

## Sermon Notes

# WORSHIP SERVICE - 4.30.2023

## THE CHURCH'S CHARACTER AND CONFESSION - PART 11

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### 1 TIMOTHY 3:14-16

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.

### II. THE CHURCH'S CHARACTER

- Right conduct is the theme of this letter.
- The first and second half of this letter is filled with information concerning how believers ought to behave in the church.
- Paul is passionate for the church of Jesus Christ.
- Galatians 4:19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!
- 2 Cor. 11:2-3 For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.
- That's why he was so passionate and protective of the church because it is Christ's Church!
- And that's why he writes that we must "*know how one ought to behave...*"
- Ch 2 and 3 was a call to exemplary conduct in the church.
- And the reason that the church should strive for the kind of conduct Paul is presenting is that the church is something unique.
- And he presents the compelling case for that in the three characteristics he uses to describe who and what the church is.
- Understanding these truths will forever change how you view the church.
- Understanding these truths will cause you to love the church even with all her flaws and faults.
- Understanding these truths will fuel your commitment to Christ, who is the head of His church.
- Ask yourself:
  - How do I view the church?
  - Do I understand what the church is?
  - Do I understand why we gather?
  - Right ecclesiology matters!
- Paul's three descriptions of the church are soaring theological proclamations of the beauty and glory of the church of Jesus Christ.
- V15 Paul states the church is the household of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and buttress of the truth.
  - The church is:
    - The visible manifestation of the family of God
    - The dwelling place of the presence of God
    - The guardian and herald of the Word of God.

#### A. THE VISIBLE MANIFESTATION OF THE FAMILY OF GOD

- Paul says that the church is the household of God.
- There are multiple metaphors used for the church by the NT writers; the body (Rom. 12:4-5), the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:31-32), the holy temple

of God (1 Pet. 2:5), a field and building (1 Cor. 3:9).

- Paul employs the metaphor of household and family in several of his letters to describe the church (Gal. 6:9-10; Eph. 2:18-22).
- And that's what he means here, we are members of God's household, we are a family—the family of God.
- 'Household' is the Greek word, "oikos" (οἶκος).
- It means everyone who belongs to the house, all who are related, the family members who reside in a house. It can mean the structure of a house, and a household.
- Scripture calls us both the house and the household of God.
- The church is a visible manifestation of the family of God.

- How do we become part of God's family?
- Just like you do in your natural family—you have to be born into it.
- It is the magnificent doctrine of adoption. He adopts us as his own and places us into his own family.
- 1689 LBCF 12.1 God has granted that all those who are justified would receive the grace of adoption, in and for the sake of his only Son Jesus Christ. By this they are counted among the children of God and enjoy the freedom and privileges of that relationship. They inherit his name, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, and are enabled to cry "Abba, Father!" They are given compassion, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as a father. Yet they are never cast off but are sealed for the day of redemption and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

- Paul weaves several of these metaphors together to express the unity we now have because we are in Christ Jesus.
- Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

- There are profound implications.
- Because we are God's family, these relationships are eternal.
- How are you getting along with your eternal siblings?
- It also means you can't do church on your own.
- Belonging to the church is not optional, for it would mean you are separated from the family of believers.

## B. THE DWELLING PLACE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

- "The church of the living God."
- In the OT, God is frequently called "the living God" to draw contrast between Him and the dead and lifeless false idols and gods of the people.
- The NT writers also use this designation for God; emphasizing his immortality and eternity.
- Our turning to the living Christ necessarily involves us turning away from dead idols. (1 Thess. 1:9)
  
- And where does this living God dwell? In his temple. That's his house.
- And where is his house? Where is his temple?
- We are God's house, his temple, where he dwells.
- 2 Cor. 6:14-18 14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,

and I will be their God,

and they shall be my people.

17 Therefore go out from their midst,

and be separate from them, says the Lord,

and touch no unclean thing;

then I will welcome you,

18 and I will be a father to you,

and you shall be sons and daughters to me,

says the Lord Almighty."

- **John Stott**, "Israel's consciousness that the living God lived among them profoundly affected their community life. Even an elementary lesson in personal hygiene was based on the fact that the Lord God walked among them and must not see anything indecent. And they were incensed when the heathen presumed to defy, insult, or ridicule the living God. In even more vivid consciousness of the presence of the living God should

characterize the Christian church today. For we are the temple of the living God, a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

- Church is the Greek word, “ekklesia” (ἐκκλησία) and means “assembly.”
  - We, together, make up the assembly of the living God.
  - What we are doing now, together, is enriched by the knowledge of God’s presence in our midst.
  - We are worshipping before the living God.
  - We are hearing his voice through the exposition of His Word.
  - We meet him at his table as we partake of the Lord’s Supper.
  - We experience his love through the fellowship of the saints as we express our love to one another.
- Because the church is the assembly of the living God, the temple of the living God, the way we conduct ourselves when we are together and what we do when we are together is vitally important.

### C. THE GUARDIAN AND HERALD OF THE WORD OF GOD

- Paul also describes the church as “a pillar and buttress of the truth.”
  - These are building metaphors.
  - Buttress is the foundation or support of a structure. The sense of the word is that it is a structural member used to support and strengthen a framework.
  - The church provides the solid foundation of the truth.
  - The church holds firm the truth so that the structure does not collapse under the weight of false teaching.
  - The church is a guardian of the truth, preserving and protecting it.
  - But the church is also a pillar.
  - A pillar or column holds up the roof. Tall pillars can hold the roof up high so that it can be seen from a great distance.
  - In this case, the church also holds the truth up high when it proclaims it so that it can be seen and heard and not hidden from the world.
- Ex. The Great Temple of Artemis (Diana)
- The temple in Ephesus could be seen from a great distance.
  - Just like that temple called attention to the goddess her worshippers served, the church as the temple of God, the pillar of the truth, is to call attention to the living God.
  - The church is to be a city on a hill, the light of the world.
  - The church is to be firmly rooted and grounded in the truth so that it will not be carried away by false doctrines and teachings.
- The church cannot be the church apart from the truth.
  - Without the truth, a church is not really a true church.
- What is the truth that we must both guard and herald?

## III. THE CHURCH'S CONFESSION

- The truth we must guard and herald concerns Christ.
  - Paul expresses this truth using what many scholars believe to be an ancient creedal hymn about the person of Christ.
  - “*Great indeed, we confess...*”
  - The phrase “great indeed” is also translated, “beyond all question” or “most certainly”.
  - The implication is that there is nothing greater than this.
  - The believers at Ephesus knew the creedal confession of the worshippers of Artemis--“*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!*” (Acts 19)
- But we have a greater confession, Paul calls it “the mystery of godliness.”
- Mystery doesn’t mean something we have to try to solve, but rather the full revelation of Christ which was previously hidden and has now been revealed.
  - He is saying that what makes godliness possible, what makes the kind of right conduct in the church possible, is Jesus Christ.
  - He is the key to godly conduct in God’s household.
  - And our conduct will flow from our confession.
  - We are a confessing people!
- The Christ-saturated ancient creedal hymn is only six lines.
  - The six lines are three couplets.
  - These lines begin with a verb in the passive voice. That means the subject of each sentence, which is Christ, is the recipient of the verbal action.
- Kent Hughes and John Stott in their commentaries categorize the couplets this way:
  - First couplet: The revelation of Christ
  - Second couplet: The witnesses of Christ
  - Third couplet: The reception of Christ
- **The revelation of Christ:** “He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit”
  - Manifested in the flesh is a clear reference to Jesus’s incarnation and birth.

- The second half, “vindicated by the Spirit, is the bookend of his life, his resurrection from the dead.
  - Vindicated means to be justified, proven right. The Spirit vindicated and verified Jesus’s claims and lordship by raising him from the dead.
  - The first couplet sings of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ.
  - We must confess those glorious truths.
- **The witness of Christ:** “Seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations”
  - The couplet contrasts how Christ was seen or witnessed from both the heavenly realm and the earthly realm.
  - Angels were prevalent throughout Jesus’s earthly life. From his birth to ascension.
  - And now, in glory, the unceasing worship of Jesus is attended to by the myriad of angelic host singing, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:12).
  - The angels were the closest to him and the Gentile nations of the world were the furthest.
  - His witnesses take the good news to the nations, to the ends of the earth.
  - Jesus said, “this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations...” (Matt 24:13)
  - There was, as Kent Hughes writes, “cosmic witnesses to Christ on earth and in Heaven.”
- **The reception of Christ:** “believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”
  - John writes in his gospel that those “who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12)
  - He is believed on in the world by those who receive him, believe in his name, and become part of his family.
  - And heaven also received him, he was “taken up in glory.” He ascended to heaven. He goes back to where he first came from.
- We confess that He was revealed by his incarnation and resurrection.
  - We confess that he was witnessed by heaven and earth.
  - We confess that he was received on earth and in heaven.
  - This is the truth we hold fast and stand firm in. This is the truth we boldly proclaim.
  - The confession of this glorious Christ makes possible the godly conduct that Paul is instructing the church to walk in as God’s family, God’s temple, and the guardians and heralds of God’s truth.
- Paul writes to the church at Colossae, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” (Col.1:28)
  - Because we are the church we must confess and proclaim such a Christ.
  - Our conduct will naturally flow from a right confession of Christ and his truth.

## APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today’s message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?