

God's Household, Part 9: "The Mystery of Godliness"

1 Timothy 3:14-16

Rev. Andrew Jun

[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

Praise the Lord! Today, we mark the halfway point of our series in 1 Timothy, called "God's Household," with the central passage of the entire book.

I have been blessed to hear that the last few sermons from 1 Timothy have led to good discussions about eldership, deaconship, and the role of men and women in the home and church. These are difficult- even controversial- subjects and what we really need to do is search and study the Scriptures. If we believe that the Bible is truly God's Word, then we also believe it is the authoritative voice in our lives.

The church in Berea modeled the spirit that we also want to imitate. Acts 17:11 says, *...they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*

Sometimes the Bible isn't easy to understand or accept- it's from God so we shouldn't expect it to be easy to swallow! But it is absolutely ok to wrestle with it personally and respectfully not agree with each other when we discuss it.

Even further, Scripture isn't just for us to study and talk about- it changes our hearts and affects our behavior! It makes us more "godly" in our actions, motives, and interactions with others! In that way it is PUBLIC- it is for others to see!

Scripture Reading

This is Paul's heart as he writes this central part of his letter. It's pretty much a "purpose statement" for his writing to them! So let's go ahead and read 1 Timothy 3:14-16...

1 Timothy 3:14-16 (ESV): *14 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.*

Proposition

Paul's main message in this passage of Scripture can be stated like this...

The "one thing" from 1 Timothy 3:14-16:

***Live out our identity as the church
in light of the mystery of the Gospel!***

Organizational Statement

There are three key words or concepts that are connected together in this passage of Scripture: *Paul said for the church to live out...*

1. Godliness (14-15a) - *...which is because of who they are in their...*
2. Identity (15b) - *...that God gives them, which is possible only because of the...*
3. Mystery (16) - *...of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!*

Prayer

Let's pause and ask the Lord for more of his grace during this proclamation of his Word.

Heavenly Father, we praise you because you are the author and architect of this great mystery of the Gospel! Thank you for graciously revealing it to us and may you further do transforming work through your Word and Spirit in us today. Help us to listen and take to heart what you have for us today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

→ **Transition:** Amen! Here's the first key word for us today...

Sermon Outline

I. Key Word #1: Godliness (14-15a)

A. Paul wanted the Ephesian church to know how to live as God's household in vv. 14-15a.

1 Timothy 3:14-15a (ESV): *14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15a if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God...*

1. God has expectations for how his people were to live their lives.
 - a) This was why Paul wrote here- he paused here and shared personal thoughts to Timothy and also to the Ephesian church (this would be a public letter that would be read aloud to the churches as they gathered). He said that he "hoped to come soon" to visit Timothy in the city of Ephesus but wasn't sure when the door would be open to visit them. So he wrote this letter in the meantime because he was eager to address the important issues that had arisen. Here's a review of what he covered in chapters 1-3...
 - b) Remember that Paul wrote in the very beginning of his letter that he was appointed an apostle by Christ Jesus himself (1:1). He was exerting his apostolic authority here to give instructions to the church. He had to deal with the issue of false teachers who had emerged within the church, teaching different doctrines and controversial topics like myths and genealogies (1:3-7). Paul spoke up to defend the Law, how it reveals the holiness of God and exposes the sinfulness of human hearts (1:8-11). But Paul pointed to Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, among whom he was the foremost (1:12-17). This was the charge that Paul entrusted to Timothy, which was a serious spiritual warfare that some had already been made shipwrecked (1:18-20).
 - c) Then Paul proceeded to address issues in God's household: The church should engage in this spiritual warfare in prayer, fighting for hearts that please God and engage in his mission (2:1-7). He specifically exhorted men to not fight each other but to be devoted to prayer ministry; he specifically exhorted women to not be consumed with good looks but with good works (2:8-15). Paul explained the character qualifications for elders (3:1-7) and deacons (3:8-13), people who would be fit to lead in and model

for the church- as Paul put it here- “how one ought to behave in the household of God.”

- d) What would be these points of “godliness” be from this review of 1 Timothy 1-3 so far? Generally, it would primarily be love for God and others that comes out of a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith (1:5). It would be restraining ourselves from indulging our sinful natures in lawlessness, profaneness, dishonoring of parents, sexual immorality, lying, and other ways contrary to sound doctrine (1:8-10). It would also include an intimate and far-reaching prayer ministry (2:1). It would mean abstaining from fighting (2:8) and learning submissiveness (2:11). It would be developing Christ-like, dignified character that is exercised personally in the home and publicly in the church (3:4-5, 12). *God has expectations for how his people were to live their lives.*

2. True godliness is not mere behavior modification achieved by human effort.

- a) Now, if you were to just look at this exhaustive list that I just mentioned out of context and without the whole teaching of Paul, this would be very MISLEADING. Paul never wrote imperatives (in other words, “Just do so-and-so!”) without preaching the Gospel before that imperative. You see, the Gospel is the power and motivation to actually DO anything.
- b) The word “behave” in the English Standard Version of v. 15 can be mistaken as just outward, external actions. The word might be more properly understood as “conduct,” which is also outward, external actions but is linked with a reason or higher purpose behind it. The truth is we can change our behavior temporarily, but we can’t change who we are in our core beings, our hearts of hearts.
- c) How can we truly love people who hate us? How can we genuinely forgive offenses that have traumatized us so deeply? How can we be generous when we ourselves are so limited in our time, money, or energy? How do we serve others with a good attitude when we are taken advantage of or taken for granted? At the heart of it, we cannot be godly like this on our own because we are by very nature selfish: self-serving, self-preserving, self-promoting, and every other “self”-dash-blank that you can think of!
- d) Godliness is NOT merely behavior modification, but a change of heart (which only God does by his grace) that leads to the choice we make (which only God does by his grace) that leads to godly conduct/behavior (which only God does by his grace). So we can experience true godliness if we put ourselves into this process!
- e) So we have an opportunity at this moment, my friends. First, don’t fake it before God! Don’t think that your external behavior is enough for God, if in truth your hearts are far away from him. Don’t think your sneaking past God because you’re just doing the right religious activities and saying the right words. You might be able to trick people, but God sees what is really in your heart! Second, don’t fake it before others! As you’re honest before God regarding your inability to change yourself, then also be honest and open with others. I keep seeing the thumbnail for this K-drama series, “It’s ok to not be ok.” What the church needs isn’t more people pretending they’re good; we need people admitting that they’re not ok. Authenticity and transparency should be our “normal.”
- f) Third, don’t THINK you’re faking it if you fail! What I mean by this is that some of us genuinely want to pursue and please God and yet struggle when you fail. When you try but fall short, you slip into destructive self-doubt: questioning if you’re really saved and condemning yourself for failing. “Am I faking it and trying to trick myself into thinking this is real?” But God’s Word, penned through the apostle Paul here, provides the hope and possibility that we can have as we wrestle to attain true godliness. *True godliness is not mere behavior modification achieved by our effort.*

→ **Transition:** So we've looked at the first key word, "godliness." God has expectations for how the church should live their lives- not behavior modification achieved by human effort. But we're only one step in this three-step process. This brings us to...

Sermon Outline (continued)

II. Key Word #2: Identity (15b)

A. Paul wanted the Ephesian church to know their identity as the church in v. 15b.

1 Timothy 3:15b (ESV): *...15b in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*

1. Our identity is who we are because of Christ and thus influences how we live.
 - a) In other words, I would say that our identity both describes who we are and how we live as well as prescribes who we are and how we live. Think about the first metaphor that Paul used for the church in v. 15: "God's household." We are God's family. He is the Heavenly Father. Those who believe in him are God's spiritual sons and daughters.

John 1:12-13 (ESV): 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
 - b) Those who believe in Jesus experience new spiritual birth by God's will and are now God's children! When our children were newborn babies, I felt this indescribable affection for them. I would hold them in my arms and stare at them, just having thoughts like, "I would gladly sacrifice my life if I had to for my child"; "No matter what, I will always love him/her"; "I want this child to attempt anything and know that I will catch them if they fall." Now, you can confirm with my children that I'm infinitely far away from being a perfect father, but these thoughts reflect the heart of our Heavenly Father! He says the same thing to his children (and backs it up because he's perfect): "I have already sacrificed my life for you, I will give you the best"; "No matter what kind of mess you find yourself in, I will always love you"; "I want you to keep attempting to live for me because I will catch you every time you fall."
 - c) The apostle Paul described this (in Romans 8:15) as "adoption": we were once enslaved to sin and estranged from God; but by his grace and the work of the Spirit in us, we are transformed into his children, heirs to his kingdom. This is the amazing "theology of adoption." Now in the never stopping, sacrificial love of our Father, we WANT to please him. We love our dad! In our confidence and security in our Father, we CAN take risks in those wobbly steps, falling often, and getting back up.
 - d) Now think about the second metaphor that Paul used for the church in v. 15: "the church of the living God." The Biblical word means "assembly," which is the Old Testament idea of God's reality and presence in the covenant community of God's people.
 - e) For example, in Joshua 3, the people of Israel gathered at the Jordan River, at the very brink of finally entering the Promised Land that their parents had left Egypt to enter. Joshua spoke these words to them: "Here is how you will know that the living God is among you" (Joshua 3:10). And the priests carried the ark of the covenant to the banks of the river and the water stopped upstream so that they could carry the ark on dry ground across the river. And all the people followed behind, entering the Promised Land. This was a time when God's people experienced God's reality and presence among them.

- f) How do we experience God's reality and presence among us today? On this side of the cross, in this chapter in God's story of salvation, we have the Holy Spirit himself to fill and empower every single disciple of Christ, in everyday situations and moments.
- g) Don't let the significance of this get past you: This means we experience the reality and presence among us in EVERYTHING we do as believers. Can you believe that the living God is with you as you spend your devotions in the Word and prayer (even as you're falling asleep)? Can you believe that the living God is with you at home when you rise and go to sleep? Can you believe that the living God is with you at your workplace (or campus) as you go about your daily tasks? Can you believe that the living God is with us when we gather for Sunday Celebration, even over Zoom? Can you believe that the living God is with us in our LIFE group Bible studies that are sometimes awkward and uncomfortable? Can you believe that the living God is with us in our interactions and conversations- deep or casual- with the people in our lives? He is! *Our identity is who we are because of Christ, thus influences how we live.*
2. Our identity informs God's people and the world of his purpose and design.
- a) Now think about the third metaphor that Paul used for the church in v. 15: "a pillar and buttress of the truth." These are architectural terms, so I asked an architect to explain this a bit. What I gleaned is that both pillars and buttresses are weight-bearing supports for buildings. In Gothic architecture, pillars and buttresses are outside of the main structures, as you can see in these two pictures.
- b) *Show portico-building.jpg*. First, this is the Portico Building in the University of London, with its prominent pillars that stand in the front. *Show notre-dame.jpg*. Second, this is the Notre Dame Cathedral, with its famous "flying buttresses" coming out of its main structure. The thing about pillars and buttresses are that they bear the weight internally for these buildings, but they are also externally visible for all to see (unlike maybe nowadays, in which weight bearing structures are usually kept hidden).
- c) Now let's think about the truth: There are absolute truths that are presented in God's Word that we can bank our entire lives on- truth about God, about his salvation, and about how to live our lives. Think about an owner's manual to a gadget or appliance. *Show iphone.jpg*. This iPhone could just become a very expensive way to hold paper down so it doesn't fly away in the wind. Or it could be a very powerful tool to increase efficiency, access data and the internet, socialize with others, and of course don't forget, make telephone calls! Only if we read the owner's manual can we unlock all the ways it was designed and purposed to do.
- d) The church holds up this truth for God's people internally this way. Truth informs us about God, our identities in Christ, and how we ought to live. Godliness is how God designed and purposed for us to live. For example, think about sex (now I have everyone's attention). I'm going to divulge something to you now that I only share in premarital counseling. The world says sex- outside of the marriage covenant and with as many partners as possible- is the way to joy and fulfillment. But the truth is that sex is supposed to be experienced within the marriage covenant, with one person, for a lifetime. The truth is that sex is not easy, but within the security of marriage, with that one person, over time- sex can be enjoyable and like no other intimacy in the world. There's your sex education lesson for today. When we are "godly" in our sexuality, we experience the way God has designed for us to live.
- e) All this to say, godliness is how God designed for us to live- and this is the best way to live! Going back to being pillars and buttresses of the truth again, pillars and buttresses are not just for internal weight-bearing but also are on display for the public to see. The church is also a public entity that the world sees. Disciples of Jesus are "out there" for people to see. By the way we live our lives, we point people to Christ (or not in many cases). *Our identity informs God's people and the world of his purpose and design.*

→ **Transition:** The second key word was “identity.” The identity for disciples of Jesus Christ is that we are God’s household, the church of the living God, and a pillar and buttress of the truth. We are to live out godliness because that’s who we are- that’s our identity as the church- this is step one and two in this three-step process. Finally, let’s move on to...

Sermon Outline (continued)

III. Key Word #3: Mystery (16)

A. Paul wanted the Ephesian church to soak in the mystery of the Gospel in v. 16.

1 Timothy 3:16 (ESV): *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.*

1. The “mystery” is revealed to us in Christ, the center of God’s salvation story.
 - a) Now this isn’t a “mystery” in today’s sense of the word, like a Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie murder mystery, where there is some situation that needs to be figured out. Rather, this is a “mystery” in the sense that God’s plan to save the world was once unknown and is now revealed and clarified. This “mystery” is presented in this ancient hymn about Jesus that Paul apparently quoted. Perhaps it was something that was used to help people back in the first century to remember these basic truths about Christ.
 - b) There seems to be a chronological order to it: First, Jesus was “manifested in the flesh.” As John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” God who was once unseen became seen; God became man and lived on earth. Second, Jesus was “vindicated by the Spirit”: People rejected him as a fraud and he was crucified-made sin for us; he resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, defeating sin and death and proving himself to be the true King. Third, he was “seen by angels,” the very first witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection to his disciples.
 - c) Fourth, he was “proclaimed among the nations”: It started at Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit fell upon Christ’s disciples and they spoke of the wonders of God in the different tongues of the nations. This was a precursor to the Gentiles- people from the nations- also hearing the Gospel. Fifth, Jesus was “believed on in the world” as his disciples were witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Lastly, Jesus was “taken up in glory” as he ascended into heaven and promised to return to consummate his Kingdom for eternity.
 - d) These aren’t just great lyrics to a song- this a news that transforms lives! The Gospel message is- very importantly- historical: Jesus was placed in the timeline of the world and all of this just described so poetically were events that happened. What makes the movement of Jesus Christ so different of other “religions” of the world is that if he didn’t happen (everything mentioned), then there is no Christianity. But if you take out the founder or most prominent figure of any other religion, that religion still can exist based on its propositions or ideas. The Christian message is “news” that changes everything! *The “mystery” is revealed to us in Christ, the center of God’s salvation story.*
2. The church’s “mystery of godliness” reveals the wisdom of God to the universe.
 - a) Look at this carefully: In verse 16, the wording of the mystery is the “mystery of godliness,” as Paul now connected godly conduct with the mystery of the Gospel. Paul loved to use the concept of “mystery” with the Ephesian church. He wrote that the “mystery” was God’s plan to bring all of creation into unity under Christ (Ephesians

1:9) and to unite people of all nations together as the church in Christ (Ephesians 3:6). Then he wrote this:

Ephesians 3:9-10 (NLT): *9 I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. 10 God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*

- b) Paul said that God had entrusted with him a small role in unfolding this “mystery” to the nations and that as the Holy Spirit birthed churches like the Ephesian church (even with all its drama and problems), God would use the church to display his infinitely-faceted wisdom, not just to people but to the “rulers and authorities of the heavenly places”- to the universe in all its glory.
- c) This “mystery of godliness” can build up the church. As we’re serving together and walking through life together more deeply these days, we face the challenges of conflict, personally clashes, and hurts and betrayals. But the mystery of the Gospel produced us- the household of God, the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth- so that we can respond in godliness- transformed from the inside out- towards each other in these challenges. We CAN truly love people who hate us; we CAN genuinely forgive offenses that have traumatized us so deeply; we CAN be generous when we are so limited in our time, money, or energy; we CAN serve others with a good attitude when we are taken advantage of or taken for granted.
- d) But this “mystery” goes even further because we can also be public in our godliness (especially as a pillar and buttress of the truth!). We CAN build friendships and share the about Jesus to those around us; we CAN initiate ministries of justice and mercy to those in need, at risk, and on the margins of our city. We CAN endeavor to build platforms and bring the Gospel to the unreached- starting something like a “disciple-making movement hub” in Banten.
- e) But even crazier is that we don’t even need people to know what we’re doing to make it meaningful and impactful in God’s perspective! We CAN do the right thing even when no one is looking; we CAN work wholeheartedly, enjoying it and serving Christ for no one else’s approval; we CAN be in personal worship and prayer, enjoying deep intimacy with our Heavenly Father; we CAN fast and intercede for concerns without anyone knowing. The mystery is that we as the church can do this because we know we display the wisdom of God into the universe...and it matters! Especially right now being in COVID-19 we must take this to heart- we are mostly a church “scattered” but we still can impact the universe for the glory of God! *The church’s “mystery of godliness” reveals God’s wisdom to the universe.*

→ **Transition:** The third key word was “mystery.” The mystery of Christ Jesus, leads us to the mystery of who we are as the church, which leads us to the mystery of godliness. Now let’s go to our...

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

A. Here are the next steps we can take in light of the message of 1 Timothy 3:14-16.

1. Pursue the mystery of Christ in a) planned opportunities and b) unplanned opportunities that you face.
 - a) Learn more about who HE is, and who you are in light of HIM. Those “planned opportunities” are when you press into him in your personal worship, Word ministry,

and prayer ministry. They can also include church involvement in LIFE group and Sunday Celebration- we can pursue him together!

- b) Those “unplanned opportunities” are difficult circumstances, personal failures, or relational conflicts that arise in life. These are opportunities to preach the Gospel to yourself: evaluate how you respond and what goes on inside of you, bring it back to Christ, and let the Holy Spirit speak (and listen) and minister to you!
2. Implement “godliness” into your life that is consistent with your identity in light of the mystery of the Gospel.
- a) Remember who you are friends! Remember who we are church! We are the household of God (adopted by your Father who loves you), the church of the living God (where the presence of the Holy Spirit resides, rules, comforts, and convicts), and a pillar and buttress of the truth (revealing the wisdom of God into the universe).
 - b) It’s your choice that you make- pause and reflect on this throughout your day. Put some reminder this week to do this: an alarm on your HP, a quick phone call or message to another person, seeking accountability and feedback from others throughout the day. Church, let us...

***Live out our identity as the church
in light of the mystery of the Gospel!***

→ **Transition:** Let’s return back to the live service over Zoom for some time in prayer and worship- God bless you!

© 2020 Harvest Mission Community Church

This manuscript has been lightly edited and formatted. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template. Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any error to be with the transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker.