

1 Timothy Chapter 3 (vv.14-16)

These verses form the *centre* and *key* to the epistle and explain Paul's reasons for writing. *Hamilton Smith* succinctly states, "The Apostle writes to charge believers to live the practical life of piety consistent with the house of God." As Timothy is charged to 'guard' (protect) the precious deposit of truth which was being assailed by false teaching, he is reminded that the local church is the 'pillar and ground of the truth', the *essence* of which is the proclamation of the person and work of Christ (v.16). The receiving of such truth tends to *godliness*, rather than corruption (1.19-20). Paul is now placing responsibility upon the entire company (not just its spiritual leadership) to *defend* and *display* sound doctrine by godly living.

Behaviour in the House of God [v.15]

v.14: 'These things' Paul 'is writing' (*present* tense) refer to the content of the whole letter. It was Paul's hope he would be able to visit Timothy in Ephesus 'shortly', or better 'without delay' (speedily). Though the circumstances may have looked unfavourable, he was hoping to arrive sooner than expected.

v.15: If, however, Paul was detained ('tarry long'), this letter would further instruct Timothy and the saints how to behave in the sphere of the local assembly. Great as the apostle was, there were clearly several *unknowns* in his future movements and plans. He could only order his steps in the light of the Lord's guidance and in glad subjection to His will (cf. Acts 16.9-10). Though **Paul** might be 'detained', the promises of **God** are never 'delayed' (2 Peter 3.9). 'Mayest know' translates the verb *oida*, not something learned by *experience* or *practice*, but an *intuitive*, inward perception (understanding) received by divine revelation. 'How *thou* oughtest to behave thyself' is not suggesting Timothy is misbehaving! The more literal translation is, "how *it* is necessary to behave" – hence the conduct of *any* person forming part of the local church is in view. 'Behave' signifies conduct, or manner of life. There is a *kind* of behaviour that befits association with the 'house of God' – this is **godliness**, and Christ is the supreme example.

The word 'house' (*oikos*) can either mean the *building* itself or a *household* (i.e. the people that occupy the building). Since *oikos* has already been used three times in this chapter to signify 'household' (vv.4, 5, 12), the thought is likely the same here. Each assembly is a *household* belonging to God. The figure '**house** of God' is applied to both the *dispensational* (1 Peter 2.5; Hebrews 3.6) and *local* church (1 Timothy 3.15). It describes the place where God *dwells*; the place where His *presence* is known and experienced – an *entity* (household) alive with the presence of God. In the OT, the house of God referred to a *place* (Bethel), then a *building* (tabernacle and temple). In the NT, the house of God is a *people*, a 'spiritual edifice comprised of living stones' (1 Peter 2.5). In the OT, God's people went *into* the house. In the NT, God's people *are* the house! There are *three* other figures of the local church that relate to **God**: God's *husbandry*; God's *building* (1 Corinthians 3.9) and the *temple* of God (1 Corinthians 3.16).

The 'household of God' is the 'church' (called-out and gathered company) of the '**living** God' in contrast to the lifeless idol gods enshrined in the many pagan temples of Ephesus. This *living* God dwells in the midst of His people, *sees* their every concern and *hears* their every cry. The same adjective is used of the *preservation*, *protection* (4.10) and *provision* (6.17) of this saviour God. However, we do well to remember "if the holiness that becomes His house is not maintained, God may make manifest that He is the living God in solemn governmental dealings."

The local church is also the '**pillar**' (*stylos*) and '**ground**' (*hedraioma*) of the truth. The *pillar* was a familiar sight to the inhabitants of Ephesus, the temple of Diana being supported by 127 pillars, each one being the gift of a king. Whilst a pillar was a column supporting the weight of a building, they were also used to post public notices. Jacob reared a pillar to testify (witness) to God's unfailing faithfulness and mercy (Genesis 31.52-53). The leading thought of the pillar is therefore **display**. Every believer *should* be like a pillar with truth written large on their persons. Note. There was often a small lockable safe in the base of a pillar to put important documents and store them for future generations (2 Timothy 2.2). The word 'ground' refers to a 'support' or 'bulwark' akin to a physical structure (like a sea wall) that protects from external forces or pressure. So, the local church **defends** the truth in the face of all opposition – the storms of heresy and unbelief. The local church therefore has a collective responsibility in relation to the truth.

The Mystery of Godliness [v.16]

v.16: This verse contains a summary statement of the truth the church defends and displays. "When we look at the top of the pillar to find out what it is that is held up by the local assembly, we find, not a series of rules and dogmas, but six sublime statements about Christ" (Sweetnam).

The six statements almost defy analysis. Some see the verse as one six-line hymn (KJV), three sets of two lines (NIV) or two sets of three lines (GNB). Some even see an inverted chiasm! If taken as *three* sets of *two* lines then there are obvious contrasting couplets: *flesh* and *Spirit*, *angels* and *men* (Gentiles), *earth* (world) and *heaven* (glory). It is perhaps best to view them as *two* sets of *three* lines. “The *first* stanza then sings of the **historical** Christ’s earthly ministry, concluding with a word of triumph and glorification. Similarly, the *second* stanza sings of the **exalted** Christ’s ongoing ministry in heaven through his church, concluding again with the theme of glorification” (Fee).

‘Without controversy’ is literally, ‘to say the same thing as’. These statements are *incontestable*, most certain and beyond question. Every believer in the assembly affirms these truths in relation to the person of Christ. *What think you of Christ? is the test, To try both your state and your scheme; You cannot be right in the rest, Unless you think rightly of him.* ‘Great is the mystery (revelation) of godliness’ (cf. 3.9), i.e. the revealed truth of the NT (and indeed the gospel) both **manifests** (in Christ) and **produces** (in His people) **godliness** – the NT equivalent of ‘the fear of the Lord’ comprising an inner attitude of heart that gives God His proper place in one’s life. Christ is the great *example* (pattern) of godliness, and the “secret (or power) by which all real godliness is produced” (JN Darby), cf. Galatians 2.20; Titus 1.1. The slogan of the city of Ephesus was ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians’ (Acts 19.28), but she was merely a lump of stone that allegedly fell from the sky. The revelation of true godliness came from heaven in the person of Christ – that was far greater!

- **God** was **manifest** in the flesh. Many modern translations have “who was manifest”, but the AV reading “God” has strong textual support and was the reading known to many of the church fathers. God was ‘manifested’ (aorist) in ‘flesh’ describing the period Christ was visibly present on earth as a Man (Hebrews 9.26; 1 Peter 1.20). The *passive voice* implies the pre-existence of the person who came to reveal God. What glorious truth is this! The uniting of fulness of *deity* with perfect (sinless) *humanity* in one glorious person. Theologians often use the term ‘hypostatic union’ to describe two separate and distinct (not merged) natures united in His one person.
- **Justified** in the *Spirit*. He was ‘vindicated’ or ‘proved morally righteous’ by the Spirit of God (cf. 4.1) when He raised Him from the dead (1 Peter 3.18). Men rejected and crucified Christ as a criminal, but by the resurrection, God reversed the verdict of men. There is a sense in which the Lord Jesus was vindicated by the Spirit of God at His *baptism* (Matthew 3.16), *resurrection* (Romans 1.4) and *ascension* (John 16.7, 10), and, indeed, throughout His life (Matthew 12.28; Luke 4.18).
- **Seen** of *angels*. This is probably not a reference to angelic ministry in relation to the Lord Jesus on earth. The word translated ‘seen’ means ‘to show oneself’. Christ presented Himself to the angelic hosts upon His triumphant ascension to the throne of God. *1 Peter 3.22: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.* “Christ twice passed the angels by. He sank far below them in His humiliation; He rose far above them in His exaltation.”
- **Preached** unto the *Gentiles*. Christ is presently ‘heralded’ (*kerusso*) to the Gentiles. The word describes the imperial herald as a spokesman of the emperor. He was to speak with dignity, clarity and authority. This is not the preaching of a system of religion within the national limits of Israel, but a worldwide proclamation of a Person.
- **Believed** on in (not ‘by’) the *world*. The preaching of the gospel has resulted in the exercise of faith on the part of some. *2 Thessalonians 1.10: Our testimony among you was believed...*
- **Received** up into *glory*. The word ‘received’ is used of the ascension in Mark 16.19 and Acts 1.2, 11. Received ‘in’ (*en*) not ‘into’ glory describes the accompanying circumstances of His ascension – it was attended by glory (a possible reference to the Shekinah, Acts 1.9), like that of a victorious Roman general.

If the *first* statement of the hymn has produced the greatest wonder of **history** – *God down here in the place of man* – then this *final* statement is the greatest wonder of **heaven** – *Man up there in the place of God!*