

# Gospel shaped church

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 20 February 2022

Preacher: Aaron Reeves

[0:00] Well good morning. It's a fair few faces here today. It's nice to see you all again.! So we've been going through the book of 1 Timothy. It's a letter from the Apostle Paul who at this point is an older man.

And he's writing to Timothy, a much younger man who is in Ephesus, with commands for Timothy to teach and bring some order to the church there.

And I have this tendency to forget to click, so I'm going to grab this clicker, keep it firmly in my hand. The letter contains specific instructions on how the church should operate.

We've established that this is applicable to not just the church in Ephesus, but to the church in general as a whole. It's you and me. And here's some things that we've heard about so far.

Oh, where am I? Okay, there we go. Here's some things we've heard about so far in his previous teachings. Keeping it authentic, Timothy was to confront false teachers, but with a primary task to promote love.

[1:13] We heard that it's an invitation into a relationship. It's not a set of rules as such. A gospel-shaped life.

Christ came to save sinners, which is you and me. We can seek his favor through repentance. And the presence of God's grace is shown not in a list of sins that we have turned away from, but how we love.

A gospel-shaped church. Did I get that right? Anyway, we learned that corporal prayer was important. Prayer is pleasing to God.

And evangelism plays a vital role. Gospel-shaped gender. This was a very intense sermon.

We had some good discussions on this. We heard about created order and how the gospel takes us back to creation, to that greater order. That there are a set of roles in place and things expected from people fulfilling those roles.

[2:19] And lastly, as we heard last week from David, authentic leadership. These were qualifications for overseers and deacons in the church. We heard something of that in our reading today.

So I thought I'd cover these points. Because as we approach this text, you've probably noticed that the format breaks.

What I mean is the format is different to what we're used to seeing. And that's a very important reason for that. So let's come to our text now.

So here's a list of things that we'll be looking at from our text today. Some things are implied. The nature of instructions. So there are things that are assumed when we're given instructions.

The purpose of Paul's instructions. So the reasons for his teachings. Instructions for whom? Who are these instructions intended for?

[3:24] We look at a church with purpose. Paul tells us that the church is something specific to do. So we're going to look into that. The mystery of godliness.

I can't tell you how many hours I spent looking into this. It's such a complicated and very difficult concept to understand. And I hope that God's blessed me with revealing that to me.

So verse 16 is some really, depending on what translation you look at, some quite cryptic language. So we're going to look at that. I'm going to see if we can decode that. And lastly, Paul bursts into gospel song.

I thought I'd put it that way. It's such a wonderful image, isn't it? Who likes musicals here? Yeah, everybody does, doesn't it? We all like a musical. Yeah. One of my favorites is Greece.

People bursting into song. There's usually really good reasons. A lot of joy behind it, usually. Or even sadness. People are motivated when they burst into song. So 1 Timothy 3, 14.

[4:35] So the nature of instructions. So the text opens with Paul giving Timothy a reason why he's sending instructions. So Paul is covering his bases.

He was obviously hoping to join Timothy in Ephesus. But he's written this letter in case he was delayed. So we can gather then that the verses that follow are Paul's reasons and motivations for the instructions.

So we're going to think for a moment about the nature of instructions. It's important to think about these. Instructions can change the dynamics of how people interact with each other, can't they? It's not something that's just an on-the-fly discussion. It actually gets right down into the way that people interact. So when we order something online, I don't know if anybody's ever had this experience.

I have plenty of times. And it comes from a country, let's say, far away. So we assume that the instructions will help us assemble or use the product well and not cause us problems.

[5:49] So we assume that instructions are going to be helpful. It assumes, instructions assume, an ability to listen and learn.

So instructions assume what's called, when you learn, I'm learning to teach English, receptive skills. So in a teaching world, that's listening or reading for the purpose of learning.

So instructions are there to teach us things that we wouldn't normally know or to remind us of things that we have known. Ultimately, when it comes to instructions, what we assume is trustworthiness.

If you're carrying out instructions, you would normally trust not just the instructions, but the source.

We trust, don't we, that when we get instructions, that the source is reliable.

That the source has an authority on the subject, that they know what they're talking about. So there's an assumption that behind the instructions, there's good purpose.

[7:01] And in the same way, the people giving the instructions would trust that the job will be done properly. So you might be wondering, right off the bat, how do I know that I can trust the Bible's instructions?

This is a sermon in and of itself, so I'm just going to touch on this very briefly. It's really for the purpose, if you're joining us, someone at home might be joining us in the middle of this series. 2 Timothy 3, 16-17 says, All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So these instructions are written by Paul, but they are the word of God himself, the ultimate authority. God knows everything, he created everything, he is the ultimate authority to be giving instructions.

So we know that these are good instructions, from a good authority, for a good purpose. Ultimately, they are trustworthy. Speaking of trustworthy, when I was a young lad, I was in the Sea Cadet Corps.

[8:23] I don't know if any of you have heard of that. And with my rank as a leading cadet, I would often teach the younger cadets, the new guys that came in.

And one of the instructions that I used to get was to send them off to find milk for the sea cat. I don't know if anybody knows what a sea cat is.

Steve probably does. It's not a cat, it's a ferry. It's a ship. So we had a good laugh at their expense. These weren't official Sea Cadet instructions.

That was me being badly behaved. The new kids didn't know that. So the point I'm trying to make is it's always good to check the handbook.

It's good practice to check for yourself what God says in the Bible. So what are the purpose of Paul's instructions?

[9:23] Excuse me for a second. The purpose of Paul's instructions.

Well, Paul is straight to the point in this, in the text. He's looking back at the instructions from the previous verses. He says that the instructions are there to tell us how people ought to conduct themselves or behave in God's household, which is the church of the living God.

It's interesting, isn't it, this dynamic of being in a household. Households always operate in their own particular way. It depends on who occupies the house.

Particularly if they're from another culture. You may have experienced this when going to dine with a foreign family. Or if you come to live in England and you've never been here before.

You suddenly become incredibly aware of manners, don't you? You start thinking about things as really important things that you've never thought about before.

[10:35] Should I take my shoes off? Is it okay to stop eating now? Why didn't I wear the socks without the holes? That's happened to me a few times.

At the bottom of this discomfort is the concern that you might displease them. Because we appreciate what a privilege it is to be invited.

Or maybe we don't want to seem ungrateful for the offer. Either way, the solution to this is fairly straightforward. The solution to this is you get to know the occupiers of the household, don't you? Then you'll know how to please them. How much more then should we be aware of the privilege of being called to be part of God's household?

The response to eat at his table. We know that God-pleasing behavior doesn't just happen.

[11:40] If it did, there'd be no need for the instructions, would there? It'd come naturally. We could all go about our business and we'd have a healthy church and nothing to worry about.

We know that's not reality, don't we? That's not human nature because we're all sinners. So God has told us through his word about himself and how his household is to be ordered.

This requires a response from his people. So this means effort. People in God's household need to be willing. Need to be committed.

Most of all, we need to be obedient to the word of God. That's everyone, isn't it? No one is exempt from that when they're in the church. Men, women, deacons, elders, children.

Because we're all sinners, this means that we're not going to get it right every time. There's room to grow and learn.

[12:45] Instructions for whom? So who are the instructions for?

It says right there in a verse, doesn't it? Instructions are for people in God's household, which is the church of the living God. This term living God is used as a distinction of the real God from idols and false gods.

It's mentioned many times in the Old Testament. These people belong to the very real and active creator of the heavens and the earth, the Alpha and the Omega.

Here's what we need to notice. So we need to notice that the people in God's household are defined here as the church.

This word, it means assembly. So it's not the building, is it? It's not the building on Viaduct Road that's the church.

[13:53] It's God's people themselves. It's the assembly. Ephesians 2, 19-22 says, So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

So when you assemble bricks and mortar, they don't grow, do they? Bricks and physical things like that just don't grow.

It's something that has to be living that grows. I built a fire pit in my back garden and I didn't bother measuring it first and it ended up massive.

I wish that would shrink, but it's not going to. It's not going to move. It is what it is. So structures can't grow in that sense, but people can.

[15:13] 1 Corinthians 6, 19-20 says this, Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

People grow by the Spirit. We grow together as a church. So if we're God's church here together at Viaduct Road, then we're God's church when we're at home.

We're God's church when we go for pizza, when we're at Dale's Down, when we're at work. God's instructions are for all God's people, the church, everywhere at all times.

Now not negotiable. This forces us to ask an important and sometimes uncomfortable question.

What do people see when they see us in our everyday situations?

That is an interesting question, isn't it? We often think about inviting people to church, to see what church is like.

[16:32] But are we aware that in normal situations, when we interact with these people, we're taking church to them in some way? That's both an exciting and rather unnerving prospect.

Because in the same way, the church goes with you wherever you are, so do God's instructions. And so does Christ, who is in us. At the beginning of this chapter, we saw how the home was the proving ground for overseers.

One of the very qualifications for this role is obedience outside of the church building. God cares about obedience for all his people.

Instructions aren't to be ignored. A church with purpose. So church has a purpose.

It's described in the text as a pillar and foundation of the truth. Let's look at that imagery.

[17:42] There's a couple of pictures there behind me. A pillar. It's a support. Its job is to uphold and protect the main part of the structure. It's important, but it's not the main attraction.

Probably David could tell us a lot more about pillars than I would know, but that's the very, very basics. The foundation. It's a similar principle. I'd like to state, it's not the same as origin.

Because in English, modern day English, we can use those words sometimes interchangeably.

What it doesn't mean is that we are our founders. We're not founders in the sense of we've invented it.

Jesus said to Peter on this rock, I will build my church. The foundation, again, is an image of a base. It's a support for something bigger.

I thought maybe it's a bit like primer to a coat of paint. The primer doesn't look like much. I don't know if you've ever used primer. When you're going to paint something, quite often paint doesn't stick to the surface.

[18:48] You sand it down and you put a bunch of primer over it and then paint will stick and it will do what it's intended to do. It's there to grab hold of the paint and display it properly as it was intended to be seen in all its beauty.

And you know when the primer isn't doing its job because the paint doesn't stick. So the primer is upholding the paint. So these images of foundation are in a way what the people are holding up. What are the people holding up? What are they proudly displaying? What are they the foundation of? The text says, the truth. There we go.

The truth. Am I? Yeah, that's right. That is the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ which we've already heard a lot about this morning in song, haven't we?

This is the truth of Jesus Christ as God's son defeating death and the hope of salvation. The gospel truth.

[20:04] So that's the image. God's people as supports holding up and protecting God's truth. Here's an interesting question. So I'm sure David could tell us what would happen to a building if we took away the supports.

Yeah, it would come crashing down wouldn't it? Does that happen with God's truth of the gospel?

No. Absolutely not. Isaiah 48 says, the grass withers and the flowers fall but the word of our God endures forever. God doesn't need his people to uphold the truth.

He chooses his people to uphold the truth. It's God that makes the primer good. It's God that keeps the pillars strong.

So wherever we go, wherever we go, we're not just the church. We are the church with Christ at the center and our behavior as the church of the living God represents not just his church but his gospel truth as savior to the human race.

[21:25] And so we come to this really complicated line. Verse 16, the mystery of godliness. Paul goes on to say, beyond all question, I gather

this isn't the same in the NIV.

I have the new NIV. This is I think where I was reading this from. Beyond all question, maybe someone could tell me that actually. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great. I found this, as I said, confusing.

Hours and hours and hours of trying to wrap my head around this. I found the ESV translation to be most helpful which says, great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness.

When we think of godliness, we tend to think of people, don't we? It's how we tend to use the term. But actually, I think Paul is referring directly back to the gospel truth of Jesus as savior and saying, great is this mystery of this godly plan.

But there's still a lot of interesting language here. It doesn't answer all our questions, does it? So let's break down a sentence into really simple terms for people like me who struggle.

[22:36] Paul says, beyond all question, your translation might say confessedly or without controversy, sorry, not controversy, controversy, I'm turning American, meaning what he is about to say is without a doubt agreed upon and the context we know is in God's church.

God's church agrees beyond all question. The mystery, now here's the sticking point, mystery. So you might understand mystery to mean something that cannot be solved, something we can't know.

This word mystery has actually a bit of a different meaning in the Greek, so I understand it.

Mysterion, apparently, that's how it's pronounced or close to. It actually means something that was hidden but has been revealed.

The implication that it's been revealed by God. It's a revelation. I don't know if anybody's seen Poirot. Yeah? Yeah, people have seen Poirot.

Everybody's seen Poirot. David Soushet, he's great, isn't he? So the secret is hidden all through the show, right up until the correct moment and the truth is revealed.

[23:49] It's uncovered. I was going to do a Poirot impression. I'm not going to do that. I won't inflict that on you. The mystery is the truth uncovered of godliness as we discussed.

I believe this would be meaning the godly gospel plan is great. It is to say it's mega, mighty, magnificent. Just, when I say mega, I'm not drawing on a 90s term, that's the actual Greek word. Massive, huge, brilliant. God's church agrees unanimously the revelation of this godly gospel plan of salvation is great.

This brings us to the most important question of all time. What is this revelation that brings about salvation?

verse 16. Paul bursts into gospel song.

[25:03] This is where, as we were saying earlier, we see a break in the writing, the writing style. People commonly believe that this text was a hymn or a song known to the church.

I won't present all the evidence for that. There is a lot of evidence for that. It's easy to find if you Google it, but you can see some clues here in the text. We see it's arranged like a song. The language is poetic and it's the common confession.

This is a very helpful word. It's in some of the translations. The common confession of God's church. We have our own hymns that act in that kind of way, don't we? One of my favorites is from the grave he arose.

We don't sing that as often as I like, but it's a common confession. So what is this revelation? The first part of the text tells us the revelation is a he.

He appeared in the flesh. The word here means to make visible. He wasn't created in the flesh. He already was.

[26:07] He preceded the flesh. He came before it, but was revealed in it. John 1 verses 1 to 2 says, In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. John 1 14 tells us who this is.

If you haven't already guessed, the word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father, full of grace and truth.

the answer is, who is this person? Jesus. The answer is Jesus. The answer is always Jesus. Paul is saying, Great indeed, we confess, is the son of God, Jesus Christ, in whom the long plan salvation for his people was revealed.

His plan was in place from the very beginning of creation. the living God always planned to reveal his son in the flesh and bring redemption to his church.

[27:30] Paul goes on as he recounts the gospel in a six line song of praise, with each line telling us something of God's son and the gospel.

Here's the song. He appeared in the flesh. He appeared, was revealed to the world in the flesh. God was made man and was both God and man. John 1.10 says, he was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. the world became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

The world did not recognize him, they did not receive him. It said they executed him. Acts 13.28 says, though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed.

[28:35] There was no grounds for the execution. And so he was vindicated. justified by the Spirit. This is a quite a difficult text.

I found it quite difficult. Mostly because I didn't really understand the word vindicated, but that's more my ignorance than it is anything else. It's not that commonly used a word. It's not something we use every day.

It means to be cleared of blame. Christ was blameless. 1 Peter 2.22 says, he committed no sin and no deceit was in his mouth.

This is a very important verse because if no deceit was found in his mouth, then he was vindicated by the Spirit.

His claim to be son of God was affirmed. He was, Jesus was, who he said he was. This was affirmed.

[29:32] And Jesus did what he said he would do. Death could not hold him. And on the third day he rose again. Here's in verses from Matthew 16, verses 16 to 17.

What about you? Jesus asked. Who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. Jesus replied, blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but my Father in heaven.

Verse 21 of Matthew 16 says, from that time on Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes, that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Jesus did what he said he would do. He was seen by angels. There are varying thoughts on this part of the text. I tend to go along the following line, which is, the scene by angels implies that this is a follow-on from the thought of resurrection to act as a witness.

Angels saw the resurrection. Matthew 28, 5-7 says, Suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, rolled away the stone and sat on it.

[30:57] His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were as white as snow. The guards trembled, in fear of him and became dead men, became like dead men. Sorry, but the angel said to the woman, do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, he is risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.

There you will see him. See, I have told you. The angel had observed the resurrection. He came down at just the right time to demonstrate what he saw to the two women.

Jesus was preached among the nations. A response to Jesus' resurrection is to share the good news. Death is defeated. Jesus commanded his disciples specifically to go and make disciples of all nations.

We see that happening in the book of Acts, chapter 8, verses 4-6. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

[32:09] When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. He was preached among the nations.

He was believed on in the world. This is people's response to the preaching. Same book, same chapter, Acts 8, verse 12, says, when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

They believed the gospel. He was taken up in glory. Just coming to the end now. Acts, chapter 1, verses 9-11 says, and after he had said these things, he was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received him out of their sight.

And as they were gazing intently into the sky, while he was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in just the same way you have watched him go into heaven. The ascension of Jesus into heaven was documented and witnessed by the disciples.

[33:26] And they are authoritatively told that he will come back. He will come back. He'll come back to judge the world. But for those, there is church, for those that are in Christ, there is no condemnation.

Jesus himself paid the price. And our reward is eternity in God's house. No pain and no death forever. This is the gospel and the truth of the good news.

As we come to the end of the chapter, here is something of what we've seen and learned, hopefully. Here is what I have learned. God's people need to stick carefully to God's word, his instructions. They are not arbitrary. They have purpose. They are good. They invite you to come and know the master of the house. Jesus, the master of the house.

They invite you to come and sit at his table. Our text today is only three verses. Like a fool, I looked at those and thought, oh, it's only three verses.

[34:34] Let me tell you, they're the longest three verses, in my opinion, because they stretch over the entire history of existence. Planned from the very beginning, this is what God has done.

This is what this text says. God himself was revealed in the flesh to pay the price for the sins of humanity, to rescue his people from the plague of sin and death, ready for when he comes back as king to collect them.

This is the message of hope that we have as the church of the living God, that we are to hold up wherever we are. So it's no wonder that Paul's response was to rejoice in song, telling people and holding up the gospel truth because it is the power of God that brings salvation to all who believe. As we finish now, I think what I'd like to do is say together, we could say out loud, those last verses, which is a good song to sing.

Sing it if you like. Let's say it out loud. Amen. Praise be to God.