The Mystery of Godliness

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[0:00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, 1 Timothy chapter 3.

1 Timothy chapter 3, and we're going to read again at verse 14. Where Paul writes, As you know, and as we've learned from this letter, Timothy was a young minister.
He was a young minister preaching and pastoring in what was the ancient seaport city of Ephesus. And Paul wrote this personal and very pastoral letter to gently guide Timothy through some of the pastoral problems that he was facing.
Because by this point, as you know, Timothy, he wanted to throw in the towel. He just wanted to walk away completely. But Paul exhorts and he encourages young Timothy to stay there and to stand firm and to stay focused.
Now, the pastoral problems Timothy had encountered, as we've seen throughout the letter, was that there was these erroneous elders, we've called them that, and there were some disobedient deacons.
[1:54] And what the problem with them was that they were soft on sin, and they were loose on the law, and they were men that just glossed over the gospel. And their false instructions and influence, it was infiltrating and infecting the congregation in Ephesus.

In short, you could say that the office bearers in the church in Ephesus, they were worldly office bearers. They were putting self first before their Savior. They were putting their personal commitments above their personal commitment to their Savior, Jesus Christ.
They were only interested in the applause and the approval of men. They were focused. They were fixated with position, not pastoring. They were interested in status, not service.
And yet, as office bearers, they had this solemn role. Paul reminds them in this chapter they have a solemn role with solemn responsibilities because they're to be effective elders. They're to be devoted deacons by their commitment and their Christ-like character, conduct, and conversation.
But as Paul brings this chapter to a conclusion, he reminds us what the focus and the function of the church ought to be.
[3:14] And he does so by setting before us our model and our mission. So he reminds us what the focus and the function of the church ought to be by setting before us our model and our mission.

Our model and our mission. So first of all, he sets before us our model. He says in verse 14, Now, Paul wrote this first letter to Timothy in probably around the month of September in the year 64 AD, which was actually only months, maybe even weeks before his final imprisonment and his subsequent execution.
Two years earlier, in 62 AD, Paul had been released from prison. He had spent time in prison before then. During his first prison sentence, that was when he wrote most of his New Testament letters.
And you'll remember, he mentions it in his letter to the Philippians, how he was in house arrest in Rome and he was chained to the emperor's imperial guard.
But now in 64 AD, Paul begins writing this personal and pastoral letter to Timothy. And as we read there in verse 14, Paul hopes to go to Timothy, but he isn't sure if he'll be able to travel to the city of Ephesus from Rome to see his friend and fellow pastor Timothy.
[5:01] Paul isn't sure if he's going to be able to get to Ephesus to personally confront and challenge the office bearers in Ephesus for being disobedient deacons and erroneous elders.

Now, the reason Paul thought he might be delayed, or the reason he was even doubtful that he'd reach Ephesus at all, was because that same year, in 64 AD, it was the year of the great fire of Rome.

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As you know, the Roman emperor at the time was the emperor Nero. Nero, he set fire to the city of Rome in the month of July, July 64 AD.
And he set fire to the city of Rome in order that he could rebuild the city to his own liking. And the great fire of Rome, as you probably know from history, it lasted six days. It destroyed about 70% of the city of Rome and it left half the population of the city homeless.
But what's worse was that Nero used the Christians in Rome as the scapegoat. Nero took pleasure in blaming the Christians for the great fire of Rome.
[6:16] And because it was the Christians' fault, Nero proceeded with yet more persecution of the Christians. And with persecution beginning again just after July in AD 64, Paul quickly realizes that well, he's probably not going to be able to travel to Timothy in Ephesus.

Which is why in the interim, Paul writes this personal and pastoral letter to Timothy. He says, Now, as we know, Paul never made it to Ephesus.
He was imprisoned shortly after sending this letter. He was arrested and then put in prison under arrest by Nero's guards. And that's where he remained for the next three years of his life until AD 67, where Paul wrote his second letter, which was his final letter.
He wrote it to Timothy. And he confesses in his final letter, which is 2 Timothy. He says in 2 Timothy chapter 4, shortly before he's executed for his faith in Jesus Christ, Paul writes, You know, So, if that was me, I was thinking about Paul in prison, arrested, awaiting execution.
If that was me, I'd probably question the Lord's providence. I'd question Nero's persecution. But for Paul, as we know from his letters, especially Philippians, Paul had learned that in whatever situation and circumstance he found himself in, he had learned to be content.
[8:36] So, Paul knew that his imprisonment and his persecution, it wasn't an obstacle to the gospel. It was an opportunity for the gospel. And as Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, it actually served to advance the gospel.

And that's because Paul knew. Paul knew. He knew Romans 8, 28 in his own experience. Paul knew that the Lord was working all things together for good to those who are the called according to his purpose.
Which is ultimately why Paul reminds Timothy here in this closing section, that the focus and the function of the church, he reminds us that we're to be the household of God.
That's why he sets before our model. Our model is that we're to be the household of God. That's what he says in verse 15. That you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.
And as you know, as those who are part of a household, well, they are your family. Therefore, as those who are part of the household of God, we are part of the family of God.
[9:53] And as the family of God, we've been born again of the Spirit of God. We've been adopted into the family of God. We're known to our Heavenly Father as the children of God.

And you know, just thinking about this, the household of God. You remember that it was John Calvin, the reformer. He said that as the children of God, God is our Father.
The church is our mother. Jesus is our elder brother. And everyone who is in union with Christ, every Christian is our brother and sister.
Therefore, we're a family. The Bible describes us then as a church family. And Paul is teaching us here that we're to focus and to function as a church family.
We're to focus and to function as a church family. But as you know, the thing about families is that you don't choose your family. You're born into that family.
[10:56] And sometimes there are those in our family that we get on well with. And there are others that we don't get on so well with. They sometimes get on our nerves. And yet, regardless of what happens and what's said within the family, we love them deep down because they're our family.

And Paul says that's what we should be like as a church family. We're to focus and function as a family. We're to love one another.
That's not what our elder brother taught us. That's not what Jesus said in John 13. Love one another. Why? By this, all people will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another.
Therefore, to focus and function as a church family, we have to love one another. We have to love one another, which is something the church, as you know, has failed to do throughout its history.
It has failed to love one another. The church is often known not for its love, but for its lack of love.
And yet, Jesus taught us, love one another.

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[12:09] By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. And that's why Paul explained to the church family in Corinth. He said to them in that well-known chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, he said to them, love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy or boast. And he wasn't talking about a married couple. He was talking about the church family. Love is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way.
Love is not irritable or resentful. Love doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing, but love rejoices with truth.
Love within the church family, says Paul, bears all things. It believes all things.
It hopes all things. It endures all things. Love, he says, never ends within the church family. Friends, our focus and function as a church family is that we're to love one another.
We're to love one another as Christ has loved us. And we should all know how much Christ has loved us because he loved us with selfless and sacrificial love.
[13:21] He loved us and gave himself for us. But there's more here because as those who focus and function as a family, we're also to be fed as a family.

We're to be fed as a family. And this is something that was highlighted by one commentator I was reading on 1 Timothy, that we come to church to worship God as a family.
But we also come to church to be fed as a family from God's Word. Because the Word of God is our bread from heaven.
It's our milk and honey. It's the meat and drink for our soul. But one commentator wrote, and I highlight it to you because I found it very, very challenging from my position.
He wrote, a pastor must take time to nourish himself so that he may nourish others. A church doesn't grow by addition.
[14:24] A church grows by nutrition. A church doesn't grow by addition. A church grows by nutrition. It's tragic, he says. It's tragic to see the way that some pastors waste their time all week long and then have nothing nourishing to give the family of believers on the Lord's Day.

You know, I read that, and I was just so convicted. It's a challenging statement, but it's a relevant statement. Because we come to church as a family, but we also come to church to be fed as a family.
And I always remember Dol McLeod, Professor Dol McLeod, he always said that to us as students. Remember that the Lord's Day is a high day, and your people are coming to be fed.
So prepare to feed them. And that's always the challenge. So it's a challenging statement here. But it's a relevant statement. And it was relevant for the church in Ephesus too.
Because as we know, they had erroneous elders, they had disobedient deacons, they had pastors who weren't pastoring, and they had preachers who weren't preaching. Which is why Paul reminds us that as a church, our model is to focus and function as a church family.
[15:40] Our model is to focus and function as a church family. But then secondly, he talks about our mission. Our mission is to preach and proclaim the truth of God's Word.

So our model, or to be a family, our mission is to preach God's Word. So our mission, secondly. Look again at verse 14 though.
He says, I hope to come to you soon. But I'm writing these things to you so that 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.
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, and taken up in glory.
Now as you know, throughout this chapter, Paul has taught that effective elders and devoted deacons, they must display commitment and Christ-like, a Christ-like character, conduct, and conversation.
[16:51] They must be men of honor and integrity. They must be diligent and dignified. They must be reverent and respectful. They must be holy and wholehearted.

They must be serious in what they're doing and sincere in what they're doing. But Paul also taught that an absolute necessity is that effective elders and devoted deacons must, they must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.
He says that in verse 9. They must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And the mystery of the faith is what Paul explains and expands upon here in verse 16.

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Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness or the mystery of the faith. 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.
Now, the mystery of the faith or the mystery of godliness is very simply the person and work of Jesus Christ. It's Christ and Him crucified. But you know, in many ways, what Paul sets before us there in verse 16, it is the actual Apostles' Creed.
[18:09] The actual Apostles' Creed. As you know, the Apostles' Creed, we studied it earlier this year, only a few months ago. The Apostles' Creed wasn't actually written by the Apostles.

The Apostles' Creed was written not in the first century, but in the third century. And it was written in order to explain and to expand upon the teaching of the Apostles from the first century.
But you'll remember from our study of the Apostles' Creed that the word creed comes from the Latin credo, meaning, I believe. Therefore, a creed is to be believed in our heart and confessed with our mouth.
And that's what we did as we studied the Apostles' Creed together. As a congregation living in this community, we recited and repeated and we reaffirmed each week the Apostles' Creed.
We believed in our heart and we confessed with our mouth. I don't know if you still know it. Do you know it off by heart? We said, I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, and he descended into hell.
[19:29] The third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven. He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick the quick and the dead.

We also said, I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.
And therefore, as a congregation of God's people, as a church, as a community of believers, we are those who believe and confess creation, not evolution.
We believe and confess that God is our creator, and his only begotten Son is our Lord Jesus Christ.
We believe and confess the incarnation, the sinless life of Jesus, the atoning death, the powerful resurrection.
We believe that they are all true. We believe and confess the ascension, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the union and communion of the saints, the second coming, and the final judgment of Jesus Christ.
[20:39] We believe and confess that it's the truth of God's inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word.
We believe all that. And you know, that's what Paul is reminding Timothy here.

He's saying to Timothy that as the church, as the ecclesia, as he writes in verse 15, as those who have been called out, those who are called out of darkness and called into the marvelous light of the gospel of God's grace, as the church of the living God, we must hold to the mystery of the faith.
We must believe and confess the mystery of godliness. And Paul is saying to Timothy, this is your calling as leaders in the church, and this is your calling and confession as members in the church of Jesus Christ.
Because as the household of God, as the ecclesia, as those who have been called out, as the church of the living God, the Word we proclaim and the Word we profess, it must be the pillar in this community.
It must be the stronghold of truth that everyone else looks to. It must be a firm foundation when everything else around us is sinking sand.
[22:06] It must be the cornerstone upon which we build our lives so that others see the importance of building their life upon it. Therefore, says Paul, as effective elders, as devoted deacons, as mission-minded members, we must, we must confess the mystery of godliness.

We must confess the mystery of godliness. So we must speak about it that Jesus Christ was manifested in the flesh.
He was vindicated by the Spirit. He was seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in glory.
We must preach and proclaim and profess and present to our congregation and the people of our community the truth of God's word.
We must love and look and listen and learn and lean upon and live for Jesus. us. We must be committed and Christ-like in our character, our conduct, and our conversation.

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[23:23] And as you know, we've said this before, that this might seem like stating the obvious, but you know, we need to be reminded again and again of who we are and what we are as the church of Jesus Christ.

because with so many voices, we can lose sight of who we are and what we are as the church of Jesus Christ. We need to be taught and told again and again that we must claim and confess the mystery of godliness.
The mystery of godliness. You know, in his commentary on 1 Timothy, John MacArthur, he writes, he says, the church today needs to be reminded often of the foundational truths of our faith because it's all too easy for the church and believers to get so caught up with the peripheral matters that they lose sight of the primary matters.
And that's so true because the sad reality is, and it is a sad reality, there are many churches which have elders and deacons and members who are graceless and godless.
There were many in the first century church and there are still as many, if not more, in the 21st century church where they dissolve and dilute the gospel.
[24:59] they weaken and they water down the word of God to the point that they ignore the incarnation, they reject the resurrection, they alter the atonement, and they totally abandon the authority of Scripture.

and it's all because they don't want to cause offense or offend anyone. But as Paul is reminding us here, our calling, our commission, our command is to preach and proclaim the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
because as Jesus said, our elder brother said it, it's the truth that will set you free. It's the truth that will set you free.
And so as Paul brings this chapter to a conclusion, he reminds us what the focus and function of the church ought to be. And he says that our model is a household.
We are the household of God. We are the church family. And as a family, we are to worship together and be fed together. We are to love one another.
[26:21] That's our model. Paul says our mission as the household of God, as the ecclesia, as those who are called out, as those who are the church of the living God, our mission as effective elders and devoted deacons and mission-minded members, our mission is to preach and proclaim the mystery of godliness.

We are to speak about the passion and the work of Jesus Christ. Our mission is to claim and confess God's word to be trustworthy and true because it's the truth that will set them free.
And you know, in our presentation of the truth of God's word, whether preached from a pulpit or spoken to a friend, we need to be relevant.
We need to see that God's word is reliable. We need to be appropriate. We need to understand that God's word is applicable. We need to be clear and comprehensible.
My friend, our mission is to coherently communicate Christ within our congregation and community. community. We are to, our mission is to coherently communicate Christ within our congregation and community.
[27:46] Why? Because as Paul says, great, great is the mystery of godliness. Jesus Christ was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen of angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world and received up into glory.

That is our model and that is our mission. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray.
O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for teaching us and Lord, that we would be teachable.
Give to us that teachable spirit where we are always sitting under the word of God and not over it.
Help us, Lord, we pray, to be those who are hearers and also doers of thy word.
Help us, Lord, to not only receive information but to make that information application, to apply it in our lives and to live it out to the glory of God and the furtherance of his kingdom.
O Lord, help us, we pray, day by day by thy Spirit that we would be faithful, faithful to the truth because Jesus is the truth and that he is the word who became flesh and dwelt among us that we might behold his glory.
[29:17] The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Lord, bless us then, we pray. Guide us, we ask, and go before us for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. We're going to sing again, this time in Psalm 86. Psalm 86 in the Scottish Psalter.

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Psalm 86 is on page 341. We're singing from verse 9 down to the verse marked 13.
And before we sing, I'll just highlight some prayer points for the gentlemen who I'll ask to pray. As you know, pray for the families who are mourning.
There are so many. Remember Bill, our own elder. I saw him yesterday. I think it was yesterday. I think, yeah, it was yesterday. I just don't remember what day of the week it is.
[30:28] I saw him yesterday and, oh, as you'd expect, he's just devastated. So please remember him. He's on his own. His daughter left today and his sister's coming at the weekend.

So please remember Bill and the other families that are grieving. We're also encouraged to pray for Glen Urchart and Fort Augustus Free Church.
The minister there is Sean Anchors. He was in college with me. He was the same year as me in college. So remember them as they have, those who are unwell in their congregation and pray that they'd be returning to worship as soon as possible.
We're also encouraged to pray for Broughty Ferry. They're just like every other congregation in our denomination and other denominations trying to regather after lockdown and all these restrictions.
Also, we're encouraged to pray for our General Assembly which meets later this month. So the General Assembly is a third of ministers within the denomination. They gather for meetings all week.
[31:32] I think our own Peter is going, is that right? Yeah, Peter's going. So remember those, the commissioners who are going to be there. And also pray for the students in the college in Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

They're sitting their exams. I think it's this week and they'll have their closing ceremony on the 13th of May. So just a few things to highlight. I mean, you don't have to remember all these things tonight but just to highlight them for prayer.
We're going to sing before then and we're going to sing in Psalm 86 verse 9. We're going to sing down to the verse marked 13. All nations whom thou made shall come and worship reverently before thy face and they, O Lord, thy name shall glorify because thou art exceeding great and works by thee are done which are to be admired and thou art God thyself alone.
We'll sing down to the verse marked 13 of Psalm 86 to God's praise. Psalm 86 O Lord, all nations whom thou made shall come and works and brethren near before thy face before thy face someday, O Lord, thy image shall glorify because the heart exceeding great and works by thee are done which are to be the world near
And now art of thyself alone It be thy way and in thy truth O Lord, then walk where I Unite my heart, thou art thy name May fear continually O Lord, my God, with all my heart
[34:35] To thee I will give praise And I the glory will ask my Unto thy name always Because thy thirst deterred me In greatness thou excel And thou delivered hast my soul And from the lowest hell

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