

# 1 TIMOTHY - THE CHURCH

*(1 Timothy 1.1-20)*

## **Introduction**

Recently John Lambert addressed the question of whether the church is a building or a people. He concluded that although churches can be buildings a building without people is not a church in any meaningful sense. Bridget Willard states, "Church isn't where you meet. Church isn't a building. Church is what you do. Church is who you are. Church is the human outworking of the person of Jesus Christ. Let's not go to Church, let's be the Church.

Church however is not just about people but it is about life.

"One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always" (A. W. Tozer).

## **About the Church**

Church is mentioned 114 times in the New Testament. 21 of these references appear in the book of Acts which describes the birth and early years of the Christian Church. There are many phrases used in scripture to describe the Church such as;

### *The Bride of Christ*

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." Ephesians 5:25-27

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." Revelation 19:7

### *The Body of Christ*

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" 1 Corinthians 12:27

### *A Royal Priesthood*

"As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:4-5

These expressions indicate how close the church is to God's own heart. It is the vehicle through which He has chosen to work in our fallen world for the past two thousand years. It isn't surprising therefore that Paul in writing to Timothy encouraged him to serve the church in Ephesus so that it could become the very best that it could be.

"Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience..." 1 Tim 1:18-19a

"Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." 1 Tim 4:11-12

### **What do people say about the Church?**

Sadly, a cursory internet search reveals a great number of vitriolic statements about the church. A few less caustic comments look like this: George Carlin stated "I'm completely in favour of the separation of Church and State. My idea is that these two institutions screw us up enough on their own, so both of them together is certain death."

"Some go to church to see and be seen, some go there to say they have been, some go there to sleep and nod, but few go there to worship God" Anon.

Does the church deserve such criticism?

### **The Church: An Imperfect Body**

Over the centuries the church hasn't always lived up to its amazing calling to demonstrate the Love of God and reflect His glory. How many people do you know today who have given up on church after being hurt, disappointed and even betrayed? Sadly I know too many such people and may be you do as well!

With the exception of Hebrews (chapter 10:25) however the Bible largely makes the assumption that believers will want to meet together as local expressions of the church. More emphasis is placed on what we do together when we meet rather than whether we meet at all. A great deal of the content of Paul's first letter to Timothy deals with how we should conduct ourselves as church before a watching world. The reality is that the church is imperfect because it is made up of imperfect people like you and me.

"The day we find the perfect church, it becomes imperfect the moment we join it."  
Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

As imperfect as our local churches are there is much to celebrate and to be thankful for. John Calvin once said, "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, there a church of God exists, even if it swarms with many faults."

The perfect church doesn't exist but if there was one what might it be like? C S Lewis describes his perfect church service as follows: "The perfect church service, would be one we were almost unaware of. Our attention would have been on God."

Are there times for you when it feels like there is no one else in church but you and God? For me there are times when I take the bread and the wine when that's just how I feel, but those moments are fleeting.

Timothy was called to teach and preach in the church at Ephesus. However see if you can imagine that Timothy is today a new curate in the church at Long Newton. What instructions might Paul give to Timothy is relationship to St Mary's church? What issues would Paul want Timothy to address?

Let us pause for a moment and give this a little thought...

Firstly, Paul might emphasise 1 Timothy 2:1-3

"St Mary's church Long Newton I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

“Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the church; it is a goodly Christian weapon.”  
Martin Luther

Praying *together* with petitions (specific requests), intercessions (prayers for others), and thanksgiving is something which many of us can be uncomfortable with, and some of us find daunting. It might be that as we meet together and work out Paul’s instruction we may find encouragement and confidence and reap the benefit of a vibrant church corporate prayer life.

Secondly Paul would instruct Timothy to “set an example for the believers at St Mary’s church in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching”.

Much of the Bible was designed to be read aloud in the synagogue and to the church. Preaching and teaching are essential activities in the church if the people are to be challenged and to grow in faith. It is right that we are grateful in St Mary’s for the people who regularly teach and preach.

Paul might go on to explore practical areas of structure, of pastoral care issues and of outreach into the community. But this might be for another occasion.

We started by considering a quote from A W Tozer that speaks of “life” as a hallmark of a church. In truth any organism that is vibrant and full of life inevitably grows. If we own a pot plant and give it the right amount of nutrients, sunlight, warmth and water we would expect it to grow. We can’t make it grow but we can provide the right conditions for growth.

It might be the same with the local church and for St Mary’s in particular. If we create the right opportunities for people of all ages to meet with the church, which is you and I, then as we depend on Our Heavenly Father we will see growth. Growth in depth of fellowship and in numbers. A person once commenting on the church stated it is “the only club which exists for the benefit of its non-members”. Although this doesn’t bear close examination it does emphasise an important aspect of the mission of the church to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel”.

Acts 2:47 tells us that the church were “praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

To conclude with a quote from T S Eliot: "The True Church can never fail. For it is based upon a rock."

Jesus our Saviour is the rock. The Church is God's idea. As imperfect as each local expression of the church might be, as we pray we have the potential to really demonstrate the love of God to people of all ages, to experience growth in depth and numbers, and to turn our broken world upside down (or the right way up!) May the Lord bless us richly in this endeavour.