

Our Conduct In The Savior's Church

1 Timothy 3:14-16

Introduction

Paul has addressed the shepherds in the church (vv.1-13) and now our attention is directed to the sheep in the church (vv.14-15) and the Savior in the Church (v.16).

Paul anticipates he might be delayed in his visit to Timothy and the church in Ephesus and desires to give Timothy necessary instructions concerning Christian conduct in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. How should we behave ourselves in the Church? How serious is this subject? Our attention is drawn to Paul's description of the Church (**it is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth**); and Christ in that Church (**the mystery of godliness**). We are reminded that the Church is the possession of the living God and the dwelling place of the living God and has been established to display God's truth (v.15). The Christian acknowledges that truth and walks in that truth and our behavior is informed by that truth. There is no greater proof that we possess God's truth than in our possession of God's Son.

Paul provides a summary of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus in six simple statements:

- Jesus appeared in a body (v.16a)
- Jesus was vindicated by the Spirit (v.16b)
- Jesus was seen by angels (v.16c)
- Jesus was announced to the nations (v.16d)
- Jesus was believed on in the world (v.16e)
- Jesus was taken into heaven (v.16f).

Conduct In The Church (vv.14-15a)

1 Timothy 3:14–15a (NKJV) 14These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; 15but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God,

“*These things*” might be a reference to everything Paul has written thus far—and the vital themes that remain in this letter. Paul was most likely in Macedonia writing to Timothy who was in Ephesus. Paul hoped to visit Ephesus but might have to remain in Macedonia. This is the reason Paul decides to spell out in further detail how Timothy should conduct himself in the house of God. It is important for Pastors and leaders to know how to behave in the local church. Was Paul delayed? Were Paul and Timothy ever reunited? We don't know whether Paul rejoined Timothy in Ephesus.

There are several themes in Paul's letters. Paul wants us to know what to believe and how to behave. The expression “*conduct yourself*” (*anastrephesthai*) means walk or behavior. What manner of men and women ought we to be? We are encouraged to conduct ourselves among ourselves in humility and holiness and harmony and truth. We all know that actions speak loudly

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and our collective actions speaks loudly to our community and culture. **Paul's reference "the house of God" is very interesting. The emphasis is not on the building as such but rather on the household (*oikos*). It was the common word for family or household. It could mean building but more likely it means family.**

In the Old Testament God dwelt in the Tabernacle and the Temple but in the New Testament God dwells in His people; in the **church**. If the Church is God's family; then it is the most important organization in the world.

Paul will address the broad themes of the Pastor and doctrinal error (4:1-6); the Pastor and self-discipline (4:7-16). Then Paul will give detailed instructions about the care of widows, elders, and personal advice to Timothy (chapter 5:1-25).

Character Of The Church (v.15b)

15b. . .which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Paul uses several metaphors in his writings to describe the Church. Paul uses the terms a temple, a building, a habitation and a dwelling place for God's Spirit (see Ephesians 2:20, 21; 1 Corinthians 3:9-17; HERE and 1 Peter 2:4-8).

Paul makes clear that the true church is the church of the living God. What does Paul mean when he describes the church as the pillar or column? This was the architectural structure that helped support the roof. Columns and pillars were plentiful in Greek and Roman temples. They were strong and beautiful. I suspect that Paul means the pillars support the roof of truth. The metaphor implies that from ground to ceiling the church evidences truth. The Holy Spirit teaches the revealed truth of God (the Bible) to believers—members of the true church.

Paul employs a term found only in this verse in the entire Greek New Testament: *hedraioma—it means support or bulwark (ground)*. One translation reads 'basement'. The Church is tasked with preserving and proclaiming the truth in this world!

Think about Paul's metaphor for a moment. The church is a pillar and a fortified embankment. The church supports the truth. You don't hide pillars. Whether short or tall; massive or manageable; pillars speak of support—and people are drawn to them. Pillars attract attention. But they are not supposed to attract attention to themselves—but what is inside! **The church is supposed to contain people who have been changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

We might think of this phrase as from floor to ceiling the church is the church of the living God. The church consists of the people who know and love the truth.

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“As the local church is faithful to preserve, preach and practice the truth, God’s work prospers on earth. The unfaithful Christian is weakening the very foundation of God’s truth in the world” (see *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines of the New Testament*; p. 628).

The church—the family of God; the company of the Saints proclaim the truth to the world. And what truth is that? The truth about Jesus! The truth about His incarnation; the truth that God sent Jesus into this world because God love the world.

The church does not invent truth it proclaims the truth. **The church is not the source of the truth but rather the protector and custodian and proclaimer of the truth.** Some suggest the Church is more important than the truth entrusted to it! But that can’t be true. The truth remains the truth—even if it is denied or left unguarded.

The church was expected to believe and trust and act on the truth.

Christ In The Church (v.16)

16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

We might think of this verse as the basic body of divine revelation. Some scholars have suggested this was an early hymn or song sung in the congregation! The mystery of godliness is God’s hidden program to bring godliness into the world (*ibid*; p.628). I think Paul is exalting the greatest mystery of all; that God was manifested in the flesh! This is Christ first in the world and then in the church! In this verse we find the *telos—the end—and purpose of God’s revelation*. The verse exalts Jesus; His birth; His death and resurrection; His earthly ministry. This is the summary of the person and work of Jesus Christ and the preoccupation of the local church! The secret to pleasing God is Christ Jesus The Lord. Great is the mystery of godliness. In what way? The God of heaven becomes flesh! The secret of pleasing God—once veiled or concealed is now revealed! Jesus is the revelation of the mystery (see 1 Corinthians 2:7-14; Colossians 1:27). Paul has spent his life thinking about this mystery and all that it means to everyone. What could be more significant or profound? **The secret of knowing God, pleasing God and living a godly life is found in the person and work of Jesus. It is impossible to please God apart from Christ. It is impossible to know God or be rescued from our sin apart from Christ.** The man Christ Jesus lives the perfect life we could never live. The God-Man gives us the power to please God and live right through Christ. “Every phrase of the hymn is a “mystery” beyond our comprehension yet available for us to believe. We accept the truth as it has been revealed to us. And the results of our belief are life changing” (see *Life Application Bible Commentary; 1&2 Timothy/Titus*; p.69).

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Paul claims “And without controversy”—that is not subject to dispute. The mystery of godliness is something all believers embrace, uphold affirm! These truths are simple statements with profound implications. We are to accept them as true.

God Manifest

“. . . *God was manifested in the flesh.*” The oldest manuscripts read; “(he) who was manifested in the flesh.” The Greek language read “*hos*” and was later changed to *Theos*. The KJV reads; “God manifested in the flesh”. Does this present a problem? Not really. The subject is Jesus. God became a human being. The very fact that God assumes another nature; a human nature must mean that it was God who is manifest (that is made known). This is confirmed in John’s gospel; “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. The incarnation provides the basis where sinful human beings can be reconciled to God. Os Guinness writes: “*The fact that the greatest mystery of all—the incarnation—comes at the very beginning and is the central reason why we believe in God. We cannot explain it: there is the beginning of the mystery of faith. But because of the evidence neither can we explain it away: there is the beginning of the rationality of faith.*”

One of the early church fathers Gregory of Nazianzus spells out the mystery: “The Self-Existent comes into being, the Uncreate is created. That which cannot be contained is contained.”

The living God becomes a man: acquires a second nature a human nature. God becomes a human being. Jesus was a real human being with flesh and blood. In His humanity Jesus participates in all that it means to be human; trials and sufferings. The writer of Hebrews says;

Hebrews 2:16–18 (NKJV) 16For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

18For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

How important is the doctrine of the incarnation? The virgin birth? The belief that the true God becomes a human being and enters into the human story? According to the Bible Jesus takes and retains a human nature to take away sin; to destroy him who has the power of death (Satan). The writer of Hebrews says; “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Justified In The Spirit

What does it mean that Jesus was justified in the Spirit? When Jesus walked the earth He spoke the truth. He came to the earth to save everyone who would believe in Him. But the vast

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majority of people rejected His claims and did not believe Him. He came to His own but His own received Him not. The religious leaders threatened Him, and arrested Him and beat Him and killed Him. But the Son of God was vindicated by the Spirit of God. How did the Spirit vindicate Christ? The Holy Spirit insured that Jesus lived a holy and sinless life. The Holy Spirit gave Him power to perform miracles. The Spirit vindicated Jesus by raising Him from the dead. “And declared to be the Son of God with power; according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).

1 Peter 3:18; “For Christ also hath suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened (made alive) by the Spirit”. “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear” (Acts 2:32-33 NRSV).

The Holy Spirit vindicated (justified) the words and deeds of Jesus by raising Him from the dead! The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives inside the Believer.

Seen By Angels

The earthly ministry of Jesus was accompanied by supernatural spirit beings! Angels were sent by God at His birth (see Luke 1:26). Angels were present during His temptation in the wilderness (Mark 1:12). Angels were present in His trials (Luke 22:43) and at His resurrection (Matthew 28:2). Angels were present at His ascension into Heaven (Acts 1:10-11). The early church reflected on the fact that Holy Angels witnessed the whole drama of Christ's presence on the planet Earth.

Preached Among The Gentiles

The Lord Jesus was preached to the nations: “So that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written: To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand” (see Romans 15:19b-21).

The word *gentiles* can also mean *nations* or people groups. “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant” (Colossians 1:23 NIV).

Believed On In The World

This is the reason Jesus comes into the world—so that the world by believing may be saved. After the painful death death of Jesus and His glorious resurrection from the dead—a small group of believers shared the Good News. The resurrected Jesus was seen by more than 500

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witnesses. Belief about Jesus is not the same as believing in Jesus. Believing in Jesus means trusting Him as Savior. It means turning from sin—repenting of sin and trusting Jesus for forgiveness of sin. “For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24). Jesus continues to be both preached and believed in the world.

Received Up In Glory

This is a reference to the bodily ascension of Jesus into Heaven. This is a reference to what theologians call the exaltation of Jesus. Jesus is Supreme in Majesty in the Universe. This is a reference to what Paul writes—“every knee will bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:7-10). Paul reflecting on this great truth wrote; “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:10 NKJV).

Jesus returned to the place where He came from. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father—where He will remain—until the moment—established by God—that Jesus will return to the earth and bring all of human history to an eventual close—and then He will establish what has been called the Eternal State.

Conclusion

The church on earth is the Body of Christ on earth and the preoccupation of God in Heaven. The church of God is important to God and should be important to you.

We love the church. And I love this church. The church exists to love; the Lord—and to love one another and to love the lost. We exist to glorify God; through praise and prayer; by bearing fruit; by giving and serving. And so the gospel is preached and believed. We instruct believers and baptize believers and provide a healthy atmosphere where believers can grow. The basis of our fellowship is Jesus. There is an old hymn by Charles H. Marsh that was revived for a new generation;

Living, He loved me; dying He saved me;
Buried, He carried my sins far away;
Rising, He justified freely forever:
One day He's coming—oh, glorious day!