

## THE MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

[Some] years ago it was announced that General Booth, of the Salvation Army, was losing his sight, and that his days of usefulness were over. After many weeks' seclusion this Christian hero of fourscore years appeared having had one eye removed and possessing only imperfect vision with the other. To an audience of over 4,000 in London, he spoke for an hour and a half. 'I want to do more for humanity,' he said, 'and I want to do a great deal more for Jesus. There are thousands of poor, wretched, suffering and sinning people crying out to us for help, and I want to do something for them.'"

—*The Congregationalist*<sup>1</sup>

"I remember hearing of a man's dream in which he imagined that when he died he was taken by the angels to a beautiful temple. After admiring it for a time he discovered that one little stone was left out. He said to the angel, 'What is this stone left out for?'

"The angel replied, 'That was left out for you; but you wanted to do great things, and so there was no room left for you.' He was startled and awoke, and resolved that he would become a worker for God, and that man always worked faithfully after that."<sup>2</sup>

Today we are going to focus on the last verse in 1 Timothy 3:

### 1 Timothy 3:16 NAS:

*By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.*

It is a glorious verse, full of rich meaning. Notice the cadence it has. Because of that,

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<sup>1</sup> Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

some think it may have been taken from an early Christian hymn.<sup>3</sup> To help us get its meaning, let us first read:

2 Timothy 2:15 NAS:

*Be **diligent** to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*

Diligent in this verse means to be persistent and to give an earnest effort in the way we present God's Word of truth to outsiders.

You cannot support or protect the Word of God unless you study it. **Let me read that verse again.**

2 Timothy 2:15 NAS:

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*

When I read this verse I hear Paul saying, "Do not deviate in your teaching from the truth of God's Word," and how do you do that? By studying it until you are familiar with the entire Bible.

Now when you saturate your mind with the Word of God and meditate on it, you will find yourself obeying it more and more. Look at the number of atheists who have entered into an extensive study of the Bible to prove it cannot be true and in the process have become committed believers. Listen to what Jesus said about those who hear God's Word and live by it.

Luke 11:28 NAS:

*Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."*

Now Paul knew from experience that the Word of God had been viciously attacked from the moment Jesus started to teach the Gospel message. So those who were disciplined in knowledge of the Bible, as we have been discussing, **were assigned to defend it.**

Philippians 1:15-18 MSG:

<sup>15</sup> *It's true that some here preach Christ because with me out of the way, they think they'll step right into the spotlight. But the others do it with the best heart in the world.*

<sup>16</sup> *One group is motivated by pure love, knowing that **I am here defending the Message**, wanting to help.*

<sup>17</sup> *The others, now that I'm out of the picture, are merely greedy, hoping to get something out of it for themselves. Their motives are bad. They see me as their competition, and so the worse it goes for me, the better—they think—for them.*

<sup>18</sup> *So how am I to respond? I've decided that I really don't care about their*

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Faithful*. Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1981, p. 52.

*motives, whether mixed, bad, or indifferent. Every time one of them opens his mouth, Christ is proclaimed, so I just cheer them on!*

As followers of Christ we are expected to make the Word of God a glorious part of our lives, to make it beautiful to those with whom we have contact. By exposing our hearts and minds to the Word of God, we will behave in a godly way.

Titus 2:9-10 NLT:

<sup>9</sup> *Slaves must always obey their masters and do their best to please them. They must not talk back*

<sup>10</sup> *or steal, but must show themselves to be entirely trustworthy and good.*

**Then they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way.**

You cannot support or protect the Word of God unless you **praise and glorify** it openly and publicly. **Living what the Word of God teaches demonstrates the reality of the Bible and draws non-believers to Christ.**

Matthew 28:19-20 NLT:

<sup>19</sup> *Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

<sup>20</sup> *Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

The Church is to first and foremost support and protect the integrity of God's Word. What a privilege to be trusted with the support and protection of the truth given us by our Lord, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords.

1 Timothy 3:16 MSG:

*This Christian life is a **great mystery**, far exceeding our understanding, but some things are clear enough: He appeared in a human body, was proved right by the invisible Spirit, was seen by angels. He was proclaimed among all kinds of peoples, believed in all over the world, taken up into heavenly glory.*

Just open up your Bible to any page at random and begin to read. You will almost immediately read truth after truth. There is nothing in the Bible that is not true, and most truth is centered around the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us the most important responsibility of the Church is to hold tight to the message that Christ brought, **and to exalt the Person of Christ.**

Luke 24:44-49 MSG:

<sup>44</sup> *Then he [Jesus] said, "Everything I told you while I was with you comes to this: All the things written about me in the Law of Moses, in the*

*Prophets, and in the Psalms have to be fulfilled."*

<sup>45</sup> *He went on to open their understanding of the Word of God, showing them how to read their Bibles this way.*

<sup>46</sup> *He said, "You can see now how it is written that the Messiah suffers, rises from the dead on the third day,*

<sup>47</sup> *and then a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations—starting from here, from Jerusalem!*

<sup>48</sup> *You're the first to hear and see it. You're the witnesses.*

<sup>49</sup> *What comes next is very important: I am sending what my Father promised to you, so stay here in the city until he arrives, until you're equipped with power from on high."*

### 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 MSG:

<sup>1</sup> *You'll remember, friends, that when I first came to you to let you in on God's master stroke, I didn't try to impress you with polished speeches and the latest philosophy.*

<sup>2</sup> *I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and who he is; then Jesus and what he did—Jesus crucified.*

“As already noted, a **mystery** was a hidden, sacred truth that is revealed in the New Testament. The **mystery of godliness** parallels the "mystery of the faith" (v. 9). It refers to the great truth of salvation and righteousness through Christ, which produces **godliness** (eusebeia) in those who believe. It is also possible to understand **the mystery of godliness** as a reference to Jesus, who was the very revelation of true and perfect "godlikeness," since He was God. **Godliness**, then, first refers to the incarnation and secondly to those who are saved and become the godly in Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

This hymn can only be describing Jesus who is the purest **mystery of godliness**—the hidden God revealed perfectly, and Paul gives us six unique attributes that Jesus alone possesses. **We will look at each phrase of this hymn, especially the first two phrases today.**

1) First, *Jesus was **revealed** in the flesh* [1 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)]. God became man in the person of Jesus. The Greek word used here, *Phaneroō* (**revealed**)<sup>5</sup> means "to make visible." You see, Jesus is God, and thus He lived in eternity past. He did not come into existence in His mother's womb, but rather as we are told in Philippians 2, God became

<sup>4</sup> Op cit, Macarthur, p. 140. **Emphases added.**

<sup>5</sup> Expose to view, make manifest, to show one's self, appear (*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, G5319); Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995.

the baby Jesus.

Philippians 2:5-8 MSG:

<sup>5</sup> *Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself.*

<sup>6</sup> **He had equal status with God** but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what.

<sup>7</sup> *Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!*

<sup>8</sup> *Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.*

John 8:58 NAS:

*Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."*

John 17:5 NAS:

*"Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

You see, God is a Spirit, He is not visible, He cannot be seen. Jesus became the visible God in the form of the man Jesus, thus **making God visible to man**. Jesus was to show people what God was like. **Jesus made the invisible God visible to human eyes.**

1 Timothy 6:11-16 NLT:

<sup>11</sup> *But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.*

<sup>12</sup> *Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses.*

<sup>13</sup> *And I charge you before God, who gives life to all, and before Christ Jesus, who gave a good testimony before Pontius Pilate,*

<sup>14</sup> *that you obey this command without wavering. Then no one can find fault with you from now until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.*

<sup>15</sup> *For at just the right time Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords.*

<sup>16</sup> *He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honor and power to him forever! Amen.*

John 14:9 NLT:

*Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!** So why are you asking me to show him to you?"*

Colossians 1:15-17 NLT:

<sup>15</sup> **Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,**

<sup>16</sup> *for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.*

**Everything was created through him and for him.**

<sup>17</sup> *He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.*

Jesus was fully human and yet fully God.

Hebrews 4:15 NAS:

*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*

2) **The second phrase of the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16 is [Jesus] was vindicated in the Spirit.** The Greek word used here for “vindicated,” *Dikaioō*, means “to declare one to be just or righteous.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus was therefore declared to be **righteous. This is substantiated in other references as well.**

1 John 2:1-2 NAS:

<sup>1</sup> *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;*

<sup>2</sup> *and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*

Hebrews 4:14-16 NLT:

<sup>14</sup> *So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe.*

<sup>15</sup> *This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.*

<sup>16</sup> *So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*

Hebrews 5:8-9 NAS:

<sup>8</sup> *Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.*

<sup>9</sup> *And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.*

Jesus was the God-Man. In His human nature, He was fully man, in His divine nature, He

<sup>6</sup> *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, G1344; Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995.

was fully God.

Romans 1:1-6 NAS:

<sup>1</sup> *Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*  
<sup>2</sup> *which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,*  
<sup>3</sup> *concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,*  
<sup>4</sup> **who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,**  
<sup>5</sup> **through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,**  
<sup>6</sup> *among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;*

Now as I read this passage over several times, the word **ALL** (*πᾶς pas*) suddenly jumped out at me. I'm always looking for evidence in the Bible to disprove the doctrine of Predestination as many scholars interpret it. So is the meaning here what I would like it to mean, that God intended for all Gentiles to be saved? So I went to the Greek and discovered the following definitions for "all:"

**1** individually. 1A **each**, every, **any**, all, the whole, everyone, all things, **everything**. **2** collectively.

Or it can mean:

**2** Some of all types.<sup>7</sup>

Now what does that mean? Well, let us look at John 12:19 (NASB) as an example.

<sup>19</sup> *So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, **the world**<sup>8</sup> has gone after Him."*

Did **all the world** go after Christ? No.

Mark 1:5 NAS:

And **all**<sup>9</sup> **the country of Judea** was going out to him, and **all**<sup>10</sup> **the**

<sup>7</sup> Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.* electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. G3956.

<sup>8</sup> *κόσμος (cosmos)* – the Sum of all Created Being; *The ESV English-Greek Reverse Interlinear NT*; (The Theological Dictionary of the NT; vol. 3, p.868).

<sup>9</sup> *πᾶς (pas)*. – Some of all types; *The ESV English-Greek Reverse Interlinear NT*; (The Theological Dictionary of the NT; G3956).

<sup>10</sup> *πᾶς (pas)*. – Some of all types: *The ESV English-Greek Reverse Interlinear NT*; (The Theological Dictionary of the NT; G3956).

**people of Jerusalem;** and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

Was all of Judea, or all of Jerusalem baptized in the Jordan River? No.

1 John 5:19 NAS:

*We know that we are of God, and that the **whole**<sup>11</sup> **world** lies in the power of the evil one.*

Does the whole world (all people) belong to Satan? The words “world” and “all” obviously cannot be referring to **all people**. The words are generally used to signify that Christ has redeemed some of **all sorts** of people: some Jews, some Gentiles, some rich, some poor, and He has not split Jews and Gentiles into two separate groups, but has taken some from **all groups**—*C.H. Spurgeon from a sermon on Particular Redemption.*<sup>12</sup>

However, the Greek word for “world” in John 12:19 (κόσμος *cosmos*), carries the meaning “the Sum of all Created Being,” and the Greek word for “whole” in 1 John 5:19, carries the meaning “all, whole, completely.” So do we have some contradiction here? Which is it? All or some of all? Well, I’ve not yet found the answer, but I will keep looking. Come back next week. I hope to have an answer then. Until then, remember, **“Work as if you were to live 100 years. Pray as if you were to die tomorrow.”**<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> ὅλος (*holos*). – all, whole, completely; *The ESV English-Greek Reverse Interlinear NT; (The Theological Dictionary of the NT; G3650).*

<sup>12</sup> Op cit., MacArthur, p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers.* Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.