

Henry Ow
Houston Chinese Church
1 Timothy 3:14-16

The Rightly Ordered Church: A Pillar of Truth

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: At McDonald's, I control my meal order.
2. Need: We are tempted to order the church around us.
3. Subject: How do we become a rightly ordered church?
4. Text: 1 Timothy 3:14-16
5. Preview: What does a rightly ordered church center itself on, pursue, and pay attention to?

BODY

- I. A rightly ordered church is Christ centered (3:16)
 - A. Paul uses a hymn to remind Timothy of the centrality of Christ in the life of the church.
 - B. Everything we do together in community should point us and others to Christ
 - C. Think about what you do together in community.
- II. A rightly ordered church pursues spiritual truth in community (1 Tim 3:15b)
 - A. Paul describes the church as a pillar displaying its truth for others to see.
 - B. God has entrusted the church to preserve the key tenants of the Christian faith.
 - C. Develop your thinking of the Christian faith with others
- III. A rightly ordered church pays attention to how it treats others (1 Tim 3:14-15a)
 - A. Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the conduct of the church because it could not wait (1 Tim 3:14-15a)
 - B. A person forms their opinion of church based upon what believers do.
 - C. Pay attention to how you conduct yourself.

CONCLUSION

1. Review: A rightly ordered church is Christ centered, pursues spiritual truth in community, and pays attention to how it treats others.
2. Closing Image: Only a rightly calibrated instrument can do what it was meant to do.

MANUSCRIPT

People know that McDonald's is a place where you can eat quickly and go. You can choose from their preset meals: Big Mac, Fillet-O-Fish, or double cheeseburger. It comes with fries and a coke. If the meal is not big enough, then you can supersize it. Or you can choose from their one-dollar menu: cheeseburger, McChicken sandwich, or fries. You can have breakfast items even for lunch or dinner. **At McDonald's, I control my meal order.** I choose what I want and how I want it.

As I think about McDonald's, I can't help but wonder: have we exported that consumer mentality also to the church? Do we attend church as though it had similar golden arches? We want certain things from churches. We look for a place where we can connect with people. The chemistry is easy and conversation flows. We may look for a church that has hip worship music on Sunday mornings. When we sing worship music, we're looking for a place where the congregation sings in tune and in a way that doesn't distract us. We are looking for a sermon that is practical, relevant, and deep. In other words, we're looking for someone who can preach like our heroes: John Piper, Tim Keller, John MacArthur, or Matt Chandler. We want to be able to order from a church ministry menu. We are tempted to order the church around our tastes and our preferences. **We are tempted to order the church around us.**

Yet the church isn't like McDonald's or a fast food restaurant. It bears greater resemblance to a 12-step meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. People come to the meeting knowing that they are broken and that they need help. Every meeting reminds them of how they need the help of a greater power if they're going to find hope in their darkest struggles.

How do we then order a church so that it becomes a place that cares for the broken soul? How do we organize the life of the church so that it becomes a place about God rather than about us? **How do we become a rightly ordered church?**

To answer this question, we're going to look at Paul's letter to his student: Timothy. Paul left Timothy in the city of Ephesus to set the church there straight. Timothy had the task of organizing the church in a way that it exalts God. It reminds me of the show Fixer Upper. A couple: Chip and Joanne Gaines would turn an old run down home into a beautiful new home. You can think of Timothy and Paul as the original church Fixer Uppers. They had the Ephesian church to flip. Turn with me to 1 Timothy, chapter 3 if you're not there already. 1 Timothy, chapter 3.

This morning, we'll answer three questions. First, what does a rightly ordered church center itself on? Second, what does a rightly ordered church pursue? Third, what does a rightly ordered church pay attention to?

First, what does a rightly ordered church center itself on? **A rightly ordered church is Christ centered.** A rightly ordered church centers itself on Christ. Much like how everything at Starbucks is branded with its logo, everything in a rightly ordered church is branded with Christ. **A rightly ordered church is Christ centered.**

Paul uses a hymn to remind Timothy of the centrality of Christ in the life of the church. Paul uses a confessional statement to remind Timothy. It would be something that Timothy would have heard, memorized, and even recited. Verse 16 says: *"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."*

Why does Paul call this confession, a mystery? The word: mystery had a different connotation in the ancient world. Mystery referred to something that was previously unknown and is now known. It's when a secret is no longer a secret. It's that moment in a BBC Sherlock episode when he explains who the villain is and his motive. Mystery can be considered the big reveal.

What's the big reveal in connection to godliness? What is the source of a believer's behavior or conduct? What made the church charitable to people? It wasn't a philosophy or rules that believers followed. The reason why believers listen to people when they're hurting is because someone listened to us in our hurt. The reason why we extend grace to others when they wrong us is because someone extended grace to us. What is the reason for the way we conduct ourselves as a community of believers aka the church? It's because of a person. It's because of Jesus Christ. Note how verse 16 says: "He" referring to Jesus Christ.

What is described in the hymn? If you look at the hymn: the six lines, then you'll see a contrast between the spiritual and the earthly: flesh vs Spirit; Angels vs nations, world vs glory. The life and ministry of Jesus had effects not only on earth but in heaven as well. In the first line: "He was manifested in the flesh.", we hear about the incarnation of Christ. God took on flesh by becoming man. The second line says: "He was vindicated by the Spirit". When the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus proved his divinity. The third line states: "seen by angels". The angelic host witnessed the exaltation of Christ as he took his place at the right hand of God the father. The fourth and fifth lines: "proclaimed among the nations; believed on in the world" reminds the church of its responsibility to proclaim the work of Christ to the nations and for the nations to respond in belief. Lastly, the fifth line: "taken up in glory" refers

to how Christ because he rose to heaven now is seated at the right hand of the father. It reminds us that Christ is in control. Each of these hymns reminded Timothy of what Christ did, how the church carries out this responsibility, and how Christ reigns in heaven.

Everything we do together in community should point us and others to Christ. When we gather together for small group meetings or for church service, would people see or hear about Jesus?

In the show: Iron Chef, chefs compete to make a series of dishes from a secret ingredient. If the secret ingredient was lobster, then every dish would have to showcase lobster. Appetizer, main course, and desert would all need to have lobster in it. Some chefs would use ingredients that overwhelm or mask the secret ingredient. This would lead to loss of points.

When we gather together, do we showcase Christ? Or do we somehow mask him? Is Jesus hidden beneath the many activities that we do together as believers?

When we get together, we need to showcase Christ. It could be in our sermon-based studies, our prayers, our singing, or our conversations. Do these activities showcase either the need for Christ or who he is? I certainly hope that we do.

Think about what you do together. Examine and reflect upon the various elements of your meetings as a small group or when we come together for worship service. Ask yourself: “How do the things I do remind me or point me to Christ?”

Take for example, worship music. When you think about the lyrics of a song, do they teach you about Christ? Or is it a song that you could possibly sing to your boyfriend or

girlfriend? Does the song mention God, but it's hard to distinguish whether or not the song describes the God of the Bible or the God of something else?

Or think about your prayers. What do you pray about it? When you ask people to pray for you is it merely for what you want? Do we find ourselves praying for things we want rather than what God wants to do in our lives or possibly the world? Do we pray for a raise rather asking for sight to see how I might serve my co-workers? Do I pray for my friends to change so that I can stay the same? What do you pray about? As someone once told me: TAI. Think. About. It. Think about what you do together.

What does a rightly ordered church pursue? What does the church seek? What does it go after?

A rightly ordered church pursues spiritual truth in community. A rightly ordered church pursues Biblical thinking. Such a church challenges itself to think through a scriptural lens. We assess situations and see how we might respond in a way faithful to the scriptures. We do this with others. **A rightly ordered church pursues spiritual truth in community.**

Paul describes the church as a pillar of truth for others to see. The second half of verse 15 says: *"the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth."*

Note how Paul describes the church. It says: "the church of the living God". Why does Paul use the word: "living"? Isn't it enough to say: "God". I think Paul is drawing contrast to the various idols in the city of Ephesians. The statues of Zeus and Artemis residing in the temples were just stone. Yes, they were made from expensive stone probably marble. But these idols couldn't hear the prayers of the Ephesians. They are dead – unliving. But the head

of the church is God, who lives. He is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything. He exists within the midst church.

A pillar elevates something to bring attention to it. For example, you put things that are precious to you on your mantle. You would put photos of your family or mementos on the mantle for guests to see. Likewise, the church has a responsibility to display God's truth in a community. Moreover, the church serves as a buttress of truth. The word: buttress is an odd word. The Greek word could be translated into various words. In the NASB, it is a support. The NIV translates it: "foundation". Either of these words illustrate the idea of fortification. A foundation, support, or buttress strengthens a structure to protect it from collapsing. Being from California, I can understand why buildings need to be reinforced because earthquakes can be devastating.

God has entrusted the church to preserve the key tenants of the Christian faith. The church not a museum has been tasked to ensure that key tenants of the Christian faith such as salvation by grace through faith or that the Bible are the very words of God are preserved.

For Paul writes to Timothy in chapter 1, verse 3: *"remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine."* Paul instructed Timothy to make sure that false teachers would not receive any type of hearing at the church.

Now some of you say: "Well... theology is great for the pastors and smart people to talk about. But for me, theology is too stuffy." Once upon a time, I would probably agree with you. My roommates used to find me asleep with a theology book a chest because I used it as a sleep aid. But I've changed my mind since then.

C.S. Lewis described theology as a map. Something you have to realize about a map is that it is a compilation of a lot of experiences. To determine the distance between Austin and Houston, someone had to make the trip and calculate the miles. Someone had to climb to the top of Mt. Whitney to give you its elevation. A map fits all these different experiences together, so that you can know where to go.

Theology is similar to a map because it compiles different people's theological reflections. They help lead a person to a deeper understanding of who God is. And one hopes that a deeper understanding will lead to much more meaningful worship of God. Theology directs people to God and believers to deeper worship. C.S. Lewis explains that a lack of theology leads to potentially wrong thinking about God: *"if you do not listen to theology, that will not mean you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones – bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas. For a great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today are simply the ones which Theologians tried centuries ago and rejected."* The church has been entrusted with the map. It has been entrusted with the key tenants of the faith.

I would encourage you with this. **Develop your thinking of the Christian faith with others.** Pastor Jason has encouraged you before to get together with some other brothers or sisters and read a theology book together. I'm not saying: "Get together to read Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology." It weighs a ton by the way... Start small. Try reading his book: Christian Beliefs or J.I. Packer's classic: Knowing God. These are wonderful primers that may open the door to you reading other theological material. Be sure to discuss it with others.

Learning happens better when it occurs in community. By developing your theological muscles, you will be more apt to identify false teaching and speak coherently against it.

If you're not able to gather a group together, then consider attending a Sunday school class. Last semester, Jason taught a class on Calvinism. This semester, Jason is teaching a class on Theology Proper, which is the study of God. Next semester, Jason may offer another class on theology. Keep an eye out for it.

What does a rightly ordered church pay attention to? What does it focus on?

A rightly ordered church pays attention to how it treats others. It focuses on how they relate to other people. A rightly ordered church keeps its members accountable to walk in the Spirit. **A rightly ordered church pays attention to how it treats others.**

Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the conduct of the church because it could not wait. He wanted to come and instruct Timothy in person, but it was faster for a letter to be delivered. Verse fourteen says: *"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God."* The conduct of the church is not a small matter. It is an urgent matter.

As mentioned before, Paul had to quickly address the issue of conduct because the false teachers mentioned in chapter one spread teaching that would be detrimental to the witness of the church. Moreover, it could possibly lead some believers astray. Chapter four, verse one states: *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons."* Hence, Paul writes this letter explaining how the church should conduct itself.

Note the word: “household”. Paul used this metaphor in a series of ways. The ancient church didn’t meet in church buildings like ours. Instead it met in people’s homes. Typically, a home large enough to host a church would belong to the wealthy believers.

Whenever, the church gathered itself in someone’s home, Paul expected them to behave in certain way. For example, they should make intercession for government leaders. Chapter two, verse one says: *“First of all then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly, and dignified in every way.”* Men and women are supposed conduct themselves within the church in different ways. Paul teaches what to look for in the church’s overseers and deacons. All this refers to how the church ought to operate.

But household also refers to a behavioral code: how members of the household should conduct themselves. For instance, there is a certain code you one follows if you visit an Asian home. Before you enter the house, one removes their shoes. If you’re a guest, then you typically bring a gift such as fruit or nuts. See! House hold code.

You see this in other epistles of Paul such as Ephesians and Colossians. Within these letters, Paul teaches how wives should relate to their husbands, husbands to their wives, parents and children, or masters to slaves.

One could expand the scope larger so that it describes the conduct of believers with the world. Paul is concerned with not only how the church behaves when it gathers, but also when its members mingle with unbelievers. Why?

A person forms their opinion of church based upon what believers do. How a believer acts at work or in the classroom affects how other people view the church. It also affects how people view the gospel.

Years ago, when I asked my dad: “Why don’t you like church?” He shared with me a story. One day, he walked into his work’s lunch room and discovered that someone had brought in doughnuts to share with everyone. He walks over to the box and opens it up. To his surprise, he discovered that there were no doughnuts left. He later discovered that someone had taken multiple doughnuts. Apparently, this someone was a Christian. Hence, my dad pointed to this believer’s conduct as a reason why he would not give the gospel a hearing. A believer’s actions could make it harder for unbelievers to hear the gospel.

But there are also instances where Christian action has caused people to think admirably of believers. In the ancient times, unwanted children were left to die on the street to die from exposure. But Christians would take in these children and care for them.

When a plague hit a city, unbelievers would leave for fear of getting infected. But Christians would remain in the city to care for other believers. They also cared for unbelievers affected by the plague. [Rodney Stark; The Rise of Christianity] Christians by sacrificially serving the suffering and dying around served as a powerful witness to the world around them.

Pay attention to how you conduct yourself. Examine our life. Do your actions reflect a life that has been transformed by Christ and his gospel? What does your life look like? **Pay attention to how you conduct yourself.**

Often times, we’re not able to see how our behavior might bring disrepute to the name of Christ. We need people in our lives, who would be willing to identify areas of sin in your life.

It's difficult to spot spinach in your teeth unless someone tells you or you find yourself in front a mirror. One way to be in a such an accountability relationship is to consider church membership. By becoming a church member, you enter into a covenantal relationship not only with the church's leaders but also other members. As members of the church, we have a responsibility to hold each other accountable to biblical instruction.

When I attended a lecture in the fall, I learned that vision requires two eyes. When you have one eye, your field of vision is limited to about 150 degrees. Two eyes give you a greater field of vision. I also learned that you need two eyes to see depth. One eye might be see an object. But you would be unable to see the depth of an object. Hence you have two eyes.

I think that it's a lot like spiritual sight. You might be able to see something. But you sometimes need the help of someone else to take a look. He or she might see the issue from a different angle and provide some spiritual accountability.

For those of you who are in an accountability relationship, be sure to speak up. My mentor at work once told me story of a fighter plane that had crashed in a training exercise. The fighter plane was a two-seater. You had the pilot in the front seat and the co-pilot in the back. When they recovered the black box containing the flight information and audio between the two pilots, the recording surprised the recovery team. As the pilot flew the plane, he took a moment to look down at some instrumentation. The co-pilot still looking up saw that they were headed straight for a mountain. He mentioned it to the pilot. But it was too late. The last words were: Pull (static). If you see that a brother or sister is headed toward a mountain, be sure to say something before it is too late.

To review, we talked this morning about how to become a rightly ordered church. A rightly ordered church is Christ centered. A rightly ordered church pursues spiritual truth in community. A rightly ordered church pays attention to how it treats others.

Working in the engineering field, you discover the importance of calibrated instruments. If your scale or calipers aren't calibrated correctly, then your measurement could be completely wrong. Wrong measurements could result in aircraft failure or possibly loss of life.

To calibrate a scale, you would need to take it to the calibration lab where they would take some known weight. Let's say a five-gram weight and put it on the scale. If the scale doesn't read five grams then they would calibrate the scale so that it read five grams. **Only a calibrated instrument can do what it was meant to do.**

Likewise, we need to make sure that our church becomes a rightly ordered church by calibrating itself to principles laid out Paul. May the witness of our church exalt our risen savior and draw people to him.