then go with it. If it keeps our family in power, then go with it. Pragmatism asks, "Does it work?" We are supposed to ask, "is it right?" But, unless you actually know what the Bible says about the church, you will not know how to answer the question, "is it right."

But God, in his grace gave us the Bible, and in the Bible he gave us three epistles that give clear instructions on what a church is supposed to believe, supposed to do, what to confront, and how to be organized. As we study the Bible, and this book in particular, we will get a definition and a vision for the church that is far more beautiful and compelling, attractive and meaningful than any of the descriptions that I opened the sermon with.

1 Timothy 3.14-15 says, "*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.*"

The six-chapter book of 1 Timothy is a personal letter from the apostle Paul to Timothy. In our study of 1 Timothy we are going to study and discuss a number of issues. One of those important issues is, what exactly is the church?

### 1. **What is the church?**

Jesus loves the church. Jesus died for the church. In fact, at the very heart of this letter is this statement in 3.14-15. Paul is writing this letter to Timothy because the church is so very important. I want you to realize what God realizes about the church. I want you to know what God knows about the church. I want your cynicism (if you have any) to melt under the heat lamp of the grace of God. I want your suspicions about the church to turn into enthusiastic conviction. I am particularly desirous for you to study through this issue. It is more than wanting you to see that the church is beyond what many of you may be inclined to think. I long for you to really benefit from the life of our church to experience being loved and cared for, and to learn how to love and care for others. I don't want you to come not primarily because you should, I want you to come because you love one another and you are humble enough to realize that you need one another, and you are able to accept the truth that you are needed as well. While this series will provide a more complete definition of the church, this summary text touches on three aspects of the church that we need to keep before us. This church is...

#### a. **The household of God.**

The household of God is another way of saying the family of God. A family is a reflection of its parents. This preposition "of" speaks of possession and location. In other words, God owns the family and God is here in the midst of his family because he loves his children and delights to be in our midst together. Our gathering together in the presence of God is our response to God calling the family together for our needed family time, for our needed meal, for our needed love, encouragement, and help. This room is not a sanctuary, where God lives throughout the week and is lonely Monday through Saturday. This room is more like a large eat-in kitchen, where we come and sit together at the table, sing together, tell stories to one another, connect with one another and enjoy the blessings and provisions of our dad. I am one of the cooks in the kitchen, whose joyous task is to serve you a plate full of lasagna or ribs. Our dad delights in the gathering of his kids. Our dad revels in the laughter and love of his children. Our dad cares for every single one of his kids, and when we gather, and some are not here, he misses them, and we miss them because the family time was not complete without them. But the church is also the pillar of truth.

#### b. **The pillar of the truth**

What does a pillar do? A pillar holds something up. It is a fitting description because the church holds up the gospel and displays it for the world to see. Our life together as a family holds up the gospel. We hold it up by our preaching and teaching. We hold it up

by our singing and praying. We hold it up by our relationships, conversations, prayers for and help to one another. The church is the gospel made visible. But the church is also ...

### **c. The buttress of the truth**

The church is called to protect the gospel. We protect it from being watered down or added to. We protect it from corruption and from neglect. Taken together, (pillar and buttress) the church is to display, promote and protect and prioritize the gospel. Now, there is a sense in which because God is the author of the gospel, no one can actually change it. The gospel is and forever will be what it is. But, what we can do is display it in all of its beauty or we can hide it, minimize it, or sadly smear the reputation of the gospel. Keep this in mind. We do not primarily gather together in order to “get something out of the service.” Now, we usually do. But our primary objective in gathering together is to remind ourselves of the importance of the gospel and to remind others of the importance of the gospel. We do not gather together because we are trying to earn points from God. We gather together because the gospel is important and the integrity of the gospel is important. What we give our time and our attention and our affections to is an expression of what we believe is truly important in life. So,

### **2. How does the church display and protect the gospel?**

1 Timothy provides 4 distinct ways the church is to display (pillar) and protect (buttress) the gospel.

#### **a. By emphasizing the gospel.**

The gospel is the good news from God that informs us that we were made by God and that our true identity is only found in him because he is our ultimate origin. We were made to live with him, under him and for him. But, we rebelled. We rejected his rule over our lives and decided that we would make our own laws and live life how we wanted. We have all rebelled. We have all gone our own way. God calls our rebellion, sin. Our sin offends God. God is perfectly righteous and cannot pretend that our sin is okay, but our sin is not okay. It is offensive to God and it is destructive to our own lives. God punishes our sin. And God is right and just to do so. But, if God punished us as we deserved, if God did to us, what would be fair, he would damn us. This is a huge issue. How can God not condemn you and be righteous? How can you make it up to God, when you deserve an infinite punishment? You can't! So God did what you cannot do. God sent Christ to live the life that you could not live. Christ lived a perfectly righteous life in your place and then Christ died in your place. When Christ died he took your place and he paid your debt. In his death he absorbed the wrath of God for your sin and rose again the third day as proof positive that the Father had accepted the payment of the Son. That payment is yours, but it must be accepted by faith. The payment that Christ made is not yours by anything other than faith alone in Christ alone. When you trust in Christ, the guilt of your sin is removed and you are credited with his righteousness. From that moment on, you are viewed by God as if everything that Christ did, you did. And you are treated as his child, just like he treats Jesus. Faith alone in Christ alone not only means that you are

declared righteous in the eyes of God, but you are now in the household, or the family of God. You are not in the family because you were sprinkled, dunked, baptized, galvanized, soldered or welded. You are not declared righteous because you do ceremonies or attend church on double-points Sunday. You are declared righteous on the basis of what Christ has accomplished for you, not on the basis of what you have accomplished. And that is good news because it does not favor the rich, the strong, the powerful or the elite. It is good news for every single person who believes, whether Jew, Gentile, slave, free, rich, poor, old or young. And everyone of those who believe are supernaturally changed from being rebels to being in the family. We go from being enemies of God to citizens of his kingdom. Therefore, the church is not a social agency, or a moral club. It is an embassy of the kingdom of Jesus. And the people who are in this embassy are here, because of the supernatural message and the supernatural power of the gospel.

The gospel takes people who are naturally enemies of one another and places us into a family where we actually learn to love and care for one another. The gospel is what brings us together and what holds us together. The gospel is the sticky glue that causes us to be connected. But, if we do not emphasize the gospel, then we will be tempted to find other things, perhaps good things, but other things that hold us together.

What if I was a really good communicator and could tell stories that would hold you spellbound for an hour? How sticky would we be? We would only be held together to the degree that I could, week after week after week keep performing at that level and there is nothing supernatural about that. I do not want you to say, wow that was an awesome sermon. My sermons cannot save you from going to hell. I desperately want you to go, we have an awesome Savior! And I want everything in this church to put Jesus and the gospel on display. This church cannot save you, but we can point people to the one who does.

In this letter, we learn that the church has to not only teach the gospel and display the effects of the gospel, but we have to confront issues that would distract from or corrupt the integrity of the gospel. We display and protect the gospel by

#### **b. By addressing and correcting problems**

Confronting problems is not fun. But from the very beginning of this book we discover that Timothy is left in Ephesus in order to address the fact that there were some people who were believing things and teaching things that were not right. This is a constant challenge because well-meaning people hear things that they think are useful or good and they start to promote them. In some cases they are not right. If you address it, then you risk causing someone to get upset. If you do not address it, then you risk false teaching getting a beachhead and creating division in the church. You want elders who are vigilant over what is taught. You want elders who care about the long-term effects of what is being emphasized.

There is an old saying in the farming community. Farmers do not actually own the farm, they are only working it for their children. That is so true about the church. If we are not vigilant in our protection of the doctrinal purity of the church, we are inviting termites in to rot away the foundation. But, this letter also speaks of the importance of having people whose personal lives are marked by integrity. We are to watch over one another. Your life matters. At the end of chapter 1, Paul names two guys that everyone knew in the church who did not hold to the faith and did not maintain a good conscience. In other words, they did not practice what they professed, and in the end revealed that they did not actually believe the gospel.

A church will, at times attract people who want to find a position of prominence. As believers, we tend to be kind-hearted and encouraging, and people will take advantage of that. That is why we all have to be vigilant and make certain that we have good, qualified leadership.

#### **c. Through good leadership**

Good leadership in a church is an amazing gift to a congregation. But, good leadership does not happen by accident. A congregation not only has to learn what good leadership is, a congregation has to expect it, grow it, cultivate it and encourage it. 1 Timothy says a lot about the character of a leader and it says a lot about the structure of leadership.

#### **d. Through good relationships**

We display and protect the gospel by allowing the gospel to inform our relationship with the government. We display and protect the gospel by understanding and pursuing the distinct gender roles that God has established for specific positions in the church. We display and protect the gospel by facilitating good harmony between the elders and the members and we display and protect the gospel by our families within the family being people of peace and true harmony. All of these issues are covered in 1 Timothy.

Conclusion:

Some of you are “car people.” You know your stuff. When something goes wrong, you know either what to do, or where to go to get it fixed. You know the difference between alternators and pistons. You can talk fuel-injection and lifters with the best of them. Then, there are the rest of us. Our automotive vocabulary consists of “thingymajiggys” and “whatchamacallits”. The idea of going to a dealer to get our car fixed is actually terrifying. We have no idea if we are getting taken advantage of. You desperately need the mechanic, but you have no way of knowing if you can trust him.

Imagine if you took your car to a mechanic and after a few minutes, he took you into the garage and explained to you what was going on, and showed you. He then invited you to work with him, and together you fixed the car, while he taught you the whole time. You not only learned, but found out, that this is not really intimidating. You can do this. You just needed the right tools and someone to show you.