

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:14-16 (Txt 15-16)

Conducting Ourselves Properly in God's House

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

There is much instruction for us in the First Timothy: the call to guard the true doctrine, refuting 驳斥 those who oppose Christ and the gospel, [chapter 1], the instruction regarding prayer in worship, the roles of men and women in public worship [chapter 2], and the qualifications for elders and deacons in the church [chapter 3]. There is also the instruction regarding relationships within the church and our godly walk [1 Timothy 4-6].

Now what is the purpose of all this instruction? Is it so important? Why is this instruction so important?

1 Timothy 3:15-16 explains the 'why'. The apostle Paul is saying, "I am writing to you I am hoping to come to you ... in order that you may know how to conduct ["behave"] yourself in the house of God..." By conduct, he means 'godly behavior.' We hear, then,

1. The *motivation* for godly behavior [v.15]

2. The *mystery* of godly behavior [v.16]

1. ***The motivation for godly behavior [v.15]***

What is the motivation for godly behavior? Two reasons are given in verse 15.

First, because this is the house of God, "which is the church of the living God." The church is not a business. It doesn't belong to pastor 'so-and-so.' It's not pastor Timothy's church. He has not been entrusted with a private business, but with God's house. Moreover, God's house is not the building, but His house is believers. Timothy, you are entrusted with believers, not a building! Believers, the people, are God's house, His sanctuary 圣殿, the church of the living God. To the church in Corinth, we read these words, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" [1 Corinthians 3:16]. You, the Bible says, are the place of God's residence, His holy habitation. Therefore, we are to "be holy as He is holy" [1 Peter 1:16]. God doesn't want His place [us, that is!] defiled or made dirty, lest He destroy us [1 Corinthians 3:17]!

See the importance of knowing how we should conduct ourselves in His house?

Believers are God's house and this is because God dwells with them. In the Old Testament, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle [Exodus 40:34-38] and later, the temple [1 Kings 8:11]. Later, when the Word became flesh, He [Jesus] dwelt [literally, *tabernacled*] among us and John says, "we beheld His glory" [John 1:14]. At Pentecost 圣灵降临节, He poured out His Spirit upon the church. Now in Christ, we are God's holy habitation. Ephesians 2:20-22 says, 'we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself the cornerstone....' Verse 21 goes on to describe His living building, a building that grows like a body. In Christ, "the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple of the Lord, in whom also you are being built together, for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Timothy, your building project are the believers in the Lord! You are not a property manager!

Many believers in the church at Ephesus, who came from Gentile background, understood the difference between the temple to the goddess Artemis in Ephesus and the church of the living God. The glory of the temple of the goddess Artemis was merely outward; its glory was merely stone, inhabited with a stone god, an idol – Artemis. Servants would wash and cleanse the gods with detergent and wipe them down and polish them. But the whole temple was dead and cold on the inside. By contrast, the glory of the church is that the living God inhabits her. Therefore, to the church in Corinth, the Lord says through Paul, "What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people'" [2 Corinthians 6:16]. Her glory is: God is with her and in her! By faith, we belong to Jesus, who justified us through His blood, sanctifies [cleanses] us, and will glorify us. Our attraction is the life of the living God in us. About us, people should say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" [Zechariah 8:23]

The second reason for such motivation for godly behavior is because the church is the pillar and foundation of truth. The people of God are people of truth. The church is to protect the truth and to promote the truth of the living God, to guard it and to communicate it.

In contrast to those who oppose the truth, believers support the truth; they buttress [foundation] the truth. The church [the people] is also the pillar. Think of the function of pillars. It is to hold up the roof. To say that the church is the pillar of the truth is to say that it lifts up the truth for all to see. John Stott says it this way,

the purpose of pillars is not only to hold the roof firm, but to thrust it high so that it can be clearly seen even from a distance Just so, the church holds the truth high indeed, as pillars lift a building high while remaining unseen, so the church's function is not to advertise itself but to advertise and display the truth"

The people of Ephesus knew about pillars 柱. In the temple of Artemis, there were more than 100 columns or pillars, each six stories high. Many pillars were needed because the roof was made of marble. Without these pillars, the temple would collapse and no longer be visible for miles around. The Lord, through the apostle, now says, 'you are a pillar that is to hold up high, not itself, but the truth of Jesus Christ for the world to see!

And we are assured by the words of Jesus Himself, congregation, that the gates of hell cannot prevail against or overpower the pillar and foundation of the truth. Rather, the truth, the gospel, overpowers temples which house idols, like the temple of Artemis. Her magnificence was destroyed [Acts 19:27] and in its place the house of the living God was resurrected. The **1]** church is the house of the living God, and, **2]** the pillar and foundation of the truth. Therefore, the apostle writes so that we might know how we should conduct ourselves in God's house.

The heart of this whole gospel and our whole devotion to this gospel is Christ. Our conduct, our godly behavior are the ornaments, the gold and silver of Christ. This leads us to sing a hymn of praise which brings us to our second point.

2. ***The mystery of godly behavior [v.16].***

God lives among His people through His Spirit. Therefore, they live their lives differently. What is behind it all? Verse 16 opens up this mystery.

This hymn begins with the prelude, "*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.*" Or as another translation says, "*beyond all question*" or "*confessedly*". In the original Greek, the word literally means 'to say the same thing.' So what it says is that 'all say the same thing. All of us agree. There is no debate here. There is no controversy here among believers'.

So what do we agree on? It is the great mystery of godliness. Great [mega] is the mystery of godliness. And this cry In contrast to the cry of the pagan worshipers in Ephesus, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" [which is no more] [Acts 19:28]. Without controversy, "Great is the mystery of godliness.'

So what is it – the mystery?

The first word is 'He' or "God". The mystery of godliness is not a doctrine, a creed, or a principle. The mystery of godliness is a Person. It is 'He.' Who is He? The word 'mystery' means "to reveal that which was hidden, to unfold what was not disclosed". He is Jesus Christ He is the mystery of godliness revealed. Great is the truth that God is revealed, that God should become man. Jesus is that Person! The testimony to this truth is given in this six line hymn.

1. "God was manifested 显现 in the flesh." This refers to His incarnation, when the second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, took upon Himself our flesh. The word 'manifest' presupposes that He existed from all eternity. He is not created. 'Manifest' means to 'make visible' or to appear. He appeared in the flesh.

So we read in John 1, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with GodAnd the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth [vv.1-2,14].*" This mystery, according to Romans 1:3 concerns, "*His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh...*" When the Roman centurion heard Jesus' final cry on the cross and saw Him breathe His last, He said, '*Truly this Man was the Son of God.*'

God was manifested in flesh. But also Jesus

2. "was justified in the Spirit." Though His claims to being the Son of God was denied, though He was despised and rejected of men [Isaiah 53:3], though He was condemned to death on the testimony of two witnesses [Matthew 26:65ff] yet...His great claims to being the Son of God were vindicated. 澄清

We read Romans 1:3 but then it continues, “*He was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*” [1:4]. The Spirit vindicated the Son by raising Him from the dead. His resurrection was the declaration by the Holy Spirit that He was righteous. He is Who He claims to be – the sinless one, the Son of God. Great is the mystery of godliness.

Not only was He revealed in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, but also

3. “seen by angels.” Certainly the angels witnessed His birth and ministered to Him after His temptation in the wilderness and strengthened Him in His hour of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. But, especially, He was seen by the angels at His resurrection. They were the first witnesses. To the women, who were looking for Jesus crucified in the tomb, the angel answered and said, “*He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay*” [Matthew 28:5-6].

While the eyes of men and women, that resurrection morning, were clouded by the lack of faith, the angels saw Him clearly. Great is the mystery of godliness. Not only was He revealed in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, but also,

4. “preached among the nations.” At first the disciples were sad, disappointed and afraid. Jesus died. So how did they get from this point of disillusionment to proclaiming Him among the nations? What made the difference? What accounts for their transformation?

It was the resurrection of Jesus. He appeared to them. And He appeared to them again ... and again ... and again. They saw Him with their eyes, touched Him with their hands and He also ate breakfast with them by the sea. This confirmed His resurrection to them. He died for us to give us life!

From that point they proclaimed Him, of Him they bore witness; the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead was poured out at Pentecost Day upon the church. They proclaimed in Jerusalem and Judea; they proclaimed Him in Samaria and to the house of Cornelius; they proclaimed Him to the ends of the earth. Many tried to silence them, but they turned the world upside down with their message. To the point that in Ephesus the great goddess Artemis was being despised and her magnificence was being destroyed.

He was proclaimed among the nations, but also witness His resurrection power among those who hear,

5. “He was believed on in the world” The heart of the gospel message is this: Jesus is risen from the dead.: “*if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*” {Romans 10:9-10}. This message continues to go out, throughout the world this day.

Many believe, hearing the message. The evidence of the resurrection is overwhelming: empty tomb, the grave clothes, and transformed lives of those who believe. Lives continue to change today through the message preached. Great is the mystery of godliness. “*He was believed on in the world.*” Life and forgiveness are offered in Christ to all who believe. Those who deny the resurrection of Christ choose to deny the plain evidence.

Finally, if this is not testimony enough, we have also the testimony of the Father. He was

6. “received up to glory.” The risen Jesus, no doubt, ascended into heaven and now He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. The emphasis here is not so much on the event of His ascension recorded in Acts 1:9-11, but that today “*we see Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honor*” [Hebrews 2:9]. He is the name above every name and will one day return with power and glory to judge the living and the dead.

Great is the mystery of godliness, the mystery which has been revealed. As one person summarized it, “the testimony of the Father [6] is added to the testimony of the risen Christ given to believers [5], is added to the testimony of the apostles [4], to the testimony of angels [3], to the testimony of the Holy Spirit [2], to the testimony of Christ Himself [1].”

Congregation, this is the mystery behind the godliness, motivating us to properly conduct ourselves in God’s house. This is the mystery resulting in the house of the living God, of God dwelling among us, a house guarding and communicating the truth. The mystery revealed is Jesus Christ.

Let us confess together, 'And without controversy 争论, great is the mystery of godliness. Great is the mystery of godliness.' Amen!