

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## The Mystery of Godliness

*1 Timothy 3:14-16*

**Keywords:** Gospel, Household of God, Proper Conduct, Godliness

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**SermonAudio Blurb:**

### Dismiss

#### I. Introduction.

- A. Imagine we do a series of “man-on-the-street” interviews and film it all. The question is simple, “What makes the Church important?”
- B. Consider some of the possible responses:
  - 1. For many the response might be blunt and bold, there is no value in the Church. It is a place of legalism, judgmentalism, and narrow-mindedness.
  - 2. Others would see its importance in the preservation of history. A place to remember your roots.
  - 3. Then again others would see it as a place for political action. It is a great place to garner support for various legislation and movements. The Church should stand for certain things and be against others. It is the place to defend against the erosion of morals and the attack against traditional marriage and such.
  - 4. Or, it is important because it is an anchor for key moments in our lives. Birth, marriage, death and various crises are all events that the Church helps make real and valuable. Everyone should be able to look to the Church for help in these things.
  - 5. A big one would be that it exists to help meet my personal needs. Life is hard and the Church should be helping us cope with the pressures and demands.
- C. Now imagine that as we conduct these interviews we spy an old man, bent with age, who carries the scars of great suffering on his body. He eyes us with a sharpness that is tinged with a sort of amusement. When asked why the Church is important he does not hesitate:

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1. The church is important because the Creator of both heavens and earth entered into this broken world, taking on flesh as Jesus Christ. He bore our sins upon Himself, taking the wrath that was to belong to us, dying for those sins. He rose again and is now ascended back into heaven where He rules forevermore.
  2. And when He left He gave to the Church alone the responsibility to proclaim the message of Himself to all the nations, pointing to Jesus alone for the forgiveness of sin.
- D. That man would be Paul, the Apostle. And that is exactly what he does in our passage today.
1. All of history was waiting for the day God would intervene against those enemies of ours that we cannot fight—Satan, Sin and Death.
  2. And when Jesus entered this world as a man it began.
  3. And now, having ascended back into heaven he is still present in and through His Church. If you will, the Church continues this incarnation ('in flesh') of Jesus.
  4. If we lose this message, we are not a Church in reality, no matter what we call ourselves.
- E. Read passage.
1. This breaks down like this:
  2. The main point is on how to conduct oneself in the household of God.
  3. This household is defined as the church of the living God and the pillar and support of the truth.
    - a. The truth, at its core, is the gospel, which is the common confession.
    - b. We have no other message than Jesus Christ.
- F. My outline is simple, I want to make three key observations regarding the importance of the Church and the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ.

## **II. Three Key Observations.**

- A. Paul wants us to realize that as a member of God's household, we are to act properly (14-15a).
  1. Paul is eager to come to Timothy (14).

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- a. This gives us a small glimpse into how bad it was in Ephesus.
  - b. Paul has sent in his key man to set things right, but he is not wanting to simply leave it in the hands of Timothy. He is seeking to come to him as fast as he can.
  - c. Sometimes a person is given a task of taking care of something all by himself, and other times it is just to begin the process or hold on until another comes who can better resolve the issue.
2. Paul would prefer to come and take over the process of correcting this church, but also is aware that it might not happen.
- a. Here we have the reality of the unknown, "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." (Pro 16:9 NAS).
    - (1) We see also that though Paul was an apostle, able to prophesy, he still did not know the future.
    - (2) This reminds us all that we are to build contingencies into our lives acknowledging that we may plan or hope for something, but that it is not guaranteed to come about.
    - (3) As a result Paul gives clear instruction on how we are to conduct ourselves as members of God's household.
  - b. This is the main point and it is put here in the middle of this letter.
    - (1) It functions as a hinge where on both sides of it we have clear instruction.
    - (2) All that came before this purpose of writing and all that comes after is to instruct Timothy first, and the church second, on how they are to behave in God's household.
    - (3) This is in the present tense emphasizing the ongoing conduct. The behavior described is to be lived out practically and consistently.
    - (4) It also tells us that there are certain non-negotiables when it comes to "church." Here the focus is on the 'vine-work' rather than the 'trellis.'
    - (5) But it is also more than just doing "church." The term "conduct" is much more than merely how to behave. Rather it is considering a manner of living, a lifestyle.

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- (a) It is also not merely talking about when you gather as a church, but as being a part of God's household you are to live a certain way.

An example would be my home, where I would expect all who are a part of it to live and act a certain way. Not just at home, but outside the home. This is because they are expressions of me, either in respect and obedience or in rebellion. In the same way, when we reject the lifestyle and values of our Lord we are actually simple rebels. We are not reflecting our Lord as we ought.

In other words, we are not free to do our own thing. That is walking according to this American culture rather than our Father in heaven.

- c. Paul has not been shy about conduct for the Christian in this letter.
    - (1) He started by telling us what the goal of teaching was, how to deal with false teaching.
    - (2) We have learned how to pray, and for whom to pray, not to mention the 'why' of prayer.
    - (3) He has taught the male and female roles in the local church; and the qualifications of those in various types of leadership.
    - (4) He is going to extensively teach on the care and lifestyles of widows in the upcoming chapters.
    - (5) And finally he will address those who are slaves and those who are rich.
  - d. All of this is not limited only during church services, but in all parts of our lives.
- B. Paul wants us secondly to begin to appreciate the treasure with which God has entrusted to us (15b).
- 1. “. . . which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”
  - 2. These two phrases are in apposition to each other.
  - 3. The church of the LIVING God, emphasis upon the living God.

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- a. In contradistinction to the temple of Diana, one of the 7 wonders of the world in the city of Ephesus, as well as all the other idols and temples.
  - b. They did not serve wood or stone idols that could not hear nor could not save, but the one, true God, the creator of the heavens and the earth.
4. Much debate about this verse actually.
- a. Pillar and Support is often used by the RCC to argue for a key difference with us. They teach that both Scripture and Tradition are authoritative and it is the RCC alone that can tell us what Tradition is truth.
  - b. Dave Armstrong's *The Catholic Verses* says this regarding our text, "Catholics accept this passage at face value: the Church is the ground or foundation of truth; it is infallible; it is specially protected by the Holy Spirit so that it can be the Guardian and Preserver of apostolic tradition and truth and doctrine."
  - c. In other words, through the lineage of the Popes, apostolic tradition is believed to continue unbroken from Peter to this day. Therefore, there are times when the RCC speaks, even today, outside of Scripture and it is considered to be infallible and utterly authoritative.
5. However, this passage is not making that statement at all.
- a. Rather, it is using two common architectural images to describe the church as holding high and defending God's truth as truth. Not defining truth in itself.
  - b. Note also that this context has the local church in focus rather than the church universal.
  - c. This also fits well with the context of 1 Timothy, where he has just rebuked those who are false teachers and is preparing to deal with more false teaching in just a few sentences.
6. The bible never says that the Church produces truth; rather the opposite is true. The truth of the gospel is proclaimed, people hear the truth, believe, and become part of the Church.

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7. Along with this we must remember that the Ephesians knew what he was referring to. Paul wrote prior to this letter these words, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 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 2:19-22 NAS)
  8. So the point here is not that the Church produces truth, but that we have been given the task of upholding the truth and defending/supporting the truth to a world without truth.
    - a. This is a treasure beyond value.
    - b. And it is something to be jealously protected.
  9. But what is the truth? What must be protected and held high?, verse 16 gives us it in a beautiful nutshell.
- C. Paul, finally, wants us to remember the utter centrality of Jesus Christ in all that we do (16).
1. The truth that the Church is to uphold and defend is this common confession. Common because it is the one message that cannot be discarded and still be Christian.
    - a. We may debate other issues but there is no debate on the core issues.
    - b. This calls to mind the confession of Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" and Jesus' response, ". . . On this rock (i.e. foundation) I will build my Church.
  2. And the reason we must confess/agree that this is the central message of the truth is that it is the means of true godliness.
    - a. "Mystery" is always something hidden until it is revealed in the New Testament.
    - b. What is the mystery, how we are truly able to be godly.
      - (1) Godliness is a broad term that means religion and personal holiness.

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- (2) And for many people, perhaps some of you, the task of godliness is one that is wearisome and burdensome.
  - (3) But Paul gives us the source of true godliness in vs 16, and it is Jesus Christ Himself. Christ Jesus revealed and glorified.
  - (4) The false teachers in Ephesus were emphasizing a false form of holiness, but it was only the deadly teaching of moralism.
  - (5) For the Christian, their godliness begins and ends with Jesus. He is their righteousness, He gives them the Holy Spirit that battles their sin, He strengthens their hearts to remain in the battle.
3. This appears to be a very early Christian hymn, one that the Church was familiar with. Six lines and six truths about Jesus that the Church is to ever believe and proclaim.
  4. He who was revealed in the flesh.
    - a. It was Jesus who existed in the very form of God, equal to God and yet did not hold jealously onto it.
    - b. As Paul writes in Philippians 2, Jesus emptied himself and took on flesh.
    - c. He did not merely look like a man, but became human. The Creator came and lived among His creatures.
    - d. Therefore all that he did on earth was as a man. Whether it was acts of kindness or of power; whether it was the kiss of Judas who betrayed him, or the tears he shed at the death of Lazarus, it was all as a human.
    - e. And as the perfect man, without sin, he took our place and died as our sin bearer.
  5. Was vindicated in the Spirit.
    - a. When Jesus came to this earth, He did not come as a mighty King, revealing the splendor of God. He took the lowly form of a servant.

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- b. Therefore the ministry of the Holy Spirit was to declare Jesus to be the Righteous One sent by God.
  - c. When Jesus identified Himself with us and submitted to the rite of baptism, the Spirit justified/vindicated Him by descending on Him as a dove.
  - d. When He suffered the shame and horror of the cross and bore our sin, and was numbered with the transgressors, the Holy Spirit declared Jesus to be the Son of God by raising Him from the dead (Rom. 1:4).
  - e. If Jesus had been a sinner, then He would have had to die for His own sins, and God would not have raised Him from the dead for even the death would have been stained by the presence of sin.
  - f. But the fact that God did raise Jesus from the dead proved that He is the Righteous One sent of God.
6. Beheld by angels.
- a. One interesting thing we find in the gospels is the consistent presence of the angels surrounding events in Jesus' life.
  - b. Angels proclaimed and sang at His birth in Luke 2.
  - c. After He had been tempted and endured the temptations of Satan in the wilderness it was angels who ministered to Him (Mark 1:12-13).
  - d. It was the angels who came to Jesus in the Garden just prior to His crucifixion and ministered to Him (Matthew 28:1-7).
  - e. And after His resurrection they witnessed His ascension back into heaven in Acts 1:9-11.
  - f. Along with this, we must understand also that even demons are angels—who had rebelled. The bible speaks of Jesus speaking and proclaiming His victory to them as well (cf 1 Peter 3:19).
7. Proclaimed among the nations.
- a. After the resurrection, the Lord Jesus made it plain to the disciples that the message of salvation was not just for the Jews, but for all nations: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,



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- baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).
- b. This began in Acts 2 where in vs 5 that there were Jews in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost who were from every nation under heaven. And it was there that Peter proclaimed Jesus as the only way of salvation and forgiveness of sins.
  - c. Beloved, there is only one message for every people everywhere, and it is that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
8. Believed on in the world.
- a. When we faithfully proclaim Jesus Christ there will always be those who believe on Him.
  - b. And that is the great task of every Christian, to make Jesus Christ known and call people of every color and race to believe in Him alone for their salvation.
  - c. This is the only means that God has ordained for every person around the world to receive the gift of eternal life: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
  - d. Peter said is as plainly as it can be said, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." (Act 4:12)
  - e. Whatever it is that you are trusting in, if it is not Jesus alone, then there is no hope for you. You are rejecting God’s only way of salvation and forgiveness.
9. Taken up in glory.
- a. This refers to the bodily ascension of the risen Lord Jesus.
  - b. Peter tells us that Jesus “is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.” (1 Peter 3:22)

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- c. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul tells us, “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. (1Co 15:25-27)
- d. So now He is seated at the right hand of the Father, with all authority in heaven and earth. As the angels in Acts 1 promised, one day He will return to earth in the same manner as He ascended: visibly, bodily, in power and glory.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. A lot of theology packed into these few verses.
- B. Why is the church important?
  1. Because God has left it here to reveal His Son to the world, even as Jesus revealed God when He was on this earth.
  2. As the household of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth, we are the current expression of Jesus Christ in the world until He comes.
  3. To do it, each one of us must commit ourselves to a living relationship with the living God through His Son.
  4. We must commit ourselves to one another as members of God’s household.
  5. We must commit ourselves to know, believe, and defend the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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## Small Group Questions

- How do you consider your conduct as part of God’s household? Give examples of various areas of life where this needs to occur.
- How does Jesus incarnate or being vindicated by the Spirit, or preached and believed among the nations, etc move you to godliness?