

GOD'S PROGRAM, THE LOCAL CHURCH

TEXT: I TIMOTHY 3:15, 16

Introduction:

1. I have chosen I Timothy 3:15 as my primary text this morning, but Lord willing we will look at other Scriptures also.
2. Today, most Americans understand that our country is in terrible shape.
3. Unemployment is up, and our morals are down.
4. Home foreclosures are up, but drug and alcohol abuse is up.
5. Prices keep going up. Food prices. Tolls on the bridges. Gasoline is now over \$4 a gallon.
6. And many politicians want taxes ("revenue enhancers") to go up too.
7. Our country is involved in three major wars: Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Libya. Our president did not even bother to get approval from Congress when he went to war with Libya.
8. Mobs of unruly teenagers have been attacking innocent people, looting, rioting, tearing up stores, and causing mayhem all over the country -- Chicago, Denver, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and other places.
9. It is has gotten so bad in Philadelphia, that the mayor has ordered a curfew: children under 14 have to be home by 10 PM; midnight is the deadline for those under 18 years of age.
10. Mayor Nutter said recently, "Pull up your pants and buy a belt because no one wants to see your underwear or the crack of your butt. If you walk into somebody's office with your hair uncombed and a pick in the back, and your shoes untied, and your pants half down, tattoos up and down your arms and on your neck, and you wonder why somebody won't hire you? They don't hire you because you look like you're crazy."
11. That sounds like good old-fashioned common sense, but unfortunately, common sense is in short supply these days!
12. With the threat of such terrible lawlessness, Islamic terrorism, a failing economy, three major wars (and numerous military skirmishes), and many other problems, it seems there is only one major issue for our liberal media -- homosexual "marriage"!!!
13. Certainly these are dark days here in America. But be of good cheer; our Lord said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

14. I believe that America's # 1 problem is not economical or political. America's # 1 problem is America has forsaken God.
15. Psalm 9:17 says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."
16. America is weak because America's churches are weak. Just the other day I read about a pastor from Florida, named Zachery Tims, who died in a Times Square motel.
17. Zachery Tims and his wife divorced in 2009 after he admitted to a year-long affair with a stripper. Obviously this man was not qualified to be a pastor.
18. First Timothy 3:2 says, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour."
19. Police say a white powdery substance, believed to be narcotics, was found on his body. Apparently he overdosed on drugs.
20. And yet his church in Orlando, Florida church claims to have 8,000 members!
21. God's program is the local church. But today many churches have deviated from the Word of God. And most people today do not read the Bible, so they are ignorant of God's purpose and God's program.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF SEPARATION

1. Our English word "church" comes from the Greek word *ekklēsia*. This Greek word *ekklēsia* is made up of two Greek words: *ek* which means "out," and *klesis*, which means "a calling."
2. Therefore the term "church" means "a called-out assembly."
3. The local church is made up of Christians who have been set apart and separated unto the Lord.
4. The first step for the new Christian is to get baptized and join the church. When the new believer gets baptized he is separating from his old worldly life and old worldly friends, and is identifying with the Lord Jesus Christ and His church.
5. Separation is an important Bible doctrine, but unfortunately it has been ignored and criticized by most churches.
6. Way back in the book of Genesis we see the doctrine of separation. In Genesis 1:4 we read that, "God divided the light from the darkness."
7. God separated Noah and his family.
8. God separated Abraham and his family.
9. The doctrine of separation is emphasized in the book of Leviticus. In Leviticus 20:26 we read, "And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the

- LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine."
10. This same principle of separation is taught in the New Testament. Ephesians 5:11 says, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (cf. II Cor. 6:14--7:1).
 11. But today, most churches are as worldly as the devil.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSOCIATION

1. These two principles are like two sides to the same coin. We separate from wicked sinners, and we associate with godly believers.
2. Christians come from all over the world, from different nationalities, languages, cultures, and customs -- but we are all one in Christ.
3. Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."
4. You may recall that the church at Antioch was very diverse (Acts 13:1-4). Simeon was called Niger ("black"), probably because of his dark complexion. Manaen had been "brought up with Herod the tetrarch."
5. One of my favorite Bible words is "fellowship."
6. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."
7. Galatians 2:9 refers to "the right hands of fellowship."
8. Philippians 1:5 refers to "fellowship in the gospel."
9. Philippians 2:1 refers to the "fellowship of the Spirit."
10. First John 1:7 says, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."
11. This principle of association is important (cf. Heb. 11:24-29).

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE

1. We serve God in and through the local church. I am not totally opposed to so-called "para-church" organizations, but the New Testament puts the emphasis on the local church (I Tim. 3:15).
2. God's plan is for you and me to serve in the local church. We are "saved to serve."
3. This service involves soulwinning. The mission of the church is winning souls. The Great Commission was given to the local church.

4. Our Lord said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16).
5. Furthermore, the Lord gave His two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper to the local church.
6. The local church is a house of prayer.
7. Acts 4:31 says, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."
8. Giving should be done through the local church. Malachi 3:10 says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."
9. But that was in the Old Testament. When we get into the New Testament, we see that people were still bringing their offerings to the temple, and our Lord commended the poor widow.
10. "And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury" (Mark 12:43).
11. When the temple was destroyed in AD 70, a new dispensation was already under way. Today, God's program is the local church (cf. I Cor. 16:1, 2; II Cor. 9:6, 7).
12. God has a place of service for each and every Christian in the local church. Regarding the various spiritual gifts, I Corinthians 12:11 says the Holy Spirit distributes them "severally (individually) as He will."
13. Romans 12:6 says we have "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us."
14. These gifts are to be used in our service for God. Romans 12:1 says this is our "reasonable service."
15. Christians miss out on the blessings of God when they miss church services. We come together as a local church to worship God.
16. Our English word "worship" was originally "worth-ship," meaning God was worthy of our praise. Revelation 4:11 says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

CONCLUSION:

1. God's program is the local church, and God put us here to win souls.
2. Proverbs 11:30 says, "He that winneth souls is wise."

3. The other day I read a great sermon preached by Lee Roberson back in 1999. Dr. Roberson was a Baptist preacher for over 70 years.
4. He pastored the Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, TN for over 40 years.
5. Dr. Roberson was 90 years old when he preached that message. He went on to preach for another eight years, and went to heaven in 2007.
6. He said this in that message:
7. I was preaching one day in Texas. As I stood in the pulpit, two men came in the back door. One was a great big fellow. He had on a bright red shirt and had a big red cap on his head. He came in and sat down with the cap on his head. Ordinarily, when a man walked into church at Highland Park with a cap on his head, I stopped everything and told him to take it off in the house of God. I looked at that fellow. He was too big! I said, "Lord, I'd better leave him alone." There he sat right back there—a big, big fellow with a big red cap on his head.
8. I came to the end of my message and gave the invitation, and people started coming forward. I walked back to him. I said, "Son, are you saved?"
9. He said, "Ah, I don't want to think about it."
10. "Would you like to be? Would you like to be a Christian, saved, born-again, going to Heaven when you die?"
11. "Yes, I would."
12. I said, "Come on!"
13. He left that place and started down the aisle. I reached up and took the red cap off his head and threw it under a bench—got rid of that. He came and knelt down in front of the bench. I put the Bible down in front of him. I read the Word of God to him. I said, "This is it! Christ died for you. He'll save you now and give you everlasting life."
14. That great big, rugged fellow, tough as nails, bowed his head and said, "Yes sir, I'll trust Him now. I'll take Him as my Saviour now."
15. He stood up there, a big fellow, taller than I am, big, husky, crying like a baby.
16. I said, "Son, how did you get here tonight, coming in here with your hat on?"
17. He said, "He brought me." He pointed to a little man sitting there who must not have weighed over 125 pounds.
18. I said, "What do you mean, he brought you?"
19. He said, "Well, I was standing there in front of the drugstore, talking to the boys, having a big time; and he walked by and said, 'Let's go to church.'

20. "I said, 'No, I don't go to church—don't like churches.'
21. "That little man back there said to me, 'Are you afraid to go?'"
22. "I told that little man back there, 'I'm not afraid of anything or anybody.'
23. "He said, 'Good! Come on!' That's how he got me here. Thank God I'm saved. Thank God I'm a Christian."
24. Now, my dear friend, that's the thing I want you to see. There is this strange, astounding confusion today. It is all around us. You see it on every hand. You hear it on the radio, don't you? You get it on television and in your newspaper. It's everywhere. People are confused; they don't know what to think.
25. You come back to the Word. Come back to the way of salvation. Come back to the way of life in Christ, separated from the world. Come back with the great hope in the second coming of our Saviour. Jesus is coming again! Begin to preach and teach and live in the light of these certainties. Sunday school teachers, ushers in the church, people of the church, no matter what you may be, let your light shine. Live in such a way that people know you belong to the loving Saviour. ("The Astounding Confusion in Today's Churches")