

1 Timothy 3:14-16

By
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"I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory."

Introduction

I have to share this experience because it was a crazy weekend. I'm waiting until Bekah's a little out of earshot. We were celebrating Bekah's birthday and she got to invite over 8 of her friends to have a sleepover and Kathy and I experienced the true scourge of every parents' life and that's the pre-adolescent, too many energetic young ladies having a sleepover time. And it was the craziest experience of our lives. I'm not kidding! We told them to go to sleep. They said "Okay." But we heard giggles and yelling and pillow fighting and then you come and say, "Hey girls, I understand. Go to sleep."

You go through this routine for a period of a few hours and finally at 1:30AM I said, "Okay, this is too much." And so, I go down and say, "Girls, you *really* need to go to sleep." The way our house is situated, obviously the girls are all sleeping down in the family room and I just sit down in the kitchen and I have a little bit of water in the dark and I'm sitting there and drinking the water and because I'm there, the little giggles fade away and they go to sleep.

In my presence, they're afraid to make a lot of noise. They're just quiet and probably they're just biding their time. They're waiting for the "old man" to get out of the room so that they can go back to their fun. See, I'm a little more clever than that. Ten minutes of just silence and waiting. What's going to happen in the dark? They all start snoring. They all fall asleep and finally, at close to 2AM they're all asleep, so I go upstairs and I, myself, finally get some sleep.

Now, the reason why I bring this up is not just so that I can vent; to just to complain about a whole bunch of crazy, young ladies causing a raucous with my weekend, but rather because there is something by way of an analogy to what we're going to talk about this morning. This morning's message, we call it "**The Household of God**" and I'd want to inform you about the concept of what it means to come into the presence of God and into His nearness.

Not that I am comparing myself to God's imminence, but if you consider it this way—what caused these young ladies to finally settle down from having a good evening and going to sleep was the fact that there was some amount of fear of my presence. I'm just a human father. I don't deserve that much amount of fear, but if you're a 9-year old girl, then I suppose there's some amount of fear for the big, weird dude. So consider how the reality of someone who has some sense of authority, who has some sense of presence to them that if they come into our presence, into our nearness, we pause. We take careful note of the manner by which we conduct ourselves in the presence of such a person.

Now, if the President of the United States came to visit us this morning, you know the church service would be a little bit different, just from our attitude of knowing the President would be among us. If the mayor of Los Angeles came, it would be the same thing. But can you imagine that though we call ourselves the household of God and the presence of God, His imminence, is so lightly esteemed in churches today that many churches are glad to throw up a slide show and make that the embodiment of what they call the worship service?

Worship today has taken too many different routes and the purpose of church has taken so many different turns for so many that it is utterly shameful. In an attitude of judgment over my brothers in Christ (they are our brothers in Christ; I don't want to condemn them), there is this sense of shame when we have taken the concept of the nearness of God, the goodness of Him towards us, and reduced it to a carnival act. This idea—that if we have enough of a good, exciting program (and there's so many wonderful creative ideas that are used in my mind) and label it worship—is inappropriate since worship is coming into the nearness of God; and the nearness of God ought to change the manner in which we conduct ourselves. The fact that God would come near to us should inform our worship.

As we look at this particular portion of 1 Timothy 3:14-16, what you'll see here is the heart of 1 Timothy. The entire letter hinges literally on this point. The reason why I can say that is because from chapters 1-3, all those positive instructions about what it means to have the right people in leadership, what the men of the church ought to be doing, what the ladies of the church ought to be doing, all of these positive instructions hinge upon these three verses and the rest of it will be an issue of negative correction.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 deal with things that are going wrong and so, this is not just the heart of the epistle, but it's literally right in the middle and it is the hinge upon which these chapters turn and this is the core of what Paul is trying to communicate by saying, "this is the most significant thing as far as church is concerned Timothy."

As we look at this passage this morning (and I realize it's communion service Sunday) may it inform our worship. May it help us to rethink of what it means to come unto nearness of God and even beyond that, by way of application, what it means that we might share in the Lord's holy communion; that we have a oneness in our common confession (i.e. the things of Christ) and we enjoy the fact that we would remember His death and His resurrection for us. It's an incredible thing for us to think about, but what are encapsulated in these few verses are the concept of worship and the concept of what the church should be about.

Let's ask that the Lord would instruct us in this time. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,

We come to You and we beg upon You that You would demonstrate Your grace to us in opening the Word of God to us; to understand it and to appreciate it; to make it real in our lives, Lord.

We take the metaphor of our Lord that the Word of God may implant itself in our hearts and that we might indeed bear fruit.

We thank You Lord, that You would give us clear instruction, that You'd remind us of what it means to dwell in this sanctuary of Your people what it means to have fellowship with one another by the blood of Christ and that as we even prepare our hearts for holy communion that we might not take things for granted, but instead take things with incredible gratitude and with reverent thanksgiving.

May we appreciate the greatness of salvation as it is the greatness of our God as He has been to us and, Lord, may we understand what is the conduct of the church and what is its creed that we might delight in the greatness of Jesus Christ and the gospel of salvation for all men.

Father, I would ask that Your Holy Spirit would have that perfect work in taking the Word of God and making it real to us. Lord, we understand that even as the Scriptures lay it out for us that the second person of the Trinity, that Jesus Himself, is referred to as the Word and yet, there's this synergism between the Word and the Holy Spirit.

And may He, the God who is the living God, instruct us today so that we might go away from this place having truly worshiped Lord, not just sitting and going through the motions of another church service.

We thank You and ask that You'd be gracious to us.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen.*

We're talking about the purpose of church; more specifically, we will talk about what is the greatness of church in these few verses. It begins by Paul addressing as a personal note the fact that he is not going to be able to come (and/or he may not be able to come I should say) because of other ministry issues. Look at what verse 14 says to open up the issue here.

Purpose of 1 Timothy (vv. 14-15a)

"I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God..."

What we have here is Paul's purpose statement for the entire letter which is encapsulated in that one phrase in verse 15, **"I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God..."** In other words, all of this stuff that Paul is addressing has one particular purpose in mind—we ought to know how we should conduct ourselves. So, verses 14 and 15 talk about the conduct of the church.

It's interesting how Paul says to Timothy that he is hoping to be there in person. Clearly, Paul's intention was to come to Timothy in Ephesus. So, what was the cause for his delay? You would think that the conduct of the church was no small issue, so why didn't Paul just hurry off? Well, because there were a lot of churches that Paul needed to minister to.

If you look at the next phrase—“*I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God*”—he gives the reason why he is writing. In other words, Paul says, “I want it to be in writing. I want you to know. I want the church to know and I want all the gathered churches to understand the purpose of God’s household; of God’s church.” That’s what he is addressing.

He says that he may be delayed. It’s kind of curious most of our modern translations will render it “**but in case I am delayed.**” I think a better translation of that would have been “but if I wait.” The concept of the verb “**delayed**” or *braduno* (βραδύνω) that is used there is not so much “if I am passively resisted, I am delayed,” but more that he might actively choose to wait instead. But why would Paul choose to wait? Because there are so many other things that God has given him to do. He’s not certain that he will have the ability to leave his present ministry and go join them in Ephesus. That is to say that as significant as it was for him to be there, Paul left it open that he may have to delay himself.

If there were all these issues, such as elders teaching mythologies, genealogies and about some kind of mysterious knowledge necessary to be saved or if you have ladies that are just flaunting excessively, immodest, and saying that they ought to be pastors of the church because they would like to preach. If you have all these kind of weird things going on; all of these things that are degrading the sense of what God has designed to be excellent in worship, what would you think would be the best cure? The *best* cure would be for the great apostle to come in through the doors and everyone would cringe into the corners and hide themselves. That’s what we would expect and I think in our modern day (and even with our common sense) we think that the best thing would be for the great apostle to show up and to just freak everyone out.

Now if Paul addressed things personally and said, “Hey *so-and-so*, you need to stop doing that. You need to stop teaching that. You guys need to step down because that’s wrong and that’s sin.” We’d think that that would be the best thing, but I guess God thinks a little bit differently and the apostle Paul seems to think a little bit differently. He says, “I may need to wait before I can come to you, but what’s more important than my arrival—than my personal ministry to you—is that these things ought to be known; that they would be written down in Scripture.”

If Paul *had showed* up at the Ephesian church, they would have greatly benefited. We’re not certain if he ever did actually show up at Ephesus, but if we know that if he had (instead of sending a letter) that the church would have greatly benefited. We, on the other hand, would have missed out on first letter to Timothy and God has sovereignly and graciously given to us these words.

Paul says, “**I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.**”

There are three things that Paul mentions here by way of encouraging the proper conduct of the church. He says that the issue is how you conduct yourselves in the church and not only does he say that it’s important what we do, but notice that he says, “...**so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself.**” When you see the word “**ought**” it’s a significant; a lot more than in our English because we use it all the time. In the Greek, the word is *dei* (δεῖ) and the concept bears a “sense of necessity.” He’s not saying that this is a light matter; that this is conduct that is like ordering combo #1 at McDonald’s versus ordering the items separately. No, he’s saying that this is by way of necessity.

“I am writing these things,” he says, “so that anyone that would hear this, that they would know how the necessity—what is necessitated—in terms of conduct in the house of God.” The term for “**conduct**” is *anastrepho* (ἀναστρέφω) which means “their lifestyle.” It means what they do; how they conduct themselves.

Paul doesn’t give us a liturgy. He doesn’t go, “First, you need to have an opening scripture reading. Then you need to have guys get up and do this.” No, what he tells us is of necessity is the attitudes and the lifestyle by which we conduct ourselves in the household of God. This is no small issue. This is the great purpose statement of this letter and the heart of it. He gives us three phrases that tell us what it means to participate in what we might call corporate worship; three phrases that ought to inform us well.

The First Consideration in Corporate Worship: The Household of God (v. 15b)

“I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God...”

The first issue is the household of God. The term for “**household**” or *oikos* (οἶκος) has appeared already in the I Timothy chapter 3. Remember that it says of elders that they need to manage their household well (vv.4-5)? Deacons are to likewise manage their household well (v.12). Curiously enough in verse 5, it says very clearly that if elders don’t know how to manage their household, then how could they possibly manage the church of God? Clearly, there’s a connection between how someone takes care of his own household and the church.

The term *oikos* (you probably heard it at one point or another) means “a house” and like our English term for house, it can either mean the physical building like if I were to say to you “Come over to my house.” I’m talking about the physical building and we’d have to give you directions. Or I might mean, “This is *my* house. We must protect *this* house!” [pointing to family] I forget who said that very significant thing. Think about what it means to have a house. It means the members of your family—your household.

So there's two ways that we use the term for house even in our English; the Greek uses it similarly. Both are very reasonable in terms of their purpose. It can mean on the one hand, the family. It can also be used to mean the building. We might ask ourselves how it is used here in this passage. Is it the physical building or the family—my household? God's temple or is it about God's family?

I think there's a little bit of both involved here and not one or the other exclusively. The reason why I say that is because he's going to go on to using the metaphor of the building later in the verse; how the church is the pillar and support of the truth. So Paul is going to talk about both of these things and that's not unusual.

Let me turn your attention to Ephesians 2. I want to show you something about this concept of God's household and how it is used there both in the sense of the family (God's house, His family) and for God's temple (the physical building).

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19)

You see familial inclusion, right? This idea that you are part of His family, you are His household and it's contrasted to being strangers and aliens. The idea of strangers and aliens in the Old Testament is more explicit than the New Testament. The idea was that you were either a stranger to the Jewish nation and to the things of God or you're an alien, a foreigner. So either you're a foreigner or you have no idea of the things of God. In either case, you are outside of the family or the nation of Israel.

Paul is using that same terminology to say that we, likewise, were on the outside looking in. We didn't know anything about God. Our heritage had nothing to do with God. We cared for nothing of the Scriptures and now, all of a sudden we are fellow citizens with the saints and we are in God's household. We are members of His family.

Look at the rest of Ephesians 2:20-22. He goes on to use the metaphor for the building.

"Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:20-22)

We switched from this idea of the family (you were strangers, but now you are part of God's household) to this idea that we are built on the foundation of the apostles—we are the temple of the Lord. We're built for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So now, we're talking about a physical building. Both of these concepts are included. The important thing about how Paul uses those metaphors is to say that God is represented by His church.

At first that might not seem like such a big deal, but understand this—if there is misunderstanding by those who are seeking to understand the things of Christ, that is, if they leave our church service thinking that church is "fun," does that represent well the character and the glory of God? No. That doesn't mean that church services ought to be the worst, most boring possible thing. Should there be some excitement about the things of the Lord? Of course! Can an activity or something that we do be fun? Absolutely! What I am saying is that if someone who is visiting with us for over a period of a month leaves and the only thing they leave with it that our church services were dynamic and exciting, then you need to ask yourself in what sense because if you mean that you felt that you had come to understand something of the glory of God, then the church has succeeded because indeed, it is God's household. If it was because we had an entertaining, "cool" service, then the church has failed.

It's a privilege, I would assume, to be in someone's household. If I considered you a part of my household, I would hope that you would take that as a privilege. I would hope that my girls (at least right now; they're not at that adolescent age where they're embarrassed to see their dad coming) would enjoy my presence right now; that they would enjoy being in my household. In that same way, we ought to enjoy being in God's household, but understand what that means—it means we represent Him who is the Head of the Church.

Can you imagine Paul is addressing the Ephesian church—a wonderful church that even in the book of Revelation, the apostle John says they knew how to kick out their bad men, how to clean house when it comes to doctrinal error and how they had forgotten the first law? This is the Ephesian church. Not some small church who were tolerating all kinds of weird stuff like the other churches. But they were tolerating false teachers among them and Paul says "You know why I'm writing these things. It is about those who are wicked and teach falsehood; those that are conducting themselves inappropriately. The reason why we exist is because we are part of God's family." Worship had started to lose that sense of the fear and admonition of the Lord. We'll talk more about that because the next phrase instructs us even further about the concept and attitude of worship.

The Second Consideration of Corporate Worship: The Church of the Living God (v.15b)

"...which is the church of the living God..."

First, Paul says that we are the household of God—His family—as well as the structure upon which He displays Himself. Now, he says that we are **"the church of the living God."** The term for **"church"** here is **ekklesia** (ἐκκλησία) and one

that is probably common to you. It means “a gathered community” or “the assembly.” It is associated with the Old Testament Hebrew term *qāhāl* (קהל) which means “the Israelites would assemble.” In fact, the Greek translation of the Old Testament would frequently use *ekklēsia* for assembly or the gathering of them (Israelites).

That’s not to say that we are the same as Israel in the sense that we are some kind of nation bound together. What it *is* to say is that the concern here is not with the identities of individuals, but with the corporate community, the corporate body—the gathering of believers. The emphasis of *ekklēsia* is exactly that—the gathered community working, ministering, moving, displaying the glory of Him who is the head which is Jesus Christ.

That is why 1 Corinthians 12 uses that metaphor of the church being the body of Christ; because within the body there is no one more significant than another. We, all of us together, form that corporate whole and Christ is the head. So, “**church**” is a great word to talk about; to see what we are and what it means for us to get together and why we get together, however, I think what informs our worship is not the term *ekklēsia*, but rather that fact that we are the community of the living God.

The funny thing about this is how I must have read through this particular portion a number of times and the concept of the living God just passed by me because you almost take it for granted. It’s not like we worship a dead God, right? The concept of “**the living God**” ought to inform us concerning worship because there are so many things that the Word of God has to say about what it means that God is the living God.

In 1 Timothy 4:9-10 it says:

“It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.”

In that context, the fact that God is a “living God” seems to inform us that He is efficacious; that He actually does stuff and the doing thing that He does is that He saves men. That is precious. It ought to be precious to us when we talk about God being alive, that He is “the living God.” In fact, the Scriptures say that that’s the *only* reason why you’re saved; that’s the *only* reason why any of us can actually think that there might be something worthwhile once we die—because God is a living God and His grace is active, because He is alive. And there’s that contrast between our God who is alive and all the false idols and false religions that are gathered around us.

Remember how in 1 Samuel 17, David comes out (this little shepherd boy) and he says “How come we’re all standing around? Who’s that huge dude? He’s like 10-12 feet tall and why is he shouting blasphemy?” He continues to say of that individual, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine? He’s a Philistine! That he should taunt the armies of the living God?” At least in David’s mind, the fact that God is alive meant that the Philistine’s god, Dagon, was dead. They’re not real. What power does that monstrosity have? It’s only physical and even that is limited, why? Because we worship a living God. We worship a God that can and does what He wishes and He’s alive, not like the deaf and dumb idols to which people will bow the knee and do all sorts of things to worship—things that they have been created and crafted with their own hands.

You read through the prophets and that’s the refrain that you will always hear. Why would you bow down to things that you have carved with your knife? That you have molded with your hands? Are you dumb? They can’t speak to you. Do they answer you when you seek them in prayer? What do they give you and why would you depend on such things? We have the living God! There is that sense in what it means that He is the living God. Even the unbelievers recognize what it means when we worship the living God in the book of Daniel.

Remember that great story when Daniel is thrown into the lions’ den and nothing happens to them? How Darius brings them out and says “*I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion will be forever.*” (Daniel 6:26)

Why did an unbelieving, Gentile king admit that the God of the Scriptures is the living God? He saw the absolute proof of His power. He saw that He actually did something. It implies then that the living God is all-powerful over anything and in all circumstances. Let’s move a little bit quicker here, since there’s so much more.

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.” (2 Corinthians 6:14)

When Paul says “*for we are the temple of the living God*” he’s saying that the fact that God dwells among us is real—not fake like the idols. You go up to the temples, you do your thing, you sacrifice, you hope you feel a tingling of the nearness of something and you actually hear that from individuals of other religions sometimes and you ask why do you believe that? They will respond that they believe it because they can just “feel” it. There’s this warmth to them. You just wonder what they are thinking.

I believe in the living God because the Word of God has proclaimed it and when God is the living God, things actually happen. It is not just this subtle “feeling” I have to interpret and hope for the best that I’m interpreting correctly. He is a living and active and true God. Not like the idols.

He’s also the source of spiritual life. Hebrews 3:12 says “*Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.*” Hebrews 10:31 says “*It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*”

Not only is God active, alive, or powerful, but He holds us to account for how we worship. That last part, I think is the most important. It informs our worship (I know I keep saying that) and let me prove it out to you. I’m not going to read the whole thing because it’s too much, but would you read it this week? Take some time from your quiet time and just read Exodus 19-20. In Exodus 20, the giving of the Ten Commandments is described. God basically says that “*you shall not have any gods before me.*” But if you read that and you forget to read chapter 19, you miss out on a whole bunch. Chapter 19 informs us of what it means that God is a living God and it tells us that there is a consequence to the manner in which we worship.

Consider the Israelites. They come to Sinai and why do they come to Sinai? The answer is: I don’t know. Because where they’re supposed to go northeast, but they had come by way of Sinai which is south. They should have taken a more northwest direction, but instead they had to come south to meet up at Sinai. What is that about? They must have been thinking what is this about?

When they had gathered around Mt. Sinai, God manifested Himself. He came down in dark, lightning-filled clouds and fire upon Mt. Sinai and the earth was shaking; fire and smoke was coming off the mountain. It was a horrifyingly, dangerous sight. When God spoke, they said it was like thunder and He’s saying do not come up to the mountain. He tells them on two occasions not just in chapter 19, but also in 20. He says tell them that they are not allowed to come up to the mountain to try to gaze at His glory or else they would die. They are not to run up. Even if their animals ran up, the animal would be hunted down and killed. No one is to come upon this mountain.

Why? Because His presence is holy and because He is a living God. He’s not some idol; some idol in a temple. You can walk in put your arm around Zeus and talk to him for awhile because he’s not real. This is the living and true God. The fact that Exodus no longer informs our attitude towards worship is a shame and an atrocity upon us. This generation of Christians will bear full account for whatever comes out for the next generation of unbelief that is masked in false conversion. It’ll be on us. You know why? Because the fear of God is no longer in this place and that is a shame; that is an absolute shame. God is a living God and the church is the gathered community. It is the gathering of the living God and if He is alive, then we ought to tremble at what we do by way of creativity. We ought to be careful about what we do by way of bringing a little more enjoyment, being a little bit different in our worship—having a new and exciting kind of worship; one that meets the needs of the people where they are.

God is not concerned about the needs of the people. What were the needs of Israel as they were gathered around Mt. Sinai? Their need was to run away and scream! Some who were curious felt their need was to come as close as they could; they wanted to run up the mountain. They wanted to be like Moses, too. The sons of Korah were like that. They said has God only spoken to Moses? Forget Moses! God said how about the ground opens up and eats you?

It’s no small business. God tells us how we are to conduct ourselves in His house and what attitude we are to have concerning Him because He is the living God. When Moses in Deuteronomy 5 recounts that entire series of events that was in Exodus 19 and 20, he asked all the nation of Israel to remember when they were gathered there at Mt. Sinai; how they had heard the voice of the living God speaking from the fire and how they were scared unto death.

“And you said, ‘Behold, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire; we have seen today that God speaks with man, yet he lives. Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?’ (Deuteronomy 5:24-26)”

There needs to be a proper reverence when we talk about worship. It’s not just supposed to be fun. It’s not just supposed to be exciting. It’s not just supposed to be good songs that make you clap your hands that make you get up. It’s about coming to the presence and nearness of the living God and that ought to inform our worship.

The Third Consideration of Corporate Worship: The Pillar and Support of Truth (v. 15b)

“...the pillar and support of the truth.”

The third thing that is spoken of here, the third phrase that is used here is “**the pillar and support of the truth.**” So the church is: 1) The household of God; we are part of His family; 2) It is the church of the living God; we ought to be careful that we understand that we are in the hands of the living God; and finally, 3) The pillar and support of the truth.

When you look at what it says there in verse 15, the emphasis is obviously on “the truth,” but the concept of the illustration is “the pillar and support.”

In other words, we're coming back to this idea that we are in that sense, the temple of God; that God's presence comes here and that if we are indeed the vessel or the place where God's presence resides, if we are the church or the structure or the house of God, then we are also the pillar and support of the truth.

I like what one commentator, William D. Mounce, says in his work on the pastoral epistles:

"This is perhaps the most significant phrase in all the pastoral epistles, not just 1 Timothy but 2 Timothy and Titus. All of them put together, this might be the most significant phrase, this idea that the church is the pillar and support of the truth. It shows more clearly and more dramatically than anything else, what is at stake in the Ephesian heresy and why it is essential that the church, especially the church leaders, conduct themselves properly."

The reason why I took this particular comment is because the statement, "This is perhaps the most significant phrase in all the pastoral epistles," kind of shocked me. 1 Timothy is full of a lot of stuff. We've seen not even half of the things that 1 Timothy addresses. There are so many phrases that you can pick out and say "This is something I want to work on for the rest of my life." But here is this great New Testament scholar who says that not only is the Ephesian church a house of the living God, but one of its functions is to support and protect the proclamation of the gospel. He's saying that this phrase ought to inform what our purpose is as a church.

What is the purpose of the church? Why do we get together? There are at least a couple of things that are mentioned here. One, we are the pillar. Secondly, we are the support. The idea of "**the pillar**" or *stulos* (στῦλος) is that we basically display or we hold it up; we support it; we lift it up the gospel of truth and that's what kind of truth Paul is talking about here. The gospel lives or dies based on how that church lives; what that church does; how it conducts its worship; what it believes about God and whether or not He truly is alive. The gospel lives and dies by that. We are the pillars of the gospel—the truth of God in salvation, as well as a support.

The term for "**support**" or *hedraïōma* (ἑδραϊώμα) is better translated like "a bulwark" or "protection." It is kind of like the front lines. You build up basically around the castle these bulwarks. You throw together these barriers to keep the advancing enemy from coming upon the building that you're trying to protect. If the building we're trying to protect is the gospel—the truth of salvation—then the church and how it conducts itself will have a great effect on making sure that the truth of the gospel is legitimately displayed to the fullness of God's glory or it is basically dragged through the mud and looks like nothing, worthless. It can be added to all the other world religions and philosophies and is really meaningless to anyone's life. That's what is at stake in this concept of the pillar and the support of the truth and it's not a small thing.

It explains to us clearly (and Dr. Mounce says why church leaders need to be of certain spiritual caliber) why we have to expect church leaders to demonstrate themselves in a manner that is appropriate to the church; why men and women need to understand their particular roles and conduct themselves appropriately within the church service; why it is intolerable that there are "leaders" in the Ephesian church teaching how there is some secret knowledge hidden amongst the mythology and amongst the genealogies of the Old Testament. That is ridiculous! Not only is it ridiculous and blatantly false, but it degrades the truth of the gospel.

Are men saved because *they* know something or because God has saved them to one truth? Is this some secret that they've unlocked? Some secret hand shake that they learned to do? Or is it the knowledge of salvation when we understand what the Scriptures say about our sin? We understand our inability to save ourselves when we understand that when we come to the end of ourselves and say, "God, I cannot do anything more to make myself anything closer to what you would desire me to be. Would you save my soul that we might have life?" This is the truth of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith for someone like Paul who calls himself "the chief of sinners."

If you think about his life before he became an Apostle, you might be inclined to think, "Yeah, I was a bad person in my sin, but I don't remember ever dragging moms and children out of their house so we could go stone them because we thought Christians were crazy. I don't remember encouraging violence against Christians." That was Paul ("I am the chief among sinners"). Look at what the truth of the gospel can do if the church will uphold it righteously and rightly; if we would be the pillars that display it, that support it; if we would be the protection of it and make sure that the truth is never belittled or smudged into a reputation that is not appropriate to the living and true God.

George Knight in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles says:

"To remind the church that it is a structure called to uphold the truth of Christianity is to also remind it that it is the household called to manifest that truth in its conduct and to conform to it."

In other words, not only are we supposed to speak what is the truth of the gospel, we are to display it in our lives. It ought to be demonstrated by the manner in which we live. Truth matters. How many of you guys have heard the phrase "the truth shall set you free?" There's not a person in this room that has not heard that phrase. "The truth shall set you free" is a concept that we all hear about it in the movies and commercials and just in our talking. You hear it all the time, but let me give you the context of that so you understand why Jesus said that in John 8. You can turn to it if you want to look at it yourself and take note of it.

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31)

There it is. In the context, He is speaking to true disciples and He says if you abide in my word, you are true disciples and you will know the truth. So, what truth is he talking about? He's talking about the truth of the Word of God and *that* truth shall make you free.

Now you have to ask what freedom is Jesus talking about? The rest of the context will tell us.

"They answered Him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free'? Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." (John 8:33-36)

"They" in this context are not the true disciples, but those who were questioning Him. They're talking about human slavery. They're saying "What are you talking about 'free?' We are free. We're not slaves are we? We've never been slaves in our generation... Egypt was a long time ago. What are you talking about?" Jesus uses this analogy of slavery to tell them what they are free from, that is anyone that sins is a slave of sin and sin will be your master, but a slave does not necessarily stay in that house of slavery forever because if the Son has set you free, indeed you are free (from the bondage of sin).

What is the truth He's talking about in John 8? The truth is His Word. What is the freedom that He's talking about? He's talking about how you might actually be free from the enslavement to sin. When has that not been enough of a gospel? Should not our worship (whether individually or corporately) be informed in the singular concept that for all the wickedness you are capable of God has set you free from sin being master over you?

When you read the paper or you catch the evening edition of the news and you hear about some horrifying thing that someone had done, there's a part of us that may be outraged at first, but there's also a part of us that should be able to think that except for the grace of God we would do likewise; that except for the salvation that comes by the blood of Jesus Christ—the forgiveness of my sins—except for the truth of the gospel, that kind of wrongdoing might have been committed by me.

If we understand that, then we understand what the truth is and why the truth will set us free. The truth is the truth of the gospel of salvation and that can free us for any and all sin. If that's the case, then we have a lot to uphold. The church has a lot to display and we have a lot to protect. There is no greater truth. There's no greater thing to display than that truth and there's no greater thing that we need to protect than that truth.

Would you tolerate it if your child or your dad or your mom (if someone that you care about that's not of faith who were open) were asking "Can I be forgiven?" and they're that close and they're that excited and then all of a sudden your neighbor runs in and says, "Oh, you can't be saved that way. You got to go to church and give money..." and they start pouring on all this stuff that one has to "do" to be saved? Would you not be so disappointed? How dare they intrude upon the purity of the gospel of salvation and grace! And yet, in the church can we not easily be distracted away from that very same truth of the gospel of salvation through grace? Yes, we can.

Today, we're more about how this song sounds. We're worried about how my voice sounds, how I look. We're worried about what we do up in front. We can make this a little more exciting—a little more comfortable. Then, there's a danger to re-shifting our focus in church to no longer be about the living God and His truth and to be more about us. That danger is that we become irreverent. We no longer display the graciousness and the greatness of God and the truth of salvation by Jesus Christ. It's not a small issue.

All of that to say that the conduct of the church needs to be informed by these 3 phrases:

- The household of God;
- The gathered community of the church of the living God; and
- The fact that we are the pillar and support of truth.

That's why it is so significant that things that are written in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus—so we know how to conduct ourselves. Truth is not a small issue. It is the bedrock of everything pertaining to life and godliness.

The Common Confession (v. 16)

"And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory."

If that is the conduct of the church, then we need to look now at the confession of the church in verse 16. It may look like a big chunk of stuff, but what you find out is that it is basically a hymn. Probably a hymn that was known in the early church and again, that informs us as to something as to the style of singing songs and the fact that even in the very early Church

(from its very inception) Christians were making songs about great theologies, about things that are true in the Scriptures and even that's important for us to know.

We need to get away from songs (and I think our worship team does a good job in avoiding those songs) that you guys might hear like on Christian radio or might enjoy hearing and might pick up a CD, but that are all about "fluff," about how I feel. They'll say, "Here's a love song to Jesus" and we have no idea what in the world we're talking about.

Instead of that, our worship ought to be well informed because look at the hymns of faith they sang then. Verse 16 tells us by way of what the church confesses as truth and says:

**"And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness:
He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory."**

Each of those refrains, we could break up into three particular stanzas, but first, take a look at the common confession that **"the mystery of godliness"** is great. That's a long phrase and that first part of verse 16 basically means that "it is commonly confessed that there is greatness in the mystery of godliness and we need to define all of these things for you a little bit so you can understand what's going on."

He says that it is by **"common confession"** or *homologoumenōs* (ὁμολογουμένως) which translates as one word that only occurs once in here in the entire NT. It's a word that means "confessedly" or if you want to look at it negatively "undeniably." In the more colloquial sense, we might say something like "you got to admit that this is true." And that's what that word happens to say. It's saying it is a fact commonly appreciated. It is undeniable that there is greatness in the mystery of godliness.

We talked about the word **"mystery"** or *mysterion* (μυστήριον) last week or the week before which means "something that is unveiled or opened up for you so that you can know." It's not "mysterious" as in "How will I figure this out? What is the mystery which is godliness and how will I ever come to godliness? I don't know!" It's not that. Instead, it is a technical term that New Testament writers, particularly Paul, seem to enjoy using. It's something that if you looked in the Old Testament may not be that clear—kind of cloudy at best. But now all of a sudden in the NT, that's what God's intention was all along. It includes like in Ephesians 3 the concept that Gentiles and Jews are all one in the Church; that there wasn't separate Jewish and Gentile Christians. We're supposed to all be one in Christ. That was new. That was something that was somewhat underappreciated in the Old Testament.

The concept of the Gospel itself (that our Messiah would die so that we might have life in Him) was revealed in Isaiah and a number of other places, but not in its fullness; not like the NT concept of "He would die so that we might have new life." It was there, but "cloudy" to the Old Testament saints, so now in the NT a mystery has been revealed.

The rapture of the church in 1 Corinthians 15 is another mystery revealed and on and on it goes. It always refers to something that has been recently revealed; and what has been recently revealed he says is the greatness of godliness; the mystery of godliness is what is great.

Great is the revelation of godliness. Because the word **"godliness"** is so packed with meaning for us today and the way that we use it, we need to back off a little bit and get an idea of what this word means in this context. In the Greek, the word used for **"godliness"** is *eusebeia* (εὐσέβεια). It's a word that speaks to the duty that man owes to God. We might translate it "piety," "saintliness," "godliness" or "the practice of true and right religion." It is to actually conduct ourselves in a manner that is appropriate to the presence of God.

You know, Eusebius was the name of an old Church Father (that's a name we ought to bring back into the naming of our children). Eusebius is a great name. It has this idea of godliness or piety that we conduct ourselves rightly in the eyes of God.

And so, what is being said here is undeniable—that what has been revealed about godliness is fantastic; it is great. What is that thing that has been revealed about godliness, about piety? What truth might turn us into in terms of our worship? It is Jesus Christ. In a magnificent way, Paul says undeniably that great is the revelation of piety, to which we would sing. He who is revealed in the flesh is vindicated. I don't know what the song would sound like, but you would just start singing.

He is in essence is saying "How amazing is godliness? It's like that hymn that we just recently learned. **He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory**" and Paul is just singing this and writing this down as it fills his heart with an overflowing sense of praise. What a beautiful picture.

Take a quick look at what he is talking about. There are basically three sections here; two parallel lines in each of those three sections. The first talks about the revelation of Jesus Christ—how He is revealed from incarnation to the

resurrection. It says that He was **“revealed in the flesh.”** The word for **“flesh”** or **sarx** (σάρξ) means that He actually came in the flesh.

We read this morning John 1 and remember how it said in v.1: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* If we skip down to verse 14, it says that *“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* This is referring to His incarnation.

It’s a reminder of how He was revealed in the flesh. He came to die as a man so that we might have life in Him. He **“was vindicated in the Spirit”** and I think more appropriately, it ought to say He was vindicated “by the Holy Spirit.” The idea of **“Spirit”** or **pneuma** (πνεῦμα) there probably refers to the Holy Spirit because it makes very clear sense to me. The idea is that all the things that Jesus claims to be—that He is the Son of God; that He had come to die; that it would be necessary for Him to be lifted up and crucified—all the things that He said was validated, vindicated, justified by the Holy Spirit.

I think of Romans 1:4 which talks about Jesus Christ and how He was promised by the prophets; how He was a descendent of David according to the flesh *“who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.”* I think in that passage, it’s not so much the Spirit of holiness, as it is the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In other words, the Holy Spirit (by way of His resurrection, by way of the confirmation of His Death on the cross and His coming back to life) validated everything that Jesus said about Himself. His incarnation and His resurrection was vindicated by the Spirit. These are things that are spoken of in this great hymn in that first phrase—the idea of the revelation of Christ.

The second part is the next two phrases and it’s the proclamation of Christ before those who are supernatural and those who are human. It says, He was **“beheld by angels.”** This word for **“beheld”** or **horaō** (ὁράω) means “to actually see” and in the entire New Testament, whenever this particular form of this particular verb was used, it was always used in the sense of seeing that which has been glorified in terms of the resurrection of the Lord already.

It speaks of how they saw or had been beheld. We beheld His glory. It often speaks of Jesus Christ after His resurrection. The angels beheld Him and I think it’s referring to the story of Matthew 28:5-7 when the ladies come looking for the Lord and the rock is rolled away:

“And the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”

It’s the angels that beheld His resurrection and beheld the accomplishment of His work. There were also angels there at His ascension in Acts 1. Remember how all the men were looking up and the two men in white show up and say “Men of Galilee, what are you guys looking at? Jesus has gone up He will come back the way that He went up but go about your business. Nothing to see here. You’ve seen Him go up to heaven and He will return one day. Do what He has tasked you to do.”

Not only has he been beheld by angels (so the supernatural have seen Him), but He is also **“proclaimed among the nations.”** The word for **“nations”** here is that word **ethnos** (ἔθνος) from which we get our word “ethnic.” It means ethnicity. It says not only did the angels behold and bear testimony to Christ, but we proclaim Him to all the nations. All the people of the world have heard of Him because we proclaim Him also.

Romans 10 is a great section on that. It talks about how whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Romans 10:14 says *“How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”* It’s that same word that is used there. How will they hear if no one goes to proclaim? All the world can know salvation through Jesus who is proclaimed among the nations.

Colossians 1:27-28 says the same thing. It says: *“to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.”*

The proclamation of Christ to His nations—that’s one of the great things that is a part of the confession of our church and of every church. Not only has he been beheld or looked upon by the angels, but the whole world has heard His proclamation—the proclamation of salvation by His death.

Finally, the last two speaks of His reception. He was **“believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”** Both of those are obvious, but incredible statements. The entire world has heard the gospel and there will be some believers from every tongue—meaning that every nation will have some that bow their knees to Christ. Then, the gospel will go forth and by the Word of God and the power of God (through the Holy Spirit) will make a difference in human lives.

Any man, any woman in this world can be saved if they call upon the name of the Lord; if they call upon the name unto salvation. It says that Jesus Christ was **“taken up in glory.”** In [Philippians 2:9-11](#) it says this:

“Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

When we taught through Philippians, that was a very important section (i.e. Philippians 2:9-11). We had said that the name that is so highly exalted is not the human name, Jesus. It's not Yeshua. It's not just anytime someone hears “Joshua” that they will bow their knee and it's not the human name “Jesus.” It is the divine title that is granted to Him; *“that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is **Lord** (emphasis mine).”*

Why is that important? Because the concept of who you call “Lord” goes all the way back into the Old Testament and in our Old Testament, we read small caps “LORD.” That's the personal name of God, “Yahweh.” In other words, that verse right there instructs us very clearly that Jesus Christ, in His death and His resurrection and now in His exaltation, has been declared as deserving the full title of “Yahweh God” and to that name every knee shall bow.

In fact, we had a glimpse of that in the garden when the soldiers come to grab Jesus. They come and He says “Who do you seek?” They say “We're seeking Jesus the Nazarene. And we'll kill anybody to get Him! (Since they came all armed and stuff) And He says “I am He.” I think what He says is the name “Yahweh” or some derivative of the concept of the Hebrew idea that expression of “I am.” He says the same thing that probably Moses heard when Moses asked, “Who am I going to say has sent me?” God told Moses to tell them that “I am” has sent you. Jesus says “I am” and what happens to the soldiers? They all fall backwards! It's the power of the ineffable name. That name is Christ's name. He's proclaimed among the nations and He has been exalted. It's a beautiful and excellent statement.

When all of this is considered, I think if nothing else, it ought to inform the manner in which we conduct our attitude of worship in the church. This is the church of the living God. This is His household and all of us together comprise that which should bring the most glory to Jesus Christ. We ought to be careful in how we conduct ourselves. Let's close our time in prayer.