

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

The Function of the Church

(1)

**The House of the Living God and
the Pillar and Base of the Truth**

LH Hymns: 852, 818

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 1:2; 3:16-17; 10:32; 11:16; Eph. 2:19, 21-22

- 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
- 1 Cor 1:2 To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:
- 1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
- 1 Cor 3:17 If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and such are you.
- 1 Cor 10:32 Do not become a stumbling block, both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God;
- 1 Cor 11:16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom of being so, neither the churches of God.
- Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
- Eph 2:21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;
- Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

I. *The house of God modifies the church, and the pillar and base of the truth also modifies the church; the house of God and the pillar and base of the truth describe what the church is—1 Tim. 3:15.*

- 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

II. *The church is the house of God—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16:*

- 1 Cor 1:2 To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:
- 1 Cor 10:32 Do not become a stumbling block, both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God;
- 1 Cor 11:16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom of being so, neither the churches of God.

A. The expression *the church of God* indicates that the church is possessed by God and that the church has the nature of God and is constituted with the element of God—Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:13.

Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.

Gal 1:13 For you have heard of my manner of life formerly in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God excessively and ravaged it.

B. The church is *of* God because it is produced of God as the source and has God as its nature and essence, which are divine, universal, and eternal—1 Cor. 3:16-17.

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

1 Cor 3:17 If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and such are you.

- C. The content of the church essentially is God Himself—10:32.
 1 Cor 10:32 Do not become a stumbling block, both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God;

III. The church of God is the house of the living God—1 Tim. 3:15:

- 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
- A. The house of God is the household of God—Eph. 2:19:
 Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
1. The dwelling place—the house—and the family—the household—are one entity—a group of called, regenerated ones indwelt by God Himself—1 Pet. 1:3; 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:16.
 1 Pet 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
 1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
 1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
 2. Just as Christ is not separate from the members of His Body but dwells in them, the Father is not a separate member of His household but is in all the children—Rom. 8:16; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:16.
 Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
 Rom 12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,
 Rom 12:5 So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
 1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
 3. The house of God is organic in the divine life, organic in the divine nature, and organic in the Triune God—Eph. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:4; Matt. 28:19.
 Eph 4:18 Being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance which is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;
 2 Pet 1:4 Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust.
 Matt 28:19 Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
 4. Because the church is organic, the church grows—Eph. 2:21.
 Eph 2:21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;
- B. In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul refers to God as the living God—1 Tim. 3:15:
 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
1. The living God, who lives in the church, must be subjective to the church and not merely objective—1 Cor. 3:16.
 1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
 2. Because God is living, the church as the house of God is also living in Him, by Him, and with Him.
 3. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together.
- C. As the house of God, the church is the dwelling place of God—the place where God can have His rest and put His trust—Eph. 2:22.
 Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

- D. The church as the house of God—the Father’s house—is the enlarged, universal, divine-human incorporation as the issue of Christ’s being glorified by the Father with the divine glory—John 12:23; 13:31-32; 14:20.

John 12:23 And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

John 13:31 Then when he went out, Jesus said, Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him.

John 13:32 If God has been glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and He will glorify Him immediately.

John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

IV. The Lord wants His church to know Him as the truth and to receive and enjoy Him as life—1 John 1:1-2, 5-6; John 11:25; 14:6; 18:37b:

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life

1 John 1:2 (And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us);

1 John 1:5 And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth;

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 18:37b ... Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.

- A. *Truth* means “reality,” denoting all the real things revealed in God’s Word, which are mainly Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 2:4; Col. 2:9, 19.

1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.

Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,

Col 2:19 And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.

- B. The church is built with the divine life in Christ, a life that is indestructible, unconquerable, and able to withstand decline into death from any source—1 Tim. 1:16; 6:12, 19; 2 Tim. 1:1, 10; Titus 1:2; 3:7.

1 Tim 1:16 But because of this I was shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His long-suffering for a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life.

1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith; lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses.

1 Tim 6:19 Laying away for themselves a good foundation as a treasure for the future, that they may lay hold on that which is really life.

2 Tim 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God according to the promise of life, which is in Christ Jesus,

2 Tim 1:10 But now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel,

Titus 1:2 In the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the times of the ages,

Titus 3:7 In order that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

- C. Both the truth and the life are Christ Himself—John 14:6:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

1. Life is the inward and intrinsic element, and truth is the outward definition and explanation—1:4; 18:37b; 8:12, 32, 36; 17:17.

- John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
 John 18:37b ... Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.
 John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
- John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.
 John 8:36 If therefore the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.
 John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.
2. The experience of the Lord as life is contained in the Lord as the truth; in order to experience the Lord as life, we must know the truth—14:6; 11:25; 8:32, 36.
 John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.
 John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;
 John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.
 John 8:36 If therefore the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.
- D. The content of the church should be the growth of Christ in us as truth and life—Col. 2:19; 3:4:
 Col 2:19 And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.
 Col 3:4 When Christ our life is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.
1. Truth is the shining, the expression, of the divine light—John 8:12, 32, 36; 1 John 1:5-6.
 John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
 John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.
 John 8:36 If therefore the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.
 1 John 1:5 And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
 1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth;
2. The standard of the truth should constantly be raised higher among all the churches in the Lord's recovery—1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15.
 1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
3. We need to grow in life, be saved in life, be filled with life, and reign in life—Eph. 4:13-16; Rom. 5:10, 17.
 Eph 4:13 Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
 Eph 4:14 That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error,
 Eph 4:15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,
 Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
 Rom 5:10 For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled,
 Rom 5:17 For if, by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

V. The church is the supporting pillar and the holding base of the truth—1 Tim. 3:15:

- 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
- A. The truth is the Triune God, having Christ as the embodiment, center, and expression, to produce the church as the Body of Christ, the house of God, and the kingdom of God—Col. 2:9; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 1 Tim. 3:15; John 3:3, 5.
- Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,
Eph 1:22 And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,
Eph 1:23 Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.
Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
- 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
- John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
- John 3:5 Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
- B. *Truth* in 1 Timothy 3:15 refers to the real things revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God's New Testament economy—Matt. 16:16, 18; Eph. 5:32:
- 1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
Matt 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.
Matt 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
Eph 5:32 This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church.
1. The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of all these realities.
 2. A local church should be such a building that holds, bears, and testifies the truth, the reality, of Christ and the church—2:22.
Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.
- C. The church bears Christ as the reality; the church testifies to the whole universe that Christ, and Christ alone, is the reality—John 1:14, 17; 14:6.
- John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.
John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ.
John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.
- D. As the pillar that bears the truth and the base that upholds the pillar, the church testifies the reality, the truth, of Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ—Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4.
- Col 2:2 That their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ,
Eph 3:4 By which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ,
- E. In order for the church to function as the pillar and base of the truth, we all need to arrive at the full knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1.
- 1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
1 Tim 4:3 Who forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods, which God has created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth.
2 Tim 2:25 In meekness correcting those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth,

2 Tim 3:7 And are always learning yet never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
Titus 1:1 Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's chosen ones and the full knowledge of the truth, which is according to godliness,

VI. When every brother and sister is full of life and truth, the church will be strong as the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth; this is what is needed in the Lord's recovery today—1 Tim. 3:15.

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:14-16

First Timothy 3:14-16 is the most crucial portion in the four books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Paul has covered the matters of the different teachings, the economy of God, the need for the leading ones to have a prayer life so that all the other brothers may follow, and the charge to the sisters to remain in faith, love, and holiness with sobriety. Furthermore, the elders have been established and the deacons have been appointed. A church that has all these characteristics is certainly wonderful. Now in 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul tells us that the church is the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. Then in verse 16 he goes on to declare, "And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory." In these verses Paul presents an extremely high standard for the church.

Among Christians today the standard of the church is far below God's standard revealed in 3:15 and 16. In order to reach this standard, the church must have all the characteristics described in the first two and a half chapters of 1 Timothy. There must be no different teachings, and God's economy must be practiced continually. The leading ones must have a prayer life, and all the other brothers must follow them to pray in every place. Furthermore, the sisters should remain in faith, love, and holiness with sobriety. Then the government of the church must be established with the two offices of elders and deacons. It is our expectation to practice this kind of church life. We praise the Lord that in His recovery we have seen such a church life at least to a certain extent. Whenever God's standard for the church is attained as outlined in 1 Timothy, the church will function as the house of the living God and the pillar and base upholding the truth. This is also the great mystery of godliness, the manifestation of God in the flesh. Not only was the Lord Jesus the manifestation of God in the past; the church today should also be the manifestation of God. This is the goal, the aim, of these four Epistles written by Paul.

Even though Paul witnessed the beginning of the decline of the church, he was not disappointed or discouraged. Because he had both insight and foresight, he could be encouraged. He knew that some day and somehow the church would reach God's standard. The majority of the believers may decline, but a small number at least would be chosen, preserved, and established to practice the church life according to the divine standard.

We in the Lord's recovery can testify of the great difference between the recovery and today's organized Christianity. Reconciliation between the two is impossible. All the saints should be encouraged that the situation in the Lord's recovery is heading toward God's standard. This standard is that the church should function as the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, and as the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. The church life today must be the manifestation of God in the flesh. When visitors, including those who have not yet believed in the Lord, come to the meetings and behold such a manifestation, they will no doubt be greatly surprised. They may say, "What is this? It is different from anything we have seen elsewhere. It is even different from

the church services in religion.” Yes, the church is different; it is the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, and the manifestation of God in the flesh. Every local church must reach this standard and continue according to it. There should be no decline; rather, we should maintain God’s standard until the glorious appearing of our Head, the Savior, Jesus Christ.

In 3:14 Paul says, “These things I write to you, hoping to come to you shortly.” By *these things* Paul means all that he has covered thus far in this Epistle. When he wrote this book, he was hoping to come shortly to see Timothy.

THE HOUSE OF THE LIVING GOD

Verse 15 continues, “But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.” The words *know how one ought to conduct himself* indicate that this book gives instructions concerning the way to take care of a local church.

According to Paul’s word in verse 15, the church is the house of God. The Greek word rendered “house” may also be translated “household.” The same word is used in 3:4, 5, and 12 (*houses*). The household, the family, of God is the house of God. The house and the household are one thing—the assembly that is composed of the believers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6). The reality of this house as the dwelling place of the living God is in our spirit (Eph. 2:22). We must live and act in our spirit so that in this house God can be manifested as the living God.

As God’s dwelling place, the church is both God’s house and His household, His family. In the Old Testament, the temple and God’s people, His family, were two separate things. But in the fulfillment in the New Testament, the dwelling place and the family are one. The family is God’s dwelling place, and God’s dwelling place is His family. As we have indicated, the Greek word for *house* may be translated either as “house” or “household.” According to God’s New Testament economy, God’s family is His house. These are not two separate things; they are actually one. We are God’s family and also His temple, His dwelling place.

In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul specifically refers to God as the *living* God. The living God, who lives in the church, must be subjective to the church rather than objective. An idol in the heathen temple is lifeless. The God who not only lives but also acts, moves, and works in His living temple, the church, is living. Because He is living, the church too is living in Him, by Him, and with Him. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together. The living church is the house and the household of the living God. Hence, it becomes the manifestation of God in the flesh. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, second edition, pp. 53-56)