

THE CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSION

1 Timothy 3:14-16

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September 10, 2017

Note: The following are the pastor's notes used in preaching this message. This is not a complete, word-for-word transcription of what was preached. These notes serve as a companion to the complete message, which is available by listening to the audio version. Bible quotes are primarily from ESV.

INTRODUCTION

Our purpose in this morning's message is the same as Paul's purpose for writing this letter, which is that we may: 1) know how to behave/live life, as we; 2) recall to whom we belong, based on; 3) what we believe about Jesus Christ.

I. "I'M WRITING SO YOU KNOW HOW THE CHURCH BEHAVES" OR, THE OCCASION OF THE LETTER (1 Timothy 3:14)

As Paul writes 1 Timothy, this church was being attacked by false teachers, and Paul wanted Timothy to stand up to them by preaching the Christ-centered Word (1 Timothy 1). In 1 Timothy 2, Paul wants Timothy to set the worship service in order generally, and to establish men's and women's roles within it specifically. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul wants Timothy to set the church leadership in order with elders and deacons. All of this time, all of this relationship, all of this ministry, could be boiled down for Paul to this text, to this passage.

II. "I'M WRITING SO YOU KNOW TO WHOM THE CHURCH BELONGS" OR, THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH (1 Timothy 3:15)

A. God's family

The word *household* means either *house*—structure—or *household*—the family within the structure. Since the same Greek word *oikos* was used to refer to family in the preceding context in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12, it seems reasonable that the same sense of family should be used here. But notice that the church is not just a family, it is God's family. He is the owner. He is the head of the home. Why? Acts 20:28 tells us. The cross purchased all those for whom Christ died. It is therefore not a human institution; it is a divine institution.

B. God's assembly

The word for church in the Greek is *ekklesia*, which means *called out ones*, or *assembly*. And when the saints assemble to preach the Christ-centered Word, to pray to God, and to appoint godly leaders and servants, that is the church of the living God. It seems that the title "Living God" was used in the Old Testament when God's people were under significant duress (e.g., 1 Samuel 17:26, Psalm 42:2; Psalm 84:2). Our faith is not a dead faith, because our God is not a dead God. Notice what the assembly is like:

1. A pillar of the truth

It could be said that Ephesus was a city filled with pillars. The main street downtown was double-colonnaded, with one portion of the street in the sun, and one portion of the street with shade under the columned covered section. Too, the Temple of Diana—the goddess of the Ephesians whose Temple was one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World. 127 pillars, each almost 60 feet tall, and they weren't just there to sit on top of the foundation, they were there to beautify the structure, and to uphold the roof. In the same way, the church is called to hold the truth aloft, so that it is seen by the world. The pillars themselves, however, would rest on the support or foundation.

2. A support of the truth

The word here is unusual, and signifies a foundation that stabilizes the building. The church is responsible to hold to the truth against any and all false teachers. Taken together, the church is to hold the truth firm in the defense of the gospel, and it is to hold the truth high in the proclamation of the gospel.

III. “I’M WRITING SO YOU KNOW WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES” OR, THE CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH (1 Timothy 3:16)

1 Timothy 3:16 is tightly arranged with layers of organization not immediately apparent on the surface. Let me highlight some organizational elements that show some of its aesthetic depth and beauty. Why does Paul choose to summarize the gospel we’re to believe in song-form? So we won’t forget it. Music does that. Good poetry does that. It helps us remember what otherwise we forget.

A. First stanza: contrast-complement #1

This first stanza’s contrast-complement is between flesh and spirit.

1. Revealed in the flesh

The word *revealed* does not mean *bring into existence*, or *create*, but *to make visible*. The Son of God, existing forever before coming into the world, was born as a baby at Christmas. This is the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The invisible God made visible. The Son of God born in the flesh. The incarnation is indeed the beginning of this great mystery of the gospel is the incarnation of Jesus Christ as a baby. No incarnation—no gospel.

2. Vindicated by the Spirit

The word vindicated could be translated *justified*. How was Jesus vindicated or justified by the Spirit? This basically means that all of the claims that Jesus made about Himself were authenticated—or justified—by the Spirit (Romans 1:4, 8:11). The Spirit authenticated who Jesus said He was by giving Him miracle-working power, especially in raising Him from the dead.

B. Second stanza: contrast-complement #2

1. Seen by angels (Luke 2:14; Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43; Matthew 28:2; Luke 24:4-7; Acts 1:10-11)

Indeed, at every stage of His life, Jesus was seen by, helped by, and proclaimed by the angelic hosts!

2. Proclaimed among the nations

This is the Great Commission, commanded by Christ Himself in Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 24:44-47, Acts 1:8, etc. Jesus Himself goes before us to ensure the success of the proclamation of Himself among the nations. What a privilege to join Him on His mission to reach the nations with the good news that Jesus saves!

C. Third stanza: contrast-complement #3

1. Believed on in the world

- a. The gospel did indeed progress ahead according to Jesus’s mission in Acts 1:8. In Jerusalem first, thousands were saved immediately after Jesus ascended.
- b. In Judea next and on to Samaria next (Acts 8:4-8)
- c. To the nations next (Acts 8:26-40; 10)
- d. Ultimately the conversion of the nations throughout the Roman Empire followed (Acts 13-28).

2. Taken up in glory

This refers, of course, to the ascension of Jesus, described in Acts 1:10-11, where it says that, with the disciples watching, Jesus was taken from earth up to heaven on a cloud, and vanished from their sight. And now that He’s in heaven, as Hebrews 1:3 states, waiting to return to take us home.

CONCLUSION

Friends, in light of the Savior in whom you believe and the church to which you belong, *make this profession your passion in all of life*. The gospel we confess must be defended against false teaching on the one hand, and held up for all to see on the other. The incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended Savior will be proclaimed among all the nations—He will be believed on throughout the entire world. The church Christ is building is unstoppable, His gospel will make progress, and His mission will not fail. Jesus Christ Himself will do it. Join Him in it, for it is at the heart of what it means to live life in God’s family.