

Chapter 4

Maintaining a Distinction

“... that thou mayest know how thou
oughtest to behave thyself in the house
of God, ...”

– 1st Timothy 3:15

In this 4th message, I want to discuss that if we're going to be the church that people need, we're going to have to maintain a distinction about us. We live in a day of seeker friendly, seeker sensitive churches, when the emphasis is upon giving people what they want, what is pleasing to their flesh, what is in line with what they perceive that they need, (which is not always what they need,) and in line with their notions of God. In such a day, there is an ever present and ever increasing danger of the churches of the Lord falling prey to such thinking. This thinking, to some degree, has already made its way into most of the Lord's churches.

What we need to realize is that the entire seeker friendly, seeker sensitive church movement is built upon at least 3 false foundations; making a church more attractive to unbelievers. a wrong motive, and a wrong focus. By building on the false foundation of making a church more attractive to unbelievers we become more popular with the world, we become more desired by the world, and they do all of that to get people to come to Christ. That's a false premise, because popularity is not what gets people to the place where they will believe, where they will come to Jesus Christ. By building upon the foundations of a wrong motive, they seek to attract a crowd, to lure a crowd, which is also building upon a wrong focus. The focus is upon the seeker, and not God. When we come to worship, the focus ought always to be on God, nothing else. In the seeker sensitive movement, the focus and everything else centers around the so-called seeker.

This movement has resulted in the establishment of churches (or, religious houses) as places of entertainment and of social gatherings rather than houses of worship. The whole movement is really entertainment and social activity has replaced real worship. These churches are built upon demographic studies and marketing research. "What do the people want in our area?" Really, if you think about it, they're founded on world corporation marketing strategies and pop physiology concepts that are known to be successful

in drawing, in attracting large numbers of people. If you look closely at the seeker friendly, seeker sensitive movement, there are many parallels to major corporations in their attempt to appeal to potential consumers.

The seeker friendly, seeker sensitive church movement seeks to attract, seeks to lure the unchurched. It seeks to attract and allure people who have been turned off by the truth, who have been turned off by traditional worship services. That's the goal of the seeker sensitive movement. "That is who we want to reach, and we're going to gear all of our services to that goal." The way you reach those who have been turned off by traditional worship services is you incorporate proven consumer oriented concepts and methods of the world. You incorporate those things in order to make the church more attractive and appealing to the ungodly. Why would you want to appeal to the ungodly? Why would you want to appeal to those who are turned off by truth? That's the whole concept of this movement.

An environment is created where the so called seeker has their emotional and their "felt" needs met. "However needy you are, we'll meet your needs." They create an environment where this so called seeker can come into the worship and they'll always be comfortable. There will be nothing said and nothing done that would threaten to "rock" their present belief system. That's the mindset that is behind the seeker sensitive movement. They say, "We don't want to do anything that would rock their present belief system, we want them to feel comfortable, we want their emotional and whatever felt needs that they have, to be met." Many times all this is done through the use of modernization. There's nothing wrong with certain areas of modernization, but you better be careful, because a lot of modernization desensitizes from the old paths, desensitizes from the old ways.

The threat to the Lord's churches today is not the seeker friendly, seeker sensitive movement. The threat is the faulty premise, the wrong motive, the wrong focus that it's built upon. The threat is that this false premise, this wrong

motive, this wrong focus, would make inroads into the Lord's churches. That's the danger. It's the mindset that is behind the movement that threatens the well being of the Lord's churches. The danger to the Lord's churches is that we would adopt and fall prey to this mindset. Most already have to some degree. We could give a lot of examples, but that's not our point here. Believe me, in a lot of the Lord's churches, to some degree, the mindset of the seeker sensitive movement has already begun to make inroads. When that happens, doing God's business, God's way, and for God's glory, ceases to be and is replaced by, "We want to be loved, we want to be accepted, we want to be desired by the world." That leads to compromising and an unbiblical, God displeasing mindset of the seeker sensitive movement. The danger is that the mindset of such a movement would take root in our own minds and in our own church.

In 1st Timothy 3:15 it says, "*But, if I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou ought to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.*" The first point is that the churches of the Lord are distinct. This verse makes that very clear. What do we mean when we say, "The church is distinct?" We mean the Lord's church is to be separate, fenced off, independent, different, unconnected, and detached from the ways of the world. In John 15:19 Jesus is talking to His apostles and His church, "*If you were of the world the world would love his own. But because you are not of the world, ...*" They are distinct from the world, separate from the world, they are not connected, not attached to the world, "*but because you are not of the world but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*" The whole mindset behind the seeker sensitive movement is, "We don't want the world to hate us." Yet, Jesus said the reason the world hates you is because you're not like them. There's only way for a church to get the world to fall in love with them and that is they become the world. At the moment that happens, a church ceases to be what people need. More than

likely, they will never again be the church that people need. There aren't too many churches that go into heresy and ever come out of it. Once a church goes down this road, it's almost a point of no return. This is very, very dangerous.

This distinction not only includes the secular world, but it includes the religious world. Reading through the gospels, it is very, very apparent that Jesus was at odds with the religious establishment. Read Matthew 23. He was at odds with that which was the mainstream of His day. The Lord's church is to be distinct not only from the secular world but from the religious establishment as well. Matthew 23 is a wonderful example, where we see Jesus constantly exposing the sham, deceit, hypocrisy, pride, error, and failure of the religion of His day. You look at modern religion today and it's no different. Pharisee-ism is alive and well today, in different forms, but the same religion. All through the New Testament it is plainly taught, it is plainly illustrated, that there is to be a clear, well defined, unmistakable, recognizable, difference between the Lord's churches and the secular world, and between the Lord's churches and the so-called religious world. In order for a church to be what people need they must maintain a distinction, the distinction that God has set down. We must be different from the world. It has to be, there has to be a difference between clean and unclean, between truth and error, between right and wrong. Read Leviticus 10:10, and Leviticus 11:47. The Jews were to separate clean from unclean, holy from that which was unholy. There was to always be a distinction, and that must always be so.

I'll tell you this for sure, wherever the Lord sows wheat, Satan sows tares. Wherever the Lord gathers sheep, Satan always herds some goats. Wherever you find grain in the field, you will also find chaff. That's true here today, that's true in all the churches. If the Lord sows wheat, Satan sows tares. We don't always know for sure the wheat and the tares, we have suspicions, but we don't always know. That's why Jesus said, let them both grow together, I'll take care of

it. That's true. If we know for sure, then of course we have a responsibility. It's not our responsibility to determine who it is that's lost and get them out. Jesus said, I'll take care of it, and He will. That doesn't go against church discipline. This is where the danger is. Because there are tares, because there are some goats, because there are some chaff, it's easy, many times, for God ordained distinctions to become blurred. We have to make sure we maintain distinction. We can not blur that distinction.

In 1st Timothy 3:15 the description of the church manifests a clear cut distinction. Notice it is referred to, first of all as the house of God. There is a distinction between the house of God and all other houses. That immediately implies a distinction that it's God's. The distinction is also that it is a spiritual house not a materialistic house. We see in 1st Peter 2:5, speaking of the saved, we are lively, spiritual stones. As such, we are referred to in Galatians 6:10 as *“the household of faith.”* Ephesians 2:19, it is referred to as *“the household of God.”* Don't you see, there's a distinction. The household of God, the household of faith. It's His house. That means He builds it, He provides for it, He protects it, and He dwells in it. That makes it distinct from all others. Why would we want to blur the distinction? We are God's house. Don't ever allow that distinction to become blurred, to blend in with the world. It is God's house. It is made up of a part of God's family. That's special.

This house consists of a master of the household that, of course, is Jesus Christ. In this household, just like in most households, there are spiritual adults, there are spiritual children, and there are spiritual babes. There are stewards to give what each of these needs. The house of God is never to be turned into the world. It's never to become anything but the house of God. When the house of God becomes the world, can it really be called, “The house of God”, any more? They begin to lose their distinction, and they begin to cease to be the church that people need, and are becoming the church that people want. Yes, if we so choose, we can give

the world what they want, but we'll lose the distinction of being the house of God. So, we must continue to be what they need.

It is also referred to here as the church. It is *“the house of God, which is the church”*, a called out assembly, *“of the living God.”* If it is a called out assembly of God, He's the one that called it out. He's the one that assembles it. That makes it distinct. An assembly must assemble. You can't have an assembly unless you assemble. A church being an assembly, must assemble. A congregation must congregate.

It is referred to here as *“the church of the living God.”* Now the church of the living God is never to become the world. A distinction must be maintained. We are the house of God, we must maintain that distinction. We are the church of God, we must maintain that distinction. We have to maintain that in order to continue to be the church that people need.

Notice these two descriptions in 1st Timothy 3:15, *“the house of God”* and *“the church of the living God”*. Those two phrases declare that the house is God's and the church is God's. It's His. It belongs to Him. He is the owner. We have to realize that if we're going to maintain this distinction. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declared, *“I will build my church”*, and that little word *“my”* makes it different from all others. People today say, “Well, one church is just as good as another.” How can that be? If Jesus built the church and He called it “My church”, don't tell me that that church isn't better than all the rest. It's His. It immediately implies that there is a distinction.

Home Baptist Church, it's not my church, it's not your church. “Oh I've been going here 20 years, it's my church.” No it's not. I don't care if you've been going here 50 years or 100 years, it's not my church, it's not your church, it's not our church. It's His. When we get to thinking it's ours, then we begin to think we have some liberties. If we keep focused that it's not mine, it's not yours, it's not ours, it's His, we're

not at liberty to do just what we please, because it's not ours. It belongs to Him. It is distinguished from all other churches. If the church is to be what people need, that distinction has to be maintained.

Notice what else it says in 1st Timothy 3:15, “*the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*” The purpose of the church is to uphold, to maintain, and to set forth the truth, not what we think is the truth, but the truth. It is also the ground of truth. It is the source of truth. God has deposited His truth in His churches. When we begin to think we're the pillar and ground of truth, and we want to lure those in who have been turned off by the truth, how are you going to do that? You're going to begin to fiddle with the truth. When you do that, where does it stop? Soon it's no longer the pillar of truth. When that happens, you're no longer the church that people need. Oh you might make them feel good, but that's not what they need. They need the truth.

We have the truth. The truth is a mark of distinction. It distinguishes the Lord's churches. It's also a mark separation. Truth and error must separate. “Well, we accept all teachings.” Well, then you can no longer stand for the truth, because truth and error must separate, it has to be. It is a mark of distinction, it's a mark of separation. It is also a mark of difference. Don't ever apologize for believing the truth. Don't ever apologize for the church for holding the truth. It's a mark of contrast, the pillar and ground of truth. It's a dividing line. “Where do we draw the line?” Truth is the line. You don't have to draw a line, the line is already drawn. Truth is the line. If the church is to be what people need, that distinction of truth must be maintained.

These descriptions of the church in 1st Timothy 3:15, reveal both the purpose and the responsibility of the church. We see God and truth. That's our purpose and responsibility. You'll notice also in this verse that God and truth have an impact on one's attitude. He says, “*that thou oughtest to know how to behave thyself in the house of God.*” God and

truth teaches us that there is a code of behavior in the Lord's house. There is a behavior. It's God's house. We have God and truth. Those are two distinctions. We must never blur the distinctions. We must never break down the distinctions. In the day of seeker sensitive churches, innovation is looked upon as more important than truth. Innovation is never more important than truth. Programs are looked upon as more important than truth. It's not more important, nor is it even on the same level. It is the truth that distinguishes us. That's why it's scary when people will make comments and say, "Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine." What are you saying? Do you realize what doctrine is? It's the truth. When you say, "Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine. That's all I hear. I'm tired of it," you're saying, "I'm tired of the truth." That's the whole mindset behind the seeker sensitive movement. Truth must have a standard. Truth is not relative, it is not subjective. That is, it is not determined by situations, it's not determined by people, it's not determined by culture. Truth is not ambiguous. That is, it is not doubtful, and it is not uncertain. Truth is definite. Truth is certain.

This truth must have a standard. That is, something has to determine what is true. Something has to determine what is true and what is not true. What is the standard? The standard is not man's opinions, reasoning, philosophies of man, it's not even the traditions of man. "Well, we've been doing that for 50 years!" Tradition does not determine truth. There are many traditions that are wrong, but that's a different message. Institutions of learning do not determine truth, they may proclaim truth, but they do not determine truth. Politicians and so-called experts do not determine truth. Hollywood and the entertainment industry does not determine truth. If you use Hollywood or the entertainment industry for an argument, you don't have much. They do not determine truth. Preachers do not determine truth. Religious institutions, Home Baptist Church, do not determine truth. Preachers are to proclaim truth, Home Baptist Church is to

proclaim truth, but we do not determine truth. Traditions do not determine truth.

What does determine truth? The Bible tells us that God is truth. Anything contrary to God is wrong. God is truth. Jesus said, in John 14:6, *“I am ... the truth”*. Jesus Christ is the truth. Anything contrary to Jesus Christ is not true. John 16:13, the Holy Spirit is said to be the spirit of truth who will guide you into the truth. The trinity, God the father, God the son, God the holy spirit, is truth. God's word is truth. John 17:17 says, *“... thy word is truth”*. Isaiah said in 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 [or truth] in them.”* This is our standard for truth. God and God's word. Those two, God, (when I say God I mean God the father, God the son, God the Holy Spirit), and God's word never contradicts one another. They're always in agreement. That's why it's called God's word. This is our standard of truth. Whatever is contrary to these things, whatever is contrary to this book is a lie. Whatever is contrary to this book is incorrect, it is wrong, it is inaccurate, it is fabricated, it is fraudulent. If it is contrary to the word of God, it's not true. *“... let God be true and every man a liar;”*, is what we read in Romans 3:4. It doesn't matter how educated that “man” is, how nice of a fellow he is, or that he has good intentions, if he's contrary to what God says, he does not speak the truth. We see our standard for truth.

God draws very distinct, very clear, unmistakable lines between truth and error, between right and wrong. The mindset behind the seeker sensitive movement is to make truth acceptable. That's not our responsibility. Our responsibility is to sound it out, to declare it, to proclaim it, and to live it. We're not to seek to be loved. It's not our goal to be accepted and desired. Our goal is to declare the truth. That's why we're here, to declare the truth.

The church is to proclaim the truth, but, when the mindset of, “We want the world to love us, to accept us, to desire us, to just break our doors down where we don't have

enough room for them. We just want them to come”, makes inroads into the church, there is only one way to keep that going. You have to begin to view proclaiming of truth and truth itself differently. As soon as you get into that mindset, you have begun to view truth differently than you ever did before. That's very, very dangerous. Once you begin to view truth differently, the fearlessness, the courage, the steadfastness, the determination for truth begins to waver. Then there are attempts to change. “Well this person was turned off by this truth, so how can we word it a little differently? How can we phrase it a little differently where they won't get so angry?” You better be careful how you go rephrasing the truth. You better be careful when you start to alter the truth, because one alteration means it's no longer truth. The truth begins to be altered. You begin to make a few adjustments. “Well, Brother Dan, maybe you can say it this way”, or, “Well, that didn't work, lets try saying it this way”, and you begin to make adjustments. That's very dangerous and when that happens, the church is well on it's way to ceasing to be the church people need. They begin to tweak and to modify the truth. If you're working on a contract over something and you want to make some alterations, you want to make some adjustments, do a little tweaking, a little modifying, go right ahead. But, when it comes to God's word, we're not to modify it, we're not to tweak it, we're not to alter it, we're not to modify it. “Well, if we don't make some adjustments, they're not going to come.” That's not our business. That's God's business. We need to keep our businesses straight.

The truth is to be contended for. It distinguishes us. It's a dividing line. In Jude 3, Jude said, “*Beloved when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation*”, he says, I wanted to write to you about the truth of salvation, “*it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith [meaning the truth]*”, then notice what it says, “*which was once delivered unto the saints.*” He says, “*that ye should*”,

which is an obligation, it means that it's advisable; “*ye should earnestly*”, that's indicative of intensity and conviction; “*ye should earnestly contend*”, that means there's a battle, “you should earnestly contend”, maintain, hold on to, and be assertive. We're not to be passive. *Earnestly contend*, that's assertive. When Jesus said in Matthew 16:8, “*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*”. Do you realize gates are defenses? Gates do not attack anybody. Gates are there for defensive purposes. So that means what? That means the church is to be on the offense. “*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” means the gates shall not be able to stop the truth that the church declares.

We're to earnestly contend. “Well, we just want to get along with everybody.” Don't you see that truth and error can't get along. God's house and the devil's house can not get along. There is a contention. As soon as we say we're God's house, God's church, that immediately puts us at odds with everybody else. There is a contention. That means there is an opposition. If we are to earnestly contend for the truth or for the faith, those words imply that there is an enemy. If we have to contend there's an enemy.

It implies that there is opposition. Not everybody is going to love the truth, not everybody is going to hear the truth. Many are going to oppose it. What do we do in those times? When someone stands up and opposes the truth, what will we do? Do we make adjustments? Do we issue an apology? No! We're to earnestly contend. We're to earnestly contend for the faith. That enemy, that opposition is relentless and determined. We can not afford not to be relentless. We can not afford not to be determined in our contention for the truth.

In the midst of all the filth, in the midst of all the vileness, and the wickedness, and the ungodliness, and the abomination, in the midst of all the blasphemy, in the midst of all the heresy, we are to earnestly contend for the truth. How do we do that? We do that by standing for the truth, cleaving to the truth, proclaiming the truth, and living the

truth. It's not only our responsibility as a church to proclaim the truth, it's our responsibility as we go out in this world of wickedness to live the truth. That makes us different than all those around us.

When the goal is to make the ungodly feel comfortable, to feel satisfied, and happy, when the ungodly comes in we ought to pray, "Lord save their soul. Lord take the preached word today and bring it into their hearts, cause them to be born again and save their soul." That should be what we're praying. Not, "Lord ... Oh, I pray Lord that the pastor wouldn't say something today to run these people off. Oh Lord, don't let him say anything that's going to offend them." No, you pray that he preaches the truth and that the Lord will take the truth and save their soul. That's how we continue to be the church that people need. When all we're concerned about is what they thought, were they comfortable, were they satisfied, were they happy, we begin to some degree to set truth to the side. When we begin to set truth to the side, again my question is, where does that stop? It doesn't. It just snowballs.

Oh how we desire to be the church that people need. I believe we are, I believe we are a church that people need, not necessarily the church people want. We need to realize there is a danger out there, that we could very easily cease to be the church that people need. God help us to be the church that lost sinners need, that God's people need, that we do not adopt the mindset of the seeker sensitive movement. The seeker sensitive churches are not what threatens our existence. They could build one right next door. That would not be what threatens our existence. What threatens our existence is that we adopt their mindset, that we begin to think along the same lines. "Oh we don't want them to build a big church there that will take away from ...". Don't worry about it. That's not the danger. We have to protect our own hearts, our own minds from falling prey to an ungodly, compromising, un-biblical mindset.