

The Pillar and Ground of the Truth

1 Timothy 3:14-16

Introduction

1. Each local congregation needs to understand their God given mission, purpose, and goal. If we cannot say what that is, or we simply do not know what that is, then what are we accomplishing? Are we supposed to be accomplishing something? (EX: mission statement of company)
 2. The church is a part of the eternal purpose of God – **Ephesians 3:11**
 - a. This is a significant truth which requires careful thought.
 - b. That eternal purpose is to bring glory to God – **Ephesians 3:21** – i.e. though God does for us, the role of the church is not simply passive.
 3. The scripture is filled with the mission, purpose, and goal of the church assigned by God.
 4. **1 Timothy 3:14-16** gives great insight into our purpose as a church. We are **“the pillar and ground of the truth.”**
- I. The Metaphor – Pillar and Ground
- A. Pillar – *stylos* – “a prop or support” (THAYER)
 - B. Ground – *hedraiōma* – unique to the New Testament – “from *hedraios*, “steadfast, firm”; from *hedra*, “a seat”” (VINE) – “that which provides a firm base for someth., perh. Mainstay” (BDAG)
 - a. Where the pillar supports the weight of the building, the *hedraiōma*, or **“ground,”** gives a steadfast or immovable base for the pillar to stand upon.
 - b. Together, **“pillar and ground”** work to provide support and structure for something else, namely, **“the truth.”**
 - C. Geographical setting of 1 Timothy – **1 Timothy 1:3** – Ephesus.
 - a. **Acts 19:28** – Diana (Artemis) of the Ephesians
 - b. “Her temple at *EPHESUS was one of the seven wonders of the world...supported on 100 massive columns... Pliny tells of a huge stone above the entrance, said to have been placed there by Diana herself.” (New Bible Dictionary, Artemis); “It contained an image of the goddess which, it was claimed, had fallen from heaven (**cf. Acts 19:35**). Indeed, it may well have been a meteorite originally.” (ibid., Ephesus)
 - c. The **“pillar and ground”** have a practical function of supporting something distinct from them, but in so supporting that thing is held up for all to see.
 - d. The temple of Diana served a religious purpose, and the structure for the center of that religious practice the temple needed support – pillar and

ground. However, the pillar and ground held the temple up providing such a display that it was ranked as one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

- e. **"Pillar and ground of the truth"** suggests the function of supporting the truth, but in effect the truth is put on display for all to see.

II. The Pillar and Ground of the Truth

- A. The metaphor **"pillar and ground of the truth"** is parallel to what was mentioned previously, which is parallel to what was mentioned before that – the house of God, and the church of the living God.

- a. These refer to the same entity but give greater insight into it.
- b. Understanding the entity or institution as described in these two ways gives insight into how it functions as **"the pillar and ground of the truth."**

B. The House of God

- a. **House** = household, i.e. the family.
- b. **Of God** – specifies the head of that family – One who will lead, teach, and shape the family.
- c. A household is in submission to the authority of the head who leads it, including the carrying out of commands and the implementation of teaching, but also is shaped after the head – **Genesis 18:19** – command, way of Lord, righteousness and justice, **"after him"** – i.e. as the exemplar (**cf. Romans 4:11-12** – father of believers).
- d. A household forms a unit under the head but not in distinction from it – **Joshua 24:15** – distinct from what others may do, my house/we will serve, implied visibility for influence of others – Joshua saying this to all.
- e. A household is the manifestation of united transcendent purpose which is then perpetuated through training and transformation of successive generations – **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** – describes, not just a consistent teaching regiment, but the defining purpose of the home – giving of undivided self to the undivided God through the abiding of His will in the heart.
- f. **"house of God"** demonstrates that the function as **"the pillar and ground of the truth"** is more than mere verbal defense of a body of teaching.

C. The Church of the Living God

- a. **Church** – *ekklesia* – "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly" (THAYER)
 - i. Like a household, it denotes a unit composed of individual parts, unified by a calling to depart from individual location to a central

location, namely, one that is before the summoner of the assembly.

- ii. All assemblies have unified purpose, even if the unity is in chaos and dishonorable activity – **Acts 19:32, 40-41** (city clerk)
- b. **Living God** – identifies the owner of the body of people assembled, the unifying force (the One who called), and therefore the nature which that assembly takes on.
- c. We are like the god we serve – **Psalm 115:3-8** – there is no being behind the mass of material that makes up an idol.
 - i. That physical material is not without purpose, but it is not made to be glorified.
 - ii. Like humans, it is made for God's glory – **(v. 1)**
 - iii. God gives the earth to men, not for them to serve, but for them to steward and bring God glory – **(v. 16)**
 - iv. Serving the creation rather than the Creator dehumanizes us as we abdicate our role as the stewards of creation for God's glory who are created in His image. **(vv. 5-8)**
- d. The church of the living God represents God's intentions for humanity whose purpose includes the created world but transcends it – i.e. everything to the praise of His glory, and humanity as the stewards of creation in fulfilling that purpose.
 - i. **"the pillar ground of the truth"** is about more than simply possessing, knowing, and defending the correct body of doctrine.
 - ii. It is about being shaped by that doctrine into the image we were originally created to bear, and by that fulfilling the chief role of those who bring God glory. **(cf. Psalm 8)**

III. The Truth

- A. In addition to understanding the institution which functions as the **"pillar and ground of the truth"** in order to see how it could function in that way, it is important to know the nature and content of the truth it is said to be the **"pillar and ground"** of.
- B. The Faith and the Truth
 - a. **"pillar and ground of the TRUTH"** – but truth and faith are used interchangeably throughout.
 - i. Truth – **2:4; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5**
 - ii. Faith (objective) – **1:2, 19; 3:9, 13; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21**
 - 1. Metonymy – that body of truth which is believed.

- b. **"the faith"** manifests a relationship between **"the truth"** and one who interacts with it – they believe the truth they have revealed to them – **1 Timothy 4:3; Acts 6:7** – those who believe the truth (hence, the faith), obedient to the faith (describes the nature of faith – **"obedience of faith," Romans 1:5**, NASB).
 - c. This consideration shows that the **"pillar and ground of the truth"** is not a function independent of life in conformity to the truth.
 - i. One cannot be the pillar and ground of the truth just by verbally or intellectually holding to the correct doctrine.
 - ii. A church who teaches truth and combats error from the pulpit whose members are not living lives in conformity to the truth is not a pillar and ground of the truth.
- C. The Mystery of Godliness
- a. **"the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16)** furthers this point concerning what it means to be **"the pillar and ground of the truth"** both by its title, and its content summarily given.
 - i. **"godliness"** is used by metonymy – the effect put for the cause.
 - ii. I.e. the mystery revealed is intended to effect godliness – **4:6-7** – the words of faith are how one exercises themselves toward godliness. (Some deny its power – **2 Timothy 3:5**)
 - 1. **6:3** – it accords with godliness.
 - iii. This shows that the truth, the faith, is meant to be embodied or lived, and in doing so it is meant to attract others to it.
 - b. This is precisely what is detailed about the gospel which is called **"the mystery of godliness"**:
 - i. **God manifested in flesh** – incarnation, Jesus revealing God.
 - ii. **Justified in the Spirit** – miraculous works, resurrection, confirming identity.
 - iii. **Seen by angels** – on display for even spiritual beings to notice. (beginning to end) (**cf. Ephesians 3:10** – as is the church)
 - iv. **Preached among Gentiles** – for display for all others.
 - v. **Believed on in world** – for the purpose of interaction and activity by others.
 - vi. **Received up in glory** – not for inactivity, but to reign – receiving the church/household spoken of before.
 - c. This details how such truth is intended to and can effect godliness – Jesus revealed in it opened the way to truly fulfilling the role as God's image bearers through His redemptive work, and the pattern of His life.

- i. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** – He reconciles us to God as our Mediator.
 - ii. **1 Timothy 3:16** – He shows us the way to live.
 - iii. **Galatians 2:20** – Christ lives in us through faith.
 - d. If the truth we are supporting is a message of God putting Himself on display for all the world to see through the incarnate of Word of truth, then it is supported and displayed not simply through reciting it and rejecting perversions of it, but through living it ourselves, thus perpetuating its living message in the world.
- IV. The Church as the Pillar and Ground of the Truth
 - A. The context surrounding the described function of the church as **“the pillar and ground of the truth”** serves to demonstrate the weight of that role, as well as explain it as something which involves more than simply possessing and defending the right facts. It involves transformed conduct which leads others to God through the truth it displays.
 - B. The Emphasis on Conduct in the Context
 - a. Paul’s letter is for Timothy and the church to maintain proper conduct, and thus fulfill their role as pillar and ground of the truth – **3:15**
 - b. Elders and deacons are those who have a good testimony, and good standing in the truth – **3:7, 10, 13** – others observing their conduct.
 - c. The epistle begins by addressing the purpose of the law to convict and lead others to change their conduct – **1:8-9, 12-13, 16**
 - C. The Relation Between Conduct and Doctrine
 - a. Hymenaeus and Alexander are examples of this relation – **1:18-20**
 - i. Faith and good conscience are dependent on sound doctrine – **1:3, 5-6**
 - ii. Maintaining **“the faith,”** proclaiming it, defending it, is dependent on faith and a good conscience.
 - b. Those who depart from the standard teach things and live in ways contrary to it – **4:1-5; 6:6-10**
 - D. The Display of Saving Truth to the World
 - a. Supporting the truth by living it and defending it against error is by God’s design going to prop the truth up on display for all to see and come to it.
 - b. Law seen by lawless leading to conviction – **1:9**
 - c. Ministry of Paul to attract others to the saving gospel – **1:12, 15-16**
 - d. God’s desire for men to come to the truth – **2:4**
 - e. Profession of godliness – **2:11**
 - f. Saving those who hear us – **4:16**

- g. Avoiding bringing blasphemy to God and His word – **5:14; 6:1** – opposite is the goal. (**cf. Titus 2:10**)
- h. As the **“pillar and ground of the truth,”** the church invites others to join in the renewed and restored purpose in Christ Jesus to God’s glory.

Conclusion

1. God’s eternal purpose of the church is for it to bring Him glory by being **“the pillar and ground of the truth.”**
2. This is more involved than simply the defense of the right facts.
3. Those who respond in faith to the gospel truth are added to the body of Christ, the church, where they are transformed into His image by the truth, bringing glory to God.
4. This transformation by the power of truth upholds the truth for all to see, and invites them to join in the mission and purpose of bearing God’s image through Christ to His glory.