

Title:           **WHY HAVE ANOTHER  
CHURCH IN PRINCETON, NJ?**

Text:           1 Timothy 3:14-15

Subject:       *What a Local Church Should Be*

Date:           Wednesday Evening — November 28, 2007  
Sovereign Grace Baptist Church  
Princeton, New Jersey

Reading:      *1 Timothy 3:1-4:16*

Introduction:

I have been looking forward to this meeting with great excitement. I cannot tell you how honored I am that you asked me to me here for this occasion, as you ordain your pastor. I cannot tell you how delighted and thankful I am that God has knit your hearts together in the blessed fellowship of the gospel and has given you a pastor according to his heart, as he promised he would, to feed your souls with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15).

Shelby and I, and the members of our congregation in Danville have, been praying for you regularly since you first started meeting together three years ago. Shelby asked me again this morning to tell you how sorry she is that she could not be with us this week and how much she appreciates your desire to have her here. We will try to come together again soon.

That being said, I've come here to preach to you; and I believe the Lord has given me something to say. Tonight and tomorrow night, I plan to speak pointedly to this congregation. On Friday evening, I plan to preach pointedly to my dear, highly esteemed friend, your pastor. You can listen in; but I will be talking to him Friday night.

The title of my message tonight is — **WHY HAVE ANOTHER CHURCH IN PRINCETON, NJ?** This town of less than 14,000 people already has dozens of churches. And I doubt that there is any city in the United States that has a richer religious history than Princeton. So, I ask, “Why have another church in Princeton, NJ?” Sadly, the rich heritage of the past is no longer characteristic of your community. The influence of men like William and Gilbert Tennet, Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, Jonathan Edwards, B. B. Warfield, Vos, Machen, Van Til, and John Murray is no longer found in the churches here. — “Why have another church in Princeton, NJ?” Because the gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in

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Christ has not been characteristic of any church in this area (to my knowledge) in recent years.

Some of you will recall a conversation I had with you the first time I came to preach to you. I said to you the very same thing I said to the folks in Danville, the first time I went there to preach. — “If there is any place in this town, or within a reasonable driving distance of this town where the gospel is preached, were you can go to hear a man preach the gospel and worship God, don’t try to start another church. Don’t call a pastor.” — “Why have another church in Princeton, NJ?” The answer to that question is this. There is no gospel church here. If there is, I urge you to disband immediately and unite with that church.

Turn with me to 1 Timothy 3, and I will show you what a gospel church is. I pray that God the Holy Spirit will graciously inspire your hearts with the desire and determination to be a faithful gospel church in this place, holding forth to eternity bound sinners the light of life and salvation in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s read 1 Timothy 3:14-15. In this passage Paul is instructing us, by divine inspiration about the work of the ministry. And the work of the ministry is not the work of a man. It is the work of a church.

(1 Timothy 3:14-15) "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: (15) But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

**TWO INSTITUTIONS**

Our Lord has established two institutions in this world for the happiness and holiness of his people. *First*, he established **the home**. Before sin entered into the world, the Lord God saw that it was not good for man to dwell alone, so he made Adam a wife, a helpmeet for him, to be his companion (Gen. 2:18-24). God himself brought Adam and Eve together as husband and wife, and the first home was formed. Therefore it is written, “*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled*” (Heb. 13:4). Marriage is honorable among all people, and in marriage the bed is undefiled. Marriage is ordained of God for the happiness of men, the moral stability of society and the propagation of the race. Among men in this world nothing is

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sweeter, happier and more comforting than home. Home is not the house in which a family lives. Home is the family itself. Home is not a geographical location, but the people who live there and make up the household. Whenever they are together, that is home. I pity the man who does not enjoy the blessedness of a happy, peaceful, loving home!

*Second*, the Lord established **his church**, the church of the living God. When Peter had made his confession, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,*” our Lord said, “*Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” (Matt. 16:16, 18). **This second institution, the church of the living God, is even more precious, more needful and more important than the first.** That may seem strange, even offensive to some. But **the family of God is more important than our personal families.** Our Lord gave the church this priority by his own example (Mark 3:31-35). Our spiritual family is more important than our physical families. **The house of God must be preferred to our own households.** The cares and needs of God's church must take priority over the cares and needs of our own families.

**Why is the church of God more important to a believer than his own family?** It is because Christ loved the church, chose the church, redeemed the church, builds the church, honours the church and preserves the church. **The church, the family of God, is an everlasting family.** Our earthly families are only temporary; our spiritual family is eternal; and that which is eternal is more important than that which is temporal.

When we think about the church, the family of God, we should particularly, think about that local church of which we are members. That is the subject of our text. **Paul's purpose in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy** was to instruct the young pastor, Timothy, and us, in the affairs of the church. **He tells Timothy how to discharge his office honorably** as a minister, an evangelist, a pastor and teacher in the house of God. **He is teaching us how we are to behave in the house of God,** as members of the family of God, and he is telling us **what every local church should be.** Every local church is “*the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*”

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**Proposition:** The church of God is a spiritual kingdom, a royal family, whose one purpose and design in this world is to uphold, maintain and set forth the truth of God.

**A PRACTICAL OBSERVATION**

Do you ask, “Pastor, what should the church be?” Let me answer first by making a practical observation. I draw this observation both from the Word of God and from personal experience. It is an observation which both pastors and church members need to learn and remember: **there never has been a perfect church upon this earth, nor will there ever be.**

Frequently, I see people going from one church to another, seeking a church which measures up to their ideas of a perfect church. But their pursuit is vain. Pastors are often frustrated and depressed, and often move from one church to another, because the church does not measure up to their expectations. Churches are made up of sinful human beings, just like you and me. Therefore they have many faults.

**In the kingdom of heaven tares and wheat grow together.** Wherever the Lord sows wheat, Satan sows tares. Wherever the Lord gathers sheep, Satan herds his goats. Wherever you find grain in the field, you will find some chaff. God in his wisdom has ordained that it be so, for as long as time shall stand, and **our Lord commands us to make no effort to separate the goats from the sheep, the tares from the wheat, or the chaff from the grain** (Matt. 13:30). That is his job, and he is the only one capable of doing it. Any time pastors, elders, deacons and churches take it upon themselves to “purge” the church, they do far more harm than good. Our judgment is so poor that we beat the sheep and pet the goats, pull up the wheat and leave the tares, and burn the grain and save the chaff.

We must not ignore the need for church discipline when it arises, but discipline is not for the purging of the church. Discipline is for the correction and restoration of the Lord's children, and the discipline of God's house is primarily carried out by the preaching of the gospel.

**The churches of the New Testament had many, many problems, just like churches have today.** When people talk about returning to “New Testament Christianity,” as though the churches then were better than the

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churches today, they reveal great ignorance. The first church had Judas for its treasurer. The church at Jerusalem was racially prejudiced. The church at Corinth was plagued with strife, division, incest, disorderly worship and drunkenness at the Lord's Table! The church in Galatia was nearly destroyed by legalism. And all the early churches of the New Testament era were assailed constantly by false brethren, false prophets and false doctrine from within.

**Every local church today will experience the same kind of troubles from time to time.** If this local church is blessed of God with doctrinal stability, unity of the Spirit and brotherly love, if God has given spiritual peace and prosperity through the preaching of the gospel and keeps his people from shameful, outward acts of gross sin, you are truly blessed of God. You have much for which to be thankful. There are few such churches in this world. But if Satan should disrupt the church for a while, do not be shocked, and **when trouble comes do not forsake your family.** Faithful brethren will not forsake their family in time of need.

**PAUL'S DOCTRINE**

“What should the church be?” Let's look at Paul's doctrine in our text.

**Look at the name Paul gives to the church.** He calls it “*the church of the living God.*” What is the church? It is a congregation of believing people, gathered in the name of Christ, by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, to worship God and obey his will. The church is a spiritual family, not a denominational organization.

**The church belongs to God.** It is not my church, your church, or our church. It is the Lord's church. He chose it. He bought it. He saved it. He owns it (Eph. 5:25-27).

(Ephesians 5:25-27) "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (26) That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (27) That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

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**It is the church of the living God.** The church is the living body of Christ, her living Head. **No one is truly a part of the church who is not united in a living relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.** The very worst thing that can happen to any local church is the decay of life. We must earnestly strive to avoid formalism, coldness and death. Spiritual life depends upon the Spirit of God. **We must have more than a sound creed.** We must have more than **a proper** form of worship. We must have **the Spirit of God.** A local church without the Spirit of God is like a body without a soul — dead, useless, decaying and obnoxious. The sooner it is buried the better. A local church is the habitation of God by his Spirit, the one place where God meets with men on this earth (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:19-22).

(Matthew 18:20) "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

(1 Corinthians 3:16-17) "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (17) If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are."

(Ephesians 2:19-22) "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; (20) And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; (21) In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: (22) In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

**The church is called "the house of God."** What does Paul mean by such language? John Gill suggests that he means three things.

1. **The church is a spiritual house.** It is built of **living stones**, men and women who are born of God. It is built upon **a sure foundation**, the Lord Jesus Christ himself (1 Cor. 3:11). It is a house with **one door** of entrance, which is Christ, and **two windows**, the ordinances of the gospel — baptism and the Lord's Supper. And **the pillars** of this house are those men whom God has chosen to preach the gospel in it.

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2. **The church is a family**, the family of God, the household of faith. This family is called by the name of Christ, the Master of the household. Within the family there are fathers, young men and children. The ministers of Christ, the servants of God, are the stewards of the family and the family is regulated by the law of Christ, love and trust.
3. **The church is the house of God**, the house that he builds, for which he provides, which he protects, in which he dwells. When men and women come together in the name of Christ, trusting his blood and righteousness, seeking his glory, seeking his will, to worship God, the triune God meets with them (Matt. 18:20). When we come together in Christ's name, to worship him this is the house and temple of the living God (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The local church is **the place where God is worshipped**, wherever it is. It is the place of **God's abode**, the place **where God reveals himself** in Christ, the **place of God's rule** and the **object of all his purposes and works**. The church of the living God needs no priests, altars, rituals and none of the outward symbols of religion, but only God himself.

Are we of the house of God? If so, then let us be an obedient, reverent, grateful, worshipping, loving people. Let us honour our Father in all things!

**Next, Paul tells us that the church is “the pillar and ground of the truth.”**

The church, the local church, is the pillar which upholds, maintains and sets forth the truth. The church, the local church, is the ground which is the undergirding, stabilizing force of the truth.

**The whole church, not just the pastor, elders, deacons and teachers, but the whole church and every member of it, is the pillar and ground of the truth.** In the church of the living God the truth is constantly uplifted as a light in the midst of darkness. The church of God is the lighthouse of truth in this world. **The one purpose and business of the church is to uphold, maintain and spread abroad the truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus.** All her strength, all her talents, all her resources are to be given to and used for this one glorious work. Whatever God puts in your hands, whatever doors of opportunity are opened before you, all are to be used for the preaching of the gospel. Nothing is to be wasted upon any other cause.

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There are other important causes in the world. But in God's providence, he raises up other people and organizations to take care of those causes. The church must not be turned aside from her far more important work. **Members of political parties** will support their politicians. Let God's church support gospel preachers. **Doctors** build hospitals and practice medicine. Let the church of Christ build churches and practice missions. **Moralists** will struggle for moral issues. Let the church struggle for the furtherance of the gospel. **Educators** will teach children the 'three Rs' of reading, writing and arithmetic. Let the church teach sinners the 'three Rs' of gospel truth — Ruin by the Fall, Redemption by the blood and Regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

We have no other work. Let us uphold, proclaim and defend the truth of God with all our might. **Truth is what we have received from our forefathers, truth is what we must maintain and truth is the legacy we must leave to the generations to come.**

### **A CHALLENGE**

You are privileged to be a member of the house of God, a part of the church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth, being such highly honored and greatly privileged men and women, let me wrap this message up by issuing a challenge to you. — **Make it your business to maintain, defend and publish abroad the truth of God with every fiber of your being.** See to it that the Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Princeton is "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" **Any church which ceases to be a pedestal of the truth ceases to be a church.**

Every believer must be engaged in this noble cause. **The church of Christ must not tolerate in her pulpit any man who is opposed to, or indifferent to the truth.**

**We must never tolerate any attack upon, violation of, or compromise of the Word of God.** The Bible alone is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. It is our only rule of faith and practice (Isa. 8:20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Ps. 119:125-128).

(Isaiah 8:20) "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them."



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(2 Timothy 3:16-17) "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

(Psalms 119:125-128) "I *am* thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies. (126) *It is* time for *thee*, LORD, to work: *for* they have made void thy law. (127) Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. (128) Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; and I hate every false way."

The Word of God alone is our creed, confession of faith and rule. We must bow to the authority of God's Book, but only to the authority of God's Book.

**We must not tolerate any departure from the old paths of gospel truth**  
(Jer. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:8-13).

(Jeremiah 6:16) "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*."

(2 Timothy 1:8-13) "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; (9) Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: (11) Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. (12) For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (13) Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

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**Without hesitation or apology, we must sound out the glorious message of God's free, sovereign, eternal grace in Christ.** We do not need to clarify the gospel, reform the gospel, or modernize the gospel. We need only to proclaim it. Let us proclaim the naked gospel, with all its barbs and rough edges. It is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. We must especially proclaim those points of gospel truth against which men most naturally and constantly rebel. Lest any should mistake my meaning, I will state plainly, though briefly, what those points of gospel truth are which the church of God is responsible to proclaim in every generation.

**EIGHT STUBBORN STATEMENTS**

Here are eight, stubborn, irrefutable statements. They go right to the heart of true Christianity. You will either accept or reject these eight statements. There is no middle ground; and you will find it impossible to be indifferent regarding them. There is no room for compromise on any of these eight points.

1. **Either the Bible is in its entirety the holy, inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, or it is in its entirety a lie by which the souls of men are eternally deceived and damned.** If the Bible not the Word of God, throw it away. But if it is, as it claims to be, God's Holy Word, we better pay attention to it. It claims, as such, a total sway over our lives. It must be our only rule of faith and practice.
2. **Either God almighty is absolutely sovereign, in total control of all things, at all times, or there is not God** (Rom. 9:11-24). Again, there is no middle ground between these two poles, between God's absolute, total sovereignty and absolute, total atheism. To speak of a god who is not totally sovereign is utter nonsense. Atheism is far more sensible than Arminianism. If God is, he is sovereign!
3. **Either man is totally depraved, utterly dead in trespasses and in sins, or there is nothing wrong with him and he needs no Savior.** There is no such thing as partial depravity or partial goodness before God. Either we are totally sinful and depraved or we are totally righteous and good. There is no middle ground (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1-3). Unless man is totally depraved by nature and utterly incapable of doing

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anything towards his own salvation, the death of Christ and the gospel of his grace are vain and useless.

4. **Either God chose to save some of Adam's fallen race to salvation and eternal life in Christ before the world began, as the Bible says he did, or no salvation is possible for any man** (Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Thess. 2:13). If God has a people in this world whom he loves and to whom he is gracious, he loved them and determined to be gracious to them in eternal election, before the world was made. The immutable God changes not! Salvation is God's prerogative, not man's. Grace is God's gift, not man's choice. If God does not choose to save and choose whom he will save, no sinner can ever be saved.
5. **Either the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God is altogether and alone the effectual Redeemer and Savior of his people, or he is a fraud and a failure.** Again, there is no middle ground, no room for compromise. Either Christ did what he came to do, or he is a failure. If he is a failure, he is not God, and we have no Savior (Isa. 53:8; Heb. 2:17; 9:12). If the Lord Jesus Christ died to redeem sinners, then those sinners for whom he died are effectually and eternally redeemed. He cannot fail! Both the justice of God and the merits of Christ demand the eternal salvation of his people.
6. **Either we are regenerated and called to life and faith in Christ by the irresistible power and grace of God the Holy Spirit, or there is no such thing as salvation.** The only hope for a dead sinner is free and sovereign grace, grace that asks for nothing and gives everything, grace that waits for nothing and does everything (Ps. 65:4). If God the Holy Spirit sets out to save a sinner, that sinner will be saved by omnipotent, irresistible, effectual grace. When he draws, he fetches. When he calls, sinners come. His will cannot be thwarted. His grace cannot be resisted. His power cannot be defeated.
7. **Either God's people are entirely free from the law, as the Scriptures declare us to be, or we are yet under the bondage of the law and entirely obligated to keep it perfectly.** There is no such thing as being partially under the law and partially free from it, not in biblical terms. The only way sinner can satisfy, fulfill, and establish the law is by faith in Christ (Rom. 3:31; 10:4).

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8. **Either every saved sinner shall persevere to the end, being preserved and kept by God's infallible, immutable grace, or none shall** (John 10:27-30). Every believing sinner will be preserved unto eternal glory, kept by the power of God. Not one of those chosen by God, redeemed by Christ and called by the Spirit can be lost. The perseverance of the saints is demanded by the purpose of God, the purchase of Christ, and the power of the Spirit.

**And we must not tolerate any distortion of the ordinances of the gospel.**

Let us be sure that the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are observed according to the teaching of Scripture and that we do not substitute any practice which in the slightest degree casts doubt on the perfect holiness of Christ's person or the necessity of atonement by his death, burial and resurrection as our substitute.

Spirit of God, make this assembly, as long as it stands, "*the pillar and ground of the truth*" in this place, for the glory of Christ, and bless their labor together for the increase of God's kingdom, the salvation of chosen sinners, and the comfort, joy and edification of God's saints.

I urge you all to give yourselves entirely to the blessed work of upholding, maintaining and proclaiming the truth of God, for the glory of God. Use everything God puts in your hand for this glorious work and you will serve God, his church and your generation well.

Amen.