

1 Timothy 3:14-16 — Why Does The Local Church Matter?

March 26, 2017

Welcome to CrossWinds. It is great to have you. Last week, we took a week out of our series to look at the vision of CrossWinds. Today we return to our study of 1 Timothy.

More Christians are trending away from attending the local church. Why are Christians avoiding church on the weekends?

One reason is that as a society, we are more mobile. Many of us are gone on weekends visiting friends or family. It is hard work to find a church to attend when we are on the road. With all the hassle of finding a new church for the weekend, it is often easier to not attend.

Another reason Christians are trending away from church on Sunday is because they are just exhausted by the weekend. Sunday feels like the one day we can sleep in when we are exhausted. This kind of fatigue gave birth to many new denominations. There are the pillow Presbyterians, mattress Mennonites and of course the bedside Baptists.

On a more serious note, another reason Christians are shying away from the local church is because they were hurt at church. Maybe it was a sermon the pastor gave they didn't like that left them offended. Maybe some of their friends betrayed their confidence and now they avoid church.

Before you find too much justification to avoid church because of people, let's be honest. The church is filled with sinful people. If anyone is around any church for a while, he or she will get hurt. It is part of working with people who

are sinners. Many people use church hurt to justify staying away from the local church on the weekend.

Another reason local church attendance is down is the rise of technology. Through the Internet, any of us can download sermons and worship music from the best communicators and worship teams in the entire nation at the push of a button on our smartphones. Why go to a local church when the Internet can provide us an even better church that we can enjoy at our convenience? In addition, many churches — like CrossWinds — have a live-streaming service so you can attend church virtually without actually leaving the comfort of your home. While attending church virtually is better than not attending church at all, a growing number of people wonder why they should even bother to start the car. Why not save the environment, stay at home and attend church in the comfort of your own pajamas? There is a lot working against the local church.

That is what raises the questions we will look at today. Does the local church still matter? Is it important for me to physically attend church? Today we will find the answers.

The text we will study this morning is right in the middle of the book. It is in the binding. In the middle of the letter Paul gave us the purpose of this letter. Let me summarize his answer, “The local church matters because it is God’s chosen way to bring the hope of Jesus to the world.” Let me say that again. “The local church matters because it is God’s chosen way to bring the hope of Jesus to the world.”

This is why the CrossWinds vision we looked at last week is about the goal to open more campuses or churches in the cities around us. Let me read the vision again.

CrossWinds is committed to the multiplication of gospel-centered churches for the good of our region and world.

We believe healthy local churches where people gather in their own community is the best way to affect lasting change for Jesus in people's lives.

Since the section we are studying this morning is short, let's read the verses together then study through them.

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. 1 Timothy 3:14–16 (ESV)

These verses break apart into answers to three questions.

1. Why does the local church matter?
2. What must a local church believe?
3. Why is it important how members of a local church behave?

Why does the local church matter?

...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. 1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)

One of the classic questions people often ask is, "Can I be a Christian and not attend church?" The answer is a "Yes" and a "No." Of course, anyone can be a Christian and not go to church. A Christian is someone who has admitted his or her sin to God and repented of that sin. Christians trust in Christ's death and resurrection to save them from their sin. You don't need to go to church to

confess your sin and trust in Christ to forgive your sin. The thief who died on the cross next to Jesus never went to church. He placed his faith in Jesus and Jesus said to him, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” He never went to church.

On the other hand, there is something wrong with a Christian that doesn't want to be a part of a church. At the very least there is a lack of obedience. At the worst, there is outright sin.

When God saved us, he didn't create us to be Lone-Ranger Christians. He created us to serve one another. When God saved us, he gifted every Christian with at least one spiritual gift not to serve ourselves but to be used to serve others in a local church family. We need one another's gifts to be spiritually healthy. To not be a part of a local church where we use our gifts to serve others means that at the very least we are a bad steward of our God-given gifts. At the worst it means other people in Christ's church are not as healthy as God intends them to be because we are not serving them in ways God equipped us to help.

As a Christian, think of yourself like a puzzle piece. Every Christian is shaped by God to connect to other Christians. It is only as we come together in the local church that we can do and be all God intends us to be as believers.

In these verses Paul gave us three additional reasons why every Christian must connect to a local church.

The local church is God's family.

Paul told Timothy that if he was delayed in visiting Ephesus, this letter will help Timothy and the rest of the church know how *they ought to behave in the household of God*. The term *household* in Greek is not talking about a physical

structure. It is talking about a relational structure, a family. The local church is a family gathering. It is a family reunion. Why is it important for Christians to gather in the local church family?

1. A family gives us support and encouragement.

Just as it is important for your family to spend time together every day for support and encouragement, it is important for God's family to get together on the weekends and throughout the week so they stay connected to support and encourage one another.

A local church gathering is a family gathering, which means we gather together to treat members of our local church with the respect and love of blood relatives. Paul will give us many examples of this later in 1 Timothy. Here is one example.

Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. 1 Timothy 5:1–2 (ESV)

Christians are to gather in local churches for the support and encouragement that only a family can provide. Neglecting to meet together for worship on the weekend is like skipping family meals. It is like skipping family reunions. We need those times to stay connected and encouraged.

2. A family goes out of the way to keep unity.

Since the church is a family, it means we should go out of our way in the church to keep unity. Some of the most heart-breaking stories I hear are from broken families. They are stories of a son or daughter walking away from a mom and dad and totally breaking contact. Parents are left in constant anxiety because they haven't heard from a son or daughter for months or years when a

relationship is broken. Just like conflict in a biological a family is extremely painful, conflict in the church family is also painful. Since the church is a family, we go out of our way to keep unity. It hurts when a family member walks away. We do whatever we can to stick together and stay together. We work through our differences.

Incidentally, if you come from a broken biological family, that is another reason you desperately need a local church family. Your local church family should provide you with the support and encouragement you don't have at home.

3. A family has your back.

Since we are family, we have one another's backs. Many of you know we have three children. The oldest two are David and Daniel. They are two years apart. When they were little and went to school, occasionally the school bully would pick on Daniel. I taught my boys to stick together. The phrase I taught David was, "If you are picking on Daniel, you are picking on me." In the Trucksess family, we have your back. When hard times hit us in life, we are there for one another no matter what it takes.

The same should be true at CrossWinds. We are family. We have your back. When your car breaks down, people from your church family are there to help you. When you need to move, people from your church family will lend a helping hand. When someone in the body is hurting, the rest of the body is there to help.

Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. The reason hurting people in the church aren't helped is usually because others don't know you are hurting.

The reason is because many people think of church more like going to a movie than attending a family reunion. A movie you arrive at the last minute and leave as soon as it is over. You never talk to the people you sit next to in the theatre. Too many of us think of church the same way. Remember church is not a movie. It is a family reunion. One of the big purposes is to get to know your family members. This means we shouldn't arrive at the last minute and leave as fast as we can. We should take the time to know people and talk with people and build a real relationship. If possible, we should invite people over to our homes for a meal. It is only when we get to know our brothers and sisters that we can treat them like family and meet their needs and they can meet our needs.

At CrossWinds, we are family. We've got your back in times of need.

The local church is where God dwells.

...which is the church of the living God...

The second reason the local church is important is because it is because the gathered church is a place where God dwells in a special way. Many of us think the place where God dwells is in our hearts. That is true. The Bible says that when we repent of our sin and ask Christ to be our savior the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and God dwells within us. Many of us don't realize that God always dwells in a special way in a local church when they gather for worship and teaching. Look what Paul said to this same church in the city of Ephesus in his earlier letter to them.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:22 (ESV)

The assembled church is where God dwells.

In the Old Testament, the dwelling place of God was the temple. Why did God allow his temple to be destroyed in 70 A.D. to never be rebuilt? The reason is because God is no longer dwelling in his temple. Now God dwells in the lives of his people and in a special way he dwells in the local church when his people assemble for worship and to live together as brothers and sisters.

Think about how God uses the gathering of the local church to nourish and sustain your walk with Christ. When I was growing up, I remember it was painfully evident in my spirit when I skipped church on Wednesday night. It was especially evident if I skipped church the following Sunday. As the old hymn says, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." When it came to my young adult battles with sin, I found myself frequently failing when I neglected church on the weekdays and weekends. There is spiritual growth and nourishment that takes place in the local church as we assemble for study, worship and prayer that does not take place on our own.

Think about the songs of worship this morning. Didn't you find your heart experiencing worship to God in a special way you do not experience at home listening to your iPhone? Think about the teaching of God's Word on Sunday morning. Don't you find God talking to you in a special way in our gathered study that you do not experience at home through simple Bible reading on your own?

While it is good to listen to podcasts and downloaded music, nothing can replace the gathered local church because God dwells there and works there in a special way for our spiritual good.

The local church is the pillar and buttress of the truth.

To help the Ephesians understand the church's role to present the truth, Paul used special imagery the Ephesians would understand but we might miss. In the introduction to the book of 1 Timothy, we learned the city of Ephesus was the home of the temple of Artemis. It was one of the seven wonders of the world. It was massive. It dominated the skyline of the city. It could be seen from miles away. Think of it like an ancient version of a sky scraper. One of the prominent features of this temple were its pillars. There were 127 of them around the perimeter. They were made of solid marble. Each one was 65 feet tall and 6 feet thick. The purpose of the pillars were to support the massive roof of the building. The pillars supported everything. To keep the pillars from tipping over there were buttresses in the building which provided side to side stability. The massive pillars provided vertical strength that lifted the roof into the air. The buttresses provided the horizontal strength to make it an unmovable building no matter how strong the gale force winds are from the coast.

While the pillars and buttresses of the temple of Artemis are what made the temple visible and a rock-solid building, they also proclaimed and preserved Artemis in the city.

In a similar way, the church is to proclaim and preserve the truth of Jesus in the city it finds itself. First, just like the pillars of the Artemesium proclaimed Artemis' presence for all to see, in the same way the church is to proclaim Jesus to the city it finds itself. That is why a local church is important. It is God's chosen method to proclaim Jesus in a community.

In addition, just as the buttresses preserved the Artemesium and made it immovable, the local church is to preserve the truth of Jesus Christ in a local community. In previous weeks we already saw that the truth of Jesus Christ was under assault in Ephesus by the elders-gone-wild that were trying to drift the church away from Jesus. The church is to be an anchor of the truth of Jesus in the city it is placed.

So the church is to proclaim the truth for all to see and to preserve the truth from the forces in society that would seek to change it.

Those are three reasons why local churches are important. The local church is the spiritual family we all need for support and encouragement. It is the place where God's spirit dwells in a special way. It is the pillar and the buttress of the truth in society. It proclaims and preserves the truth of Jesus in the community it finds itself.

What must the local church believe?

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. 1 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

What is the most essential truth for a local church to hold and proclaim? Paul gave us the answer in v. 16. It is the truth of Jesus Christ. Paul made Jesus the central theme of his preaching.

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 1 Corinthians 2:2 (ESV)

Paul quoted six lines from an early Christian hymn that describe the essential truths a church is to proclaim and hold when it comes to Jesus.

Christmas and Easter are historical facts.

Jesus was manifested in the flesh and vindicated by the Spirit...

The word manifested does not mean to bring something into existence but to make something visible. When we celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas, we are celebrating that the God of the universe, the second person of the Trinity, fused himself forever with flesh in the womb of Mary to be one of us.

...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:6–7 (ESV)

This means the Son of God fused all of himself with Jesus, not just part of himself. He voluntarily chose to limit the free exercise of some of his God attributes to do this.

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily... Colossians 2:9 (ESV)

Jesus made the invisible God visible to human eyes. In Jesus, we have God in the flesh forever. That is a real historical fact that took place in space and time. That is the truth the church proclaims to the world.

What does it mean to say Jesus was vindicated by the Spirit? This is referring to Christ's resurrection. Jesus was declared to be God and to be free of sin when the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies... Romans 8:11 (ESV)

The church holds to the truth that Jesus is fully God and he took on flesh in the womb of Mary. Jesus died in our places for our sin and he rose from the dead and is alive today. That is the truth we believe and proclaim to the world.

The work of Jesus is for the entire universe.

...seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations...

What Christ did is known to the angels, and it impacts the universe. We see angels throughout Jesus' life and ministry. Angels celebrated at his birth. Angels strengthened him before his death. Angels strengthened him after he faced temptation. Angels were at the empty tomb. Why is this important? It is important that what Jesus did on the cross and with the empty tomb is not just something earthly in scope but it is cosmic in scope. Jesus defeated Satan through his death and resurrection on earth. Look at the cosmic scope of Jesus coming to earth.

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Hebrews 1:6 (ESV)

The birth, death and resurrection of Christ is of cosmic importance.

It is also of worldwide importance. This is why it should be proclaimed to the nations. The only way anyone can be saved is by Jesus, no matter where they live. Jesus is for all people and for the entire world. This is what we believe.

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Mark 16:15–16 (ESV)

Look what the Bible says about the worldwide scope of Jesus' mission on the cross.

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation..." Revelation 5:9 (ESV)

How should we respond?

The proper response to Jesus is belief and worship.

...believed on in the world and taken up into glory...

These last verses of the hymn tells us how everyone is to respond to Jesus. Here on earth, our job is to believe on Jesus. The gospel was first preached at Pentecost, and 3,000 responded in faith. That was only the beginning. The only proper response for everyone is to believe on Jesus.

Jesus was eventually taken up into glory in his ascension. Right now he sits at the right hand of God and is worshipped. He is ruling the universe. The response we have in the world is to believe in Jesus. The response to Jesus in heaven is always worship. This is what we proclaim and what we believe. These are the basics of what we believe in the church.

Why is it important how members of the local church behave?

You are probably saying, “That is great Pastor Kurt. How does this change my Monday? How does it change my life or my week?” I am glad you asked.

Look what Paul said to Timothy at the beginning of this letter.

“I am writing to you... so that one may know how one ought to behave in the household of God...”

The purpose of 1 Timothy is not to just show us what to believe in the church but how to behave in the church. This is why Paul taught us that when we look for elders and deacons, we don't just look at what they believe but how they behave. Since the church is charged with being a pillar that displays God's truth in this world, how we behave matters. Our lifestyles can either beautify Christ or distract from Christ.

As soon as I talk about the importance of our lives honoring Christ, I know some of you felt a heavy weight laid on your shoulders. What if I mess up? I sin and fail all the time. I know what to believe about Christ but I struggle to live for Christ. What am I to do? Let me give you two pieces of encouragement.

How we respond after we sin is just as important as walking away from sin.

First, I want you to know we all fail and we all sin. All of us have times when we shame instead of beautify the name of Christ and his church. Here is what is important. What we do after we sin is just as important as when we sin. After we sin are we broken? Are we repentant? Are we honest about our sin with others? Do we go out of our ways to make things right and ask forgiveness from others when it hurts? Do we take steps to turn away from sin or do we just shrug our shoulders and continue on our merry ways? It is not just living lives of holiness that beautifies the gospel but it is also how we handle our sin that beautifies the Christ, the gospel and his church.

The secret of godliness is found in Jesus, not in myself.

Lastly, and maybe most important, you need to know it is not just up to us to have the strength to follow Christ.

Paul said, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness." The book of Acts tells us when Paul first preached the good news of Jesus in the city of Ephesus, many people turned to Christ. So many people turned to Christ that the sales of Artemis silver souvenirs took a dive. Demetrius, the local silversmith started a rally and led most of the city into the amphitheater where for hours thousands of people shouted at the top of their lungs, "Great is Artemis of the

Ephesians.” Most Bible scholars recognize the language Paul used right here is the same language they shouted that day, but Paul said, “Great is the mystery of godliness,” not Artemis. The word mystery in Greek does not mean something unknown yet to be discovered but something that was hidden that is now revealed. Paul said, “You want to know what is great? It is what was once hidden and is now revealed. His name is Jesus and what makes him so great is he is what produces godliness.”

Paul said, “What is great in this world is not Artemis and her massive temple but God’s plan to change our lives and make us into new people. He does it all through Jesus.” This morning, if you are struggling with sin, the way to beat that sin is not with your own strength but with the strength of Jesus. When we repent of our sin, spend time reading God’s Word, spend time in prayer and spend time in church Jesus begins to remake our hearts and live to have the godliness of Jesus.

That is why the local church matters so much. It is God’s chosen method to proclaim the truth of Jesus and preserve the truth of Jesus in this world.



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