

1. As you study I Timothy 3:15 explain:

a. "The house of God"

Believers are God's house or sanctuary, because God dwells in them. He no longer has a visible presence in a physical worldly temple. The church (the people of God, in whom He now dwells invisibly) is the repository for His Truth.

Jay E. Adams -- Commentary on I Timothy
William Hendriksen -- Commentary on I Timothy

b. The phrase: "the pillar and ground of truth"

Note: what is the significance of "pillar" and "ground of truth"?

The truth of God is preserved on earth by the ministry of the church alone. What a weight, therefore, rests on the pastors, who have been intrusted with the charge of so inestimable a treasure!...The reason why the Church is called the "pillar of truth" is, that she defends and spreads it by her agency. God does not Himself come down from heaven to us, nor does he send angels to make known His truth; but He employs pastors, whom He has appointed for that purpose...because the office of administering doctrine, which is God hath placed in her (the church) hands, is the only instrument of preserving the truth, that it may not perish from the remembrance of men.

John Calvin -- Commentary on I Timothy

The church is the very "ground of truth" that all other truth of God, must stand on and grow out from. This organism "the church" is the only instrument God ordained to fulfill the work of the ministry here on earth.

2. You are a pastor and the following questions are presented to you. How would you respond?

a. When my son went off to college he began attending a nearby Church of Christ where they told him that their church was a New Testament church and all other churches have been corrupted.

1. What exactly is a NT church?

A church that functions both in doctrinal beliefs and practice as closely as possible to the pattern given to us in Scripture beginning with Pentecost and expanded through the rest of the New Testament.

There are some non-negotiables: the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible as the role rule for life; the Lordship of Jesus Christ; the inherent freedom of persons to approach God for themselves; the granting of salvation through faith by way of grace and contact with the Holy Spirit; two ordinances

– the Lord’s Supper and the baptism of believers by immersion; the independence of the local church; the church as a group of regenerated believers who are baptized upon confession of faith; infant baptism as unscriptural and not to be practiced; life after death; the royal law of God; the need for redemption from sin; and the ultimate triumph of God’s kingdom.

There can and will be variations in practice from one church to another in areas that are not clearly outlined for us in Scripture, however the teaching of and practice of the above listed items are basic to a church being considered a true New Testament church.

2. Has the biblical concept of the church been corrupted throughout church history?

Yes, every person who has been involved in the organizing and maintaining of the church of Jesus Christ since Christ Himself has been, is and ever will be a sinner. It is our responsibility to do our very best to understand and emulate the New Testament church as it has been revealed to us in Scripture, but we are imperfect and we will have to continually reevaluate ourselves and our churches as we grow in Christ.

3. Is it okay if my son leaves a Baptist church and joins the Church of Christ?

No, although I would not claim that our church is perfect or all Baptist churches are perfect. I believe the fundamental doctrines on which we stand as a church and as Baptists most closely represent that which the New Testament lays out for the model of a true church of Christ. The very fact that the Church of Christ teaches salvation by baptism, which is taught nowhere in Scripture settles this point.

- b. I came from a very eclectic background denominationally. My parents came from a Lutheran background, my uncle was a Presbyterian minister, I was raised in a Baptist church and my daughter married an Anglican. How do these different traditions differ from one another in their understanding of the church?

Lutherans: The two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are not merely signs or memorials, but channels through which God bestows forgiving and empowering grace upon humankind. The body and blood of Christ are believed to be present “in, with, and under” the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper and are received sacramentally and supernaturally... Infants are baptized, and baptized persons are believed to receive the gift of regeneration from the Holy Ghost... The congregation is usually administered between its annual meetings by a church council consisting of the pastor and a number of elected lay officers. Pastors are called by the voting members of the congregation... Congregations are united in synods... Some of these general bodies are legislative in nature, some are consultative; they supervise the work in worship, education, publication, charity and missions... Worship is liturgical, centering on the altar.

Presbyterian: Under the Presbyterian system of government, each congregation has a local session made up of elders, with the pastor as the moderator. The session governs

the local church, receiving and disciplining members as well as acting for the church's welfare. Presbyteries, made up of congregations in a local district, examine, ordain, and install ministers; review reports from sessions; and hear any complaints. The synods, occupying larger boundaries, review the presbytery records, organize new presbyteries, and help administer denominational matters. The highest judicial body is the general assembly, which meets yearly and is made up of lay and clergy delegates elected by their presbyteries on a proportional plan of representation. The general assembly settles all matters of policy and doctrine referred to it by the lower governing bodies, establishes new synods, appoints agencies and commissions, and reviews all appeals. Its decisions are final, except that it cannot, of itself, amend the church's constitution. There are two officers of the general assembly: A stated clerk (the chief executive officer of the church) is elected for four years and may be reelected; a moderator is chosen each year to preside over the meetings and often speaks for the church during the year.

Anglican (Episcopal): The normal pattern for each local congregation is the parish, which elects its own minister (rector or priest), who is vested with pastoral oversight of the congregation and, with the wardens and vestry representatives, administers the temporal affairs of the parish... Two sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, are recognized as "certain sure witnesses and effectual agencies of God's love and grace." Baptism by pouring, sprinkling, or immersion is necessary for both children and adults; baptism by any church in the name of the Trinity is recognized as valid; baptized persons are confirmed as members of the church by the bishop... Without stating or defining the holy mystery, the Episcopal Church believes in the real presence of Christ in the elements of the Eucharist.

Baptist: While they differ in certain minor details, Baptists generally agree on the following principles of faith: the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible as the rule for life; the Lordship of Jesus Christ; the inherent freedom of persons to approach God for themselves; the granting of salvation through faith by way of grace and contact with the Holy Spirit; two ordinances – the Lord's Supper and the baptism of believers by immersion; the independence of the local church; the church as a group of regenerated believers who are baptized upon confession of faith; infant baptism as unscriptural and not to be practiced; complete separation of church and state; life after death; the unity of humankind; the royal law of God; the need for redemption from sin; and the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom.

Frank S. Mead – Handbook of Denominations in the United States