

NOTES FROM SAM GORDON'S SERMON- Sunday 14th July 2024 am

TITLE: "Cameos of the church and Christ" TEXT: 1 Timothy 3 v 14-16

SERIES: "Guarding the deposit" Pt 7 Scripture references from the ESV

1 Timothy 3: 14-16 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. ¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

The series from 1 Timothy, entitled Guarding the deposit, asks two all-important questions:

- What are the qualities of a good church?
- What are the marks of a godly congregation?

Put another way, when the living Lord, the head of the church, looks down on the church here, does he smile at what he sees or does he frown?

We have already heard about Paul's warning regarding false teachers, and Paul's own testimony of what he once was and what he now is because of the extravagance of God's outrageous grace. The importance of corporate prayer in the life of the local church has been highlighted, and the roles of men and women in the home and in the church have been clarified. Now in chapter 3, Paul has been laying the ground rules for the local church, outlining the specific qualifications for those in leadership, so that elders and deacons can be in no doubt as to what is expected of them in terms of Christian character. A church stands or falls by the spiritual quality of its leaders, and we need to look to what the word of God says, rather than being led by our culture. We will come back to this later in the series.

The verses above give us three main themes.

1. **The sentiments of the apostle (vv14-15a)** Paul is clearly looking forward to seeing Timothy again and renewing fellowship with him. That is the joy of Christian

friendship – such gospel fellowship has a rich depth to it. Timothy was more than just a son in the faith to Paul. Life can be lonely when times are tough, as they often were for Paul, and he looked forward to the possibility of seeing Timothy. God is good and he knew that they needed each other. The take home lesson is that

People really do matter!

2. The significance of the church (v15). Paul's thoughts on the church here are both beautiful and breathtaking. He has a reason for spelling out how church should be done, and he tells us what it is in this key verse. When it comes to church, there is a proper way to do things. This is a crucial verse in terms of our understanding of what church is, and it also lifts the curtain on how God sees his people. There is a vital connection because:

How a church behaves reveals the reality of its faith.

- What we are on Monday in the workplace or at home is coloured by what we do and where we go on a Sunday.

People matter, and so does church!

Christians who have become part of God's household, and are therefore living under his roof, should live by his house rules. The household of God does not refer to a building. Paul is talking about the relationship of the members of the household to one another and to the master of the house.

The church is a family - an international community of believers who are just ordinary people who know the joy of sins forgiven and being right with God.

As brothers and sisters who have the same Father, we are an integral part of an eternal tightly knit family.

Paul's use of the phrase '**the church of the living God**' reminds us of the striking uniqueness of the church as a company of people called out from the world to be distinct in holiness and purpose. It reminds us that God is not dead! He is very much alive, so the church is a living entity and a vibrant organism not a dead organisation.

The life of God is in the church, and flows through her veins.

God lives in us and we live in him.

- It is not your church or the pastor's church – it is God's church and his alone
That is what makes it eternal and exclusive. The church is what was purchased with the blood of Christ at Calvary.

- Take a moment to consider how amazing it is that we are part and parcel of it! Paul applies the word **pillar** to the church. This was an architectural feature that had great significance in Ephesus. The temple of Diana in the city, one of the seven wonders of the world, had 127 marble pillars, some of which were studded with jewels and overlaid with gold. A pillar can be a beautiful thing as well as a support, and the church's duty is to hold up the truth in such a way that all men may see it. The **buttress** is the foundation of the building. It keeps it standing intact. In a world where truth is relative, the church holds it up for all to see, and supports truth against all who would seek to destroy it.

As the church we are:

- Family or **household**, and we are to love our brothers and sisters who share the same heredity.
- **The church of the living God**, and we come together as multiple temples of that living God, alive in dynamic, quickened community.
- **The pillar and buttress of the truth**, with the truth of God's word being the bedrock, mortar and bricks of our lives

A church does not grow by addition but by nutrition (Warren Wiersbe). God's people need to be fed with the pure word of God – with truth unchanged and unchanging. In a world of fluctuating values, this is fundamental to our spiritual growth and godliness, and that is where church makes a massive difference. Paul has told us what church is and has given us explicit guidance on how we are to conduct ourselves. How do we best uphold the truth?

- a) By believing in it - **I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets (Acts 24:14)**
- b) By memorising it - **I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you (Ps 119:11)**

- c) By meditating on it - This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it (Joshua 1:8)
- d) By studying it - Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15)
- e) By obeying it - Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)
- f) By living it - so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. (Titus 2:10)
- g) By defending it- knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel (Phil 1:16)
- h) By proclaiming it - Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:19-20)

The supreme mission of the church of Jesus Christ is to uphold the precious legacy of God's word. What a wonderful privilege it is to support the truth given to us by our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

3. The supremacy of Christ (v16). Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great (NIV). With this statement, Paul affirms the indisputable majesty of God, and goes on to turn our thoughts to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the key to godly conduct. He is the one who, by the Spirit, makes living a good life possible.

Using this ancient hymn, Paul highlights the scope of our Lord's ministry. It tells us that Christ was both fully human and fully divine at one and the same time. It starts with the incarnation and finishes with the ascension. It is a song in three couplets that is designed to trigger spontaneous praise in the congregation.

- a) Lines 1&2 describe how Christ was revealed, referring to the moment when God became man, leaving the splendour of heaven for a sin-blighted world. This was

the initial revelation of Christ. **For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily** (Col 2:9).

b) Lines 3&4 highlight the witnesses of Christ, contrasting the angels and earthly nations. One is supernatural and the other natural. The angels saw everything! They both foretold and witnessed his birth. They were present immediately after his 40 days of temptation in the wilderness, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. They witnessed the resurrection, sat by the empty tomb and comforted the disheartened disciples as the Lord ascended to heaven. Right now, in heaven, the Lord is adored by vast angelic hosts who sing his praise. When Jesus returns in power and glory, he will be accompanied by angels.

The angels really did and do see everything!

Jesus was preached among the nations – the whole realm of intelligent creation saw him. There was cosmic witness to Christ on earth and in heaven, and the mandate to tell the world about Jesus has never been rescinded.

The gospel is what men need to hear and nations need to know.

c) The final lines concern the reception of Christ, looking at both earth and heaven. Throughout the ages, men and women of every culture have believed on his name and have found in him a shelter from the storm and a refuge in times of trouble. In that final day, there will be so many people in heaven that we will not be able to count them! They will have come from every corner of the universe, all trusting Jesus and having believed on his peerless name.

On his glorious ascension, he was given a stirring heavenly reception as the gates opened wide and the King marched in, while the heavenly host burst out in rapturous praise and worship. What a shout must have gone out - Jesus is home again, where he belongs! The angels were all there to meet him!

The magnificent Christ of this old hymn makes it possible for you to be person he wants you to be.

- If it were not for him, we would not be the church, and nor would we be able to do church in the way that Christ wants it to be done.

That says something about grace, but even more about the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the wonderful theme of this letter to Timothy. We can merge the two together and declare:

Grace is the heart of the gospel, grace is the heart of God

Every tide ebbs except the tide of grace.