

11.10.24**The Family of God****1 Timothy 3.14-15****Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

In just a couple weeks, tens of millions of Americans will travel to spend the Thanksgiving holiday with members of their families. Some people look forward to these family gatherings with anticipation, and others with more than a little dread. The word family generates different feelings, emotions, and images for every person. For some people it's a word that conjures up warm memories of love, laughter, togetherness, and joy. For others it evokes pain, heartbreak, disappointment, and loss. For some of us it's all those things. Other than the choice of a spouse or if a family chooses to adopt a child, we don't get to choose our family. We don't get to choose our parents and everyone else in our family from siblings to grandparents and extended family. We have some genes in common with family members, some of us may live under the same roof, but family members can be quite different from one another in personality, temperament, talents, and physical appearance. However, in a healthy family, we're united by our mutual love, care, and support of one another, regardless of any differences that may exist between us. I can remember saying to our sons Nathan and Greg when they were young that they would know and have each other longer than any other person in their life and that they needed to always support, encourage, help, and stand up for one another. That's what members of a family are to do.

A family also has values, standards, and expectations that everyone in the family is to follow. For example, we love one another and nothing on earth will ever divide us, express gratitude, appreciation, and encouragement freely and often, and hold one another accountable to our family's values. Expectations are things like put it back where you found it, do what needs to be done, take responsibility.

Throughout this series on Reimagining the Church we've been looking at images of the church in the New Testament that are helpful and beneficial for us to remember and live in the present. One of the characteristics of first century Christian churches is that they were organized in **households**. The household was the primary form of the church for its first four hundred years. So, it's not surprising that one of the early images of the church **is the household of God**. Listen to **1 Timothy 3.14-15**, *"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, **you may***

know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

There are three things I'd like to highlight from this verse today.

The Church is to be like a Loving Family

We are the Church of the living God

The Church is the Pillar and Bulwark of the Truth

The Church is to be like a Loving Family. This verse reminds us of the profound nature of the church not just as an institution but as a family bound by faith and love that has values and expectations about **how one is to behave** as a member of the household. One of the barriers for people connecting with the church or being receptive to our message is that a lot of people who claim to be Christian, who declare themselves to be on their social media, who wear clothes or have bumper stickers that identify themselves as Christians, don't speak or act like Jesus or how the New Testament says we're to behave. There are some humorous bumper stickers. I was driving back from a meeting in Groton yesterday afternoon and I passed a car on Route 495 that had a bumper sticker that said, *"Are you as close to Jesus as this?"* Hopefully, being a part of the church helps us get closer to Jesus and enables us to live more and more like Christ.

Understanding the church as the family of God is transformational. It shifts our perception from seeing the church merely as a building or a worship service we attend to recognizing it as a living organism made up of diverse individuals united under one God. This family perspective fosters a sense of belonging, accountability, and mutual support among believers. When we regard each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, which is how the early church referred to each other and some of us still use those terms today, then we cultivate an environment where love thrives, and everyone feels valued.

The term "household" suggests intimacy and connection. In a healthy family, members share life together, support one another, and bear one another's burdens. Similarly, in the church, we're called to walk alongside one another, celebrating victories and providing comfort in times of distress. This communal aspect is crucial, especially in a world that often promotes individualism and in which many people are feeling a

growing sense of isolation. By actively engaging in each other's lives, we embody the love of Christ. One of the privileges of being a pastor is being aware of stories that people wouldn't want shared of how individuals in the church go out of their way to help, serve, and bless others without any fanfare, notice, or attention, but every time you do, you're sharing the love of Christ in a way that is changing lives and demonstrating the love of God's family. Trust me when I tell you there are numerous examples of this every single week in our church family.

Being the family of God also entails **embracing our diversity**. Just as a family includes individuals with different personalities, gifts, and backgrounds, the church is a tapestry woven together by the Holy Spirit. Each member plays a unique role in contributing to the whole. This diversity should be celebrated, as it enriches our church and reflects the multifaceted nature of God's creation. We don't all look, act, or believe in the same way, but we're united by our common faith. When we learn to appreciate, honor, and respect our differences, we strengthen our bond and present a more complete picture of Christ's love to the world.

Being part of God's family also requires **accepting responsibility**. Just as families have expectations for how members should treat one another, the church is called to uphold standards of conduct that reflect Christ's teachings. Our behavior matters. As the household of God, the church is to be a place of belonging, safety, and nurture which transcends biological ties, but where we're one in the Spirit. We strive for unity, humility, and a spirit of service, while holding each other accountable in love. This process is not always easy, but it's essential for maintaining healthy relationships and the health of our church. The Church is to be like a Loving Family

The second thing to briefly note from 1 Timothy 3:15 is We are the Church of the Living God. We don't worship an idol made by human hands. We don't believe God is dead. The church has always been the church of the living God. We believe God is still acting, moving, speaking, and able to hear our prayers. That doesn't mean that everything that happens is God's will or what God wants to happen. There is still human free will, sin, evil, and what Paul calls in Ephesians 6 principalities and powers that are constantly striving to have their way, but we believe ultimately as we heard last week from Revelation 21, that God will have the final word and God's will shall be done.

Worshiping the living God is a reminder that we have an advocate to help us as well as a holy God to whom we are accountable. Just as in a family, a parent can love a child unconditionally and have expectations for that child, so it is with us as children of the living God.

A third thing to note is The Church is the Pillar and Bulwark of the Truth

A bulwark is a solid wall-like structure raised for defense, or a strong support or protection. In an age rife with conflicting ideologies and moral relativism, the church is tasked with upholding the truth of the Gospel. Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). Truth should be important to anyone who is a Christian. This responsibility is not merely about proclaiming what we believe to be true as Christ followers; **it involves living out the truths of the Bible** in our daily interactions and relationships. **Remember this verse started with wanting to teach us how “one ought to behave in the household of God.”** When we embody Christ-like values—such as truth, love, grace, humility, and forgiveness—we reinforce the church's role as a beacon of hope and guidance in our communities. When we fail to embody Christ-like values and instead act or speak in ways that Jesus never would, we diminish the likelihood that unchurched people or seekers or people who are struggling would consider the church to be a place where they might find love and support, a community where they might ask and wrestle with their difficult questions, or find healing, well-being, or restoration.

We're living in a post-Truth era and one of the challenges of living in a culture that often disregards truth is we can't agree on what's right or wrong. One of the roles of the church is to proclaim and live God's truth clearly, compassionately, and convincingly. This is why we try to preach and teach the core principles and truths of the Bible. That's why we talk about Jesus so much. Through our sermons, discipleship groups, and other opportunities we're trying to equip the saints, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 4, for faithful Christian living and for the work of ministry.

How do we live out our identity as the household or family of God that is a bulwark of truth. It begins with a point I made earlier and that is **Unity in Diversity**. Unity is not the same thing as uniformity or unanimity. We don't all think the same way about every issue, we don't all vote the same way, but what we share needs to be

greater than any differences we may have. Jesus longest prayer was that his followers would be one like he and the Father are one. In a similar way, it is the task of every one of us to do all we can in how we speak, listen, and interact to maintain unity while celebrating diversity. Galatians 3:26-28 emphasizes how in Christ, we are one. *“For in Christ Jesus **you are all children of God** through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there no longer male or female; **for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.**”*

If we're ever going to move beyond the division in our nation or differences we have with other family members or even church members, it requires listening, dialogue and seeking to understand those who have a different opinion or perspective. I had someone say to me this week that they couldn't understand how anyone could vote in a certain way. I asked him if he in fact knew someone who had voted that way, and if so, to simply ask from a posture of humility and wanting to understand, *“Help me to understand why you felt it was important to vote the way you did?”* We can engage in cultural issues but we're to do so with love, grace, gentleness, and respect and never with the presumption that our way of seeing things is the only way and the right way.

Practically speaking, as we live as members of God's family, we love and support one another in a host of ways from service projects as large as the Holiday Fair to acts as small and simple as giving someone a ride to worship or a medical appointment, making a meal, or raking someone's leaves. It's sharing hospitality and generosity. It's being intentional about noticing and welcoming anyone at church who you don't know or recognize. It's paying attention to the little things like someone's body language or facial expression that let's you know someone may be burdened or hurting and in need of a listening ear or some caring support. We're called to reflect Christ in our relationships, in our daily lives and to be living examples of the truth we say we believe because our individual actions can either enhance or undermine the church's witness.

A healthy church family can influence its surrounding community positively in so many ways by countering loneliness and isolation with belonging and community, by encouraging people in appropriate steps to mental health and wellbeing, and by providing meaning and purpose. We're blessed to know that our church is making a

difference on the mid to lower Cape, in Massachusetts, across the country, and indeed in nations around the world, but there is always more we could be doing.

As we look to the coming months and soon a new year, whether you've been happy or depressed since election day, I would remind us all that our hope for the future isn't in any person and it's not in political power, that was a temptation Satan tempted Jesus with, and Jesus strongly rejected it. The church's hope is in Christ, who sustains and empowers us day by day. While we all lose members of our family as we age and move through life, we have eternal significance in being children of God and members of the household of God. The church is the family of the living God, and each of us has the responsibility of behaving properly as a member of that household. Each of us can prayerfully reflect on the question, how am I contributing to the health of the family of God? Depending on your circumstances you may need to think creatively about that, and our lay leaders and staff can try to help with discerning what that might be.

Committing to living as part of God's loving family, is a beautiful and profound calling. It challenges us to live in authentic relationships with one another, to proclaim and live the truth of the Gospel, to celebrate our diversity, and to embrace our responsibilities. As we navigate the complexities of life together, we're not just a group of individuals; we are family, united in faith and purpose, reflecting the love of our Heavenly Father to a world in need. May we be guided by the words of a prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi.

Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Blessing: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called **children of God**; and that is what we are, for in Christ Jesus you are all **children of God** through faith. You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also **members of the household of God**. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of **the family of faith**. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory **to your Father in heaven**.

1 John 3:1, Galatians 5:26, Ephesians 2:19, Galatians 6:10, Matthew 5:16

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Why do you think 1 Timothy 3:15 emphasizes “how one ought to behave” and the need for proper conduct in the church? How can our behavior impact and influence how other people feel about the gospel or Jesus?
2. What does it mean for the church to be described as the "household of God"? How does this image of the church as a loving household or family shape our understanding of community and belonging within the church?
3. In what ways can the church serve as a pillar and foundation of truth? What challenges do we face in this role? Why are truth and honesty so important?
4. 1 Timothy 3:15 refers to “the church of the living God.” If we believe God is alive, how does this shape our faith and the church’s mission?
5. How can we as individuals contribute to the church’s mission of being a pillar of truth? What steps can we take to embody the teachings of the gospel in our daily lives?
6. How can the church foster unity among its members despite differing opinions or backgrounds, especially considering its role as the family of God? How can you help create a community of unity?