

Who We Are and What We Believe

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[0:00] Please take your Bibles and go to 1 Timothy again, 1 Timothy chapter 3, and that black Bible in the chair in front of you, I believe, to the back, find page 163, 163, find 1 Timothy 3.

Sorry about that first song. It's what I get for taking time off, right? That's just weird. Oh. Did you erase it on purpose?

That's what I thought. Nice job, Aaron. We're putting you on the naughty list now. 1 Timothy chapter 3, we just got three verses, 14, 15, and 16, which I think was perfectly by coincidence, because that's how God works.

Verse 3, 14 through 16, perfect with ending the year and beginning a new year. Just perfect.

So let me read, and then we'll jump in. I'm writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long or quickly, but if I'm delayed, so that you may know how it is necessary to conduct one in God's house, which is a church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

[1:35] And confessedly great is the mystery of godliness, who was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among nations, believed in the world, taken in glory.

Speaking of Christmas, when you open up your new toy, like when Travis opened up his new toy a couple days ago, you got a lot of new ones, didn't you?

And it has a manual. One of the first few pages tells you exactly what you have and all the components of that particular item.

I mean, it's in almost every manual. It tells you, this is what you got, and this is all the components in it. Now me, I'm like, this is stupid.

Why in the world is this thing in here? I know what I got. Why do I care about this? Of course. It's crucial though, because sometimes you may have a different make or model, because later on in the manual, you're looking at stuff, it's like, well, where is that thing?

[2:53] I did this. I'm not joking. I did this. I'm looking through, I'm like, where is this thing? And then I go back to the beginning, the first couple pages, I'm like, oh, I don't have that one.

I got the other one. That would really help. Way to go, moron. Your model and what it entails affects the rest of the manual and how you do or do not do certain things with your new toy, your new gadget, your new device, blah, blah, blah.

Your new Nerf gun. Same thing goes with the church. We need to know who we are and what we believe, because if we don't, it will affect how we do this thing called church.

God's manual for church life. This is what 1 Timothy is about. And not to say that there's other letters in the New Testament that are not God's manual.

It's not to say that. It's not to discredit those or say those don't have that either. We're not saying that like either or. It's more like both and.

[4:17] But definitely from Paul's perspective on writing this letter to Timothy, he's given them the how-to's for church life.

The how. And today we're going to look at the who and the what. I put it this way. Who we are and what we believe.

Interesting. You talk about identity in the first hour. Who we are. That's vital. And when we're talking about who we are, we're going to talk about who we are collectively as an entity, as a church, as a whole.

Who are we? And what do we believe? This is vital. As you go back, go further into and deeper into the manual on the how-to's, you need to make sure you know who you are and what you believe.

There's another statement for you. Inside God's manual for church life are two most basic parts. Who we are and what we believe.

[5:21] These two aspects are crucial to us as a church because it gives us our purpose. It gives us direction.

Our identity and beliefs. You got to know what you bought. What are those components? Or else you go deeper into the manual and you're going to be lost.

You see this throughout the New Testament as well. Even in Galatians we're looking at that.

We're looking at more individual level. But who we are and what we believe is vital to the how-to's. If we don't remember who we are and what we believe, we will easily get sidetracked as to what our purpose is as a church.

We are not a social justice group. We're not advocates of Black Lives Matter. We're not advocates of Black Lives Matter. We're not a pro-life group.

[6:43] We're not an advocate of a political party. We should not be known as those who hate Democrats. I personally have reservations on a Democrat being a Christian.

Because they believe in pro-abortion and killing babies. Yet having said that, just because someone is a conservative doesn't mean they love Christ.

Don't equate those. You can't do that. We do not advocate or push some type of political party.

That's not who we are. We're not a national group either. We don't have the American flag here.

On purpose. I decided to do that on purpose. Because I want to make sure we are disconnecting ourselves with the American way of life and Christianity.

[7:48] Because sometimes people, they mix that together. And then they think Christianity is all about being an American. No, it's not. Jesus was not an American. He was not a patriot.

Sorry. He wasn't. He wasn't. He wasn't. He wasn't. This affects our interactions within our community.

because we need to have godly lives and it affects our corporate life and witness as a church. How are we viewed in this community?

Is it they're Trump supporters? Or is it this? All they do is talk about the Bible. I'm ruffling some feathers, I hope.

Is it, oh, they're mask haters? Or is it, man, all they talk about is this Jesus stuff? What are we known as within this community?

[8:54] I'm not saying it's evil that you don't wear a mask. I'm not saying it's evil that you're pro-life. I'm not saying it's evil that you're a conservative. I'm not saying it's evil that you're a Democrat. There's some Democrats that are pro-life. I'm not saying you're evil that you're a Trump supporter.

But the church has lost its purpose and its direction because they equate these things with Christianity. Brethren, we cannot do that.

And I'm saying this to myself as I'm saying it to you. I really am. We're going to make sure we're a church. It's about who we are and what we believe. We need to be, which we'll see in just a moment, centering on Christ and Him crucified.

God, the living God, has established His church in the world. We are the embodiment of His truth manifested in the person and work of Christ.

We proclaim this truth and it changes our lives. The how, the who, and the what directs us to godly living, which centers us on Christ and Christ alone.

[10:12] If there's anything you get out of these verses, that's exactly what Paul is going to be telling us. And you see these three different questions that are brought up in the passage.

How? Well, she doesn't really talk about the how because the how is the whole letter. Then he's going to talk about who. He's going to talk about what. Notice how we live.

Verses 14 into verse 15. Verse 14. Paul says, I'm writing these things to you. Hoping to come to you quickly or soon. What are these things?

These things, what he's written and what he's going to write. What he will write. It's the whole letter. Let's not forget this. Paul wrote these things to Timothy as his representative to the church.

Paul was, excuse me, Timothy was Paul's right-hand man given the task to give leadership to this church in Ephesus. So it's from Paul to Timothy to the church in Ephesus.

[11:26] Okay? Notice, I'm writing these things to you. I'm going to come. But if I'm delayed, he says there in verse 15, so that you may know how, in the numeric standard, one ought to conduct himself.

The word ought comes from the Greek word *dei*. D-E-I delta epsilon eoda, which means it is necessary. It must happen. This must take place.

This must take place. It's how we are to live. The how. According to what is fitting. How to behave. How to act when we gather together.

Know how you conduct yourself. So that Timothy may know how the church is called to live as members of God's house.

That's where we get, that's where I got the theme for you. God's manual. The how to's. So it's all that Paul has written so far.

[12 : 34] And the rest of his letter. This is how we are to live. To act as God's people. God's assembly. So he says this. And then he goes into saying or speaking about our identity as an entity, as a church, as a group.

Who are we? Okay, we got the hows. This is why he's writing this stuff. Who are we? Who are we? He says, conduct or live in the house of God.

House. The place where God dwells. He dwells here with us as his people. I'm going to go more into that in just a moment. But notice he's pulling out something from the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, God dwelt with his people in the most holy place, right? Exodus chapter 40, the glory of God came.

There's a, and everyone's like, ah, you know. That's where God dwelt. Later, Solomon's temple, God's glory came upon the most holy place there.

[13 : 56] Everyone's like, ah, right? And then when Jesus came, he personally dwelt with his people being called, what did Matthew say?

He shall be called Emmanuel. Which means what? God with us. So Jesus, with us, he's the dwelling of God.

When our Lord ascended, and the Spirit came, the Spirit went and dwelt all those who trusted Christ so that now, the church, God's people, is where God dwells.

He's with us, being in us. We're not merely a building. That's what, and I wanted to read Ephesians, so I thought, you know, this corresponds with it, and that's good.

But we're not just merely a building. Notice he says, in the house of God, God's house.

[15 : 09] We're not just blood, we're family. We are members of God's family. So, as his dwelling place, this letter gives us the manual for directions and how we conduct or live when we gather together and other occasions too, not to the exclusion of that, but it's how we relate to each other.

How do we view each other? Who are we? We're family, members of his house. Notice what he does in the next part.

In the house of God, which is the church. God's house is his church. It's the Greek word, ecclesia, which means assembly or gathering.

The word church is from the Latin, kirk, which comes from the Greek, assembly or gathering. So we're members of God's family.

We are also God's assembly. And this letter provides a manual for church life as an assembled local body of believers called to gather together.

[16 : 31] Notice he says, which is the church of the living God. Another Old Testament concept. He is the one and only God who is the source of life.

He's living and true. The only God. There is no other God. It's only him. He alone has communicated, one writer puts it like this, quote, life and salvation to believers in Christ.

So, we are a live, active, dynamic body displaying God's very presence. life.

Okay, so now, here's a question. I'm going to put it up here in just a second. I'll ask the question and I'll put it up on the screen for you. what is the greatest way we have the presence of God here on earth?

The greatest way we have the presence of God here on earth? So, I'll put it up on the screen. What is the greatest way we have the presence of God here on earth?

[17 : 48] life. It's this. Yeah. A bunch of sinners coming together.

All our weaknesses. It's this coming together. It's not some mystical time up on the mountain.

And I'm not saying that's bad. Some people go up there and they have their Bible and they spend time with the Lord. I'm not, that's not what I'm saying. It's not some mystical thing that you have the very presence of God with you.

No. It's not the cool music. Or they call it the worship time as if that alone is worship, right? Can you feel the sarcasm that's coming out?

Brethren, the greatest way we see the very presence of God is when Christ's body gathers together. It's not in the stars.

[19:03] It's not in creation. No, it's not. It's this. Scars and all. Weaknesses and all. Sin, everything.

We are the greatest way you see the presence of God. It's when we gather together. I'm not saying that. Paul is.

We are the house of God. We're His assembly. That's who we are. What constitutes, I thought of this as I was going through my message, what constitutes a church, an assembly?

It's when a body of believers, they gather together and the word of God is preached. They administer the ordinances. There's church discipline. And the fourth aspect, there's church leadership.

That's a church. That's an assembly. That's a gathering. That's what that is. It's when they gather together. It's not some little Bible study.

[20:11] It's not, that's not what that is. So then, notice, he talks more about who we are, which is the assembly of the living God.

Notice, the next part there, in verse 15, the pillar and support of the truth. Pillar, which means column. We're regarded as reliably providing essential support.

What column does, right? we are the upstanding strength of God's truth. Wow! That's who we are. We're not only family. We're the assembly of the living God and then we're pillars. We're a pillar.

Notice, he says, and support of the truth. Support means foundation, bulwark. protection. We uphold the truth.

[21:18] Remember, a song, a mighty fortress is our God. A mighty fortress is our God. A bulwark never failing. That's God. That's who he is. Paul calls us that.

That's weird. That's who we are. Yeah. That's what he calls us. We are, one writer puts it like this, quote, bastion of truth.

And it's your responsibility, mind you, as members of this church to uphold the gospel. To make sure from this pulpit comes the gospel.

the justice of God, the sinfulness of man, the grace of God and Christ and his death and resurrection and the response to repent and trust Christ.

That is the gospel. You, members, your response to make sure from this pulpit that comes, is preached, is proclaimed. You defend the truth.

[22:25] It is who you are. Defend the truth, which is the structure that undergirds everything about God.

Truth, which is the content of Christianity as the absolute truth. We're pillars.

We're bastions of the truth. of the content of Christianity, of all that's true, absolutely true in Christ. We are its pillar and its true foundation.

We're called to uphold it, manifesting its truth in how we live our lives and our interaction with each other as its people and in this community. That's who we are. Can I put it a couple ways succinctly? So to speak. As God's assembly, we will conduct our lives appropriately if, remember, we're built and owned by God Himself as well as indwelt by Him.

[23:33] That's that first part. And if we remember that we're called to undergird, should be undergird, and hold high God's truth in word and deed in our gatherings.

we're built and owned by God Himself. We're indwelt by Him.

We're called to undergird and hold high God's truth in word and deed as His gather people. This is who we are. This is who you are.

Look at these four words that He brings up again, if you would humor me.

Kaus, church, pillar, support. So when we gather, here's another statement for you, kind of a collective summation statement.

[24:39] When we gather together as God's people, it should be an atmosphere of grace, warmth, and belonging, alive with God's very presence, and proclaiming and instructing each other in the truth.

That's who we are. One writer says we should be about belonging, abounding, and believing. We need to remember this.

We're coming on the end of 2020 and starting 2021. So this is a an exhortation message to us as a church.

for us to hold on in this coming year who we are because it affects our purpose, it affects our goals, it affects our direction, the trajectory of this church, what we do, why we do the things that we do, how, it affects that.

Who we are. Who we are. And then verse 16 he moves into what we believe. Notice he says, and by common confession, numeric standard, literally it's confessively great or undeniably great is the mission of godliness.

[26:13] this is what's most important. The mystery of godliness. This is vital. Notice how Paul does not hold to dead orthodox truth.

Sound doctrine should inevitably lead to sound living, sound conduct. They go together. That's why these three are together. The how, the who, and the what.

They merge together. You see him kind of merging them together and mixing together. Notice it affects our lives because he says confessively great is the mystery of Christ.

No. Confessively great is the mystery of the gospel. No. Confessively great is the mystery of godliness. Isn't it interesting?

He says godliness? Well, that's kind of weird. Why godliness? Godliness means our beliefs in action. The outward evidence of faith in Christ.

[27:22] He's used that word before in previous verses, previous chapters. Why does he do this? Truth changes the way we live.

So it's not simply the mystery of Christ or of the gospel. The mystery of godliness brought about as we trust Christ and what he's done which will inevitably lead to right or godly living.

What we believe affects how we live. So what's the deal with this statement?

It's a statement of the first century, first century church. Maybe this was a hymn, a short confession they recited. Nobody really knows for sure.

Everyone wants to speculate. Oh, this is what this is. We don't know. It just marks the truth. Let's just take it for what it is. Seems to be three couplets.

[28:30] The contrast between flesh and spirit, angels and nations, world and glory. I took it kind of like this. It's Christ's work accomplished, Christ's work proclaimed, Christ's work solidified.

That's kind of how I viewed it. It's really a short confession of Christ's work. Interesting too in the Greek, each stanza, except where you see, beheld by angels or seen, each stanza ends in the preposition in, or e, epsilon, nu, but they're all in the same form.

It's just almost like a thing where they were easy to remember type thing maybe. So now notice how it begins the first phrase.

He who was revealed in the flesh, obviously this is Jesus, which is important because the mystery of godliness centers on a person.

One writer says Christ is, quote, the center and core of truth and godliness, end quote. all that we do as a church should be centered around the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30:01] All that we do as a church should be centered upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. The one who was revealed in flesh.

That's the incarnation. The Latin means in flesh. Incarnation is Latin for in flesh. Notice how this short confession begins with Christ's humiliation and ends with glorification.

The one revealed in flesh, notice the next phrase, vindicated in the Spirit. This is talking about his claim to be the Messiah and God's Son.

It seems to be the Holy Spirit, the one who vindicated Jesus' claim throughout his life as he lived and worked in the Spirit's power. The phrase assumes the death of Messiah on the cross for us. Notice the next phrase, beheld by angels. angels or seen by angels. What does this refer to? Well, they were the only ones who saw the resurrection, who also became the first ones, the first messengers of his resurrection.

[31:20] You see that in Matthew chapter 28. So this truly confirms that Jesus was crucified and killed but then resurrected from the dead. That's part of that confession that we believe.

Notice, proclaimed among the nations or preached among the nations or all peoples. It was a message not just for Jews but for all people groups and the gospel is still being proclaimed among the nations of the world.

And notice the response it says believed in the world. This is the response of Jesus being proclaimed to all the world. This is the world of humans has responded in faith trusting Christ.

And then taken in glory, taken his ascension and exaltation when he sat down at the right hand of glory given great glory because of his accomplished work.

He was exalted and given all authority and power. Remember Matthew chapter 28? This is our important confession.

[32:37] This is the gist of it, what we believe. Anyway, there's other things involved in that as well, of course, yeah, of course, there's there. But we undeniably hold this as most important, the gospel.

the justice of God. We are sinners who need to be saved. God sent Jesus who lived, he died, he rose. The response, repent and trust Christ.

If you're here and you don't know Jesus Christ, you should turn and trust Christ. Trust him, that's the gospel. You should respond, you should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel. It's so important, it changes the way we live as we gather together as God's people, as God's house.

Who we are and what we believe affects how we function as a church. There's a connection. Who we are, what we believe affects how.

[33:45] That's what Paul's trying to say. It's this truth that shapes our conduct before our living God. And notice how all of it centers upon the person and work of Christ, who is the Lord and Savior of his church.

One writer puts it like that. The truth changes how we live. At least it should. It's God's manual for church life. When we gather together, and even beyond that too, inside God's manual for church life are two most basic parts, who we are and what we believe.

These two aspects are crucial to us as a church because it gives us purpose, it gives us direction, our identity, and our beliefs.

if we don't remember who we are and what we believe, we will easily get sidetracked as to what our purpose is as a church.

This is perfect for us, I believe. Perfect for us as we end this crazy, solemn, and in some cases sad year.

[35:09] And begin a new one. What will happen with this whole virus ordeal? I don't know.

What will take place if Biden gets sworn into office? He's not sworn in yet. What's going to happen?

How are we going to handle things?

Oh, cottonwood Bible church. We need to remember our identity and our beliefs because that will affect how we do this thing called church.

Our purpose, our goals, our details, our acts. And not just here when we gather, but how we presented ourselves to the community, to the world.

It affects that. who we are, what we believe. Will you take a moment and pray with me? And Father, we take a moment to pray, asking for your grace.

[36:23] We see this challenge laid before us, and it's daunting. We're just a bunch of sinners gathering together, thanking you that you've been so gracious and kind to save us when you didn't have to.

Thank you. Great Father, we pray that as we gather together as your people, help us to remember who we are, help us to remember what we believe, and affect how we interact with each other, and how we live in this world, this crazy, messed up world, so lost and fallen.

May we be people of grace, who give grace to each other, because you've been so gracious to us in your Son.

And may we be proclaimers of this grace, proclaimers of Christ Jesus, everything that we do center on Christ. Help us.

Spirit, we need you to help us with this. So that's what we pray. And I encourage you, if you would, just take these few moments.

[38:01] We'll do a few moments of silence. We're going to sing a couple songs and pray. we'll do a few moments of ministry. We'll do a few moments of ministry. But take these few moments, maybe to reflect upon what we've read.

I even want to encourage you, pray for us as a church. Pray for members and for those considering membership too.

Pray for us, so God will protect us, so we be bastions of truth. We'd uphold the gospel. But fill your minds with truth at these few moments.

Just fill your mind with God's truth. And let your mind ponder and think of these things. Do that now, please, I ask. One time■ me.