

The Priority of Gospel Living

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[0 : 0 0] Open your Bibles, if you would, please, to 1 Timothy chapter 3. If you're using the Pew Bible, it's on page 992.

I don't know if you are the kind of person that likes to read instructions I like the picture, I don't really like to read through the instructions, and so if the pictures are good, then the finished product will generally look the way it's supposed to.

Maybe you're a picture kind of person too. The truth is that God has made us picture people. God has made us the kind of people who respond well, remember good pictures.

You've heard the saying or the phrase, a picture is worth a thousand words, right? And there are probably instances in your life where you've been at certain places and you've seen the majestic sunrise or a sunset, or you've stood at the base of a mountain sea and you're like, wow, this spectacle is just incredible!

Or like for our family, one of the most memorable times for us is being out in California in the Sequoia National Park and kind of elevated on the top of this cliff, looking at the stars and just the majesty of the stars in the Milky Way.

[1 : 3 7] It was just breathtaking. And to try to describe such scenes in words shows the limitations of those words. Really, the only way to even come close, it's still limited, is to take a picture.

You can't just take it for me. You've got to see it for yourself. Well, you realize that God has made us picture people. And God, by His grace, has provided good pictures for us to communicate about Himself and to communicate the Gospel.

So that, in Psalm 19, we read, the heavens declare the glory of God. The sky proclaims His handiwork. All that we see about God in creation testifies to the wonder of who God is and provides a picture, as it were, of who that God is.

We see in creation His power, His beauty, His care for creatures. We see His wisdom, His design, His sovereignty, His tenderness.

All comes through so that in Romans 1, we find that we are able to witness all of the divine attributes of God that are clearly seen in creation.

[3 : 0 2] But pictures are limited. Pictures of God in creation only tell about this power. They don't communicate the message of who this God is or how to engage Him in relationship.

So God sent us a picture of Himself through His Son, Jesus. This Christ figure who came in the flesh, who dwelt among us, and who provided an accurate, telling picture of God in the flesh.

When Jesus came to earth, He became man and dwelt among us. And He came in physicality. He was accessible. He was present. This portrait of God that was clearly seen in the person and life in ministry of Jesus Christ.

And His unchanging message was communicated through the power of His words. Even when Jesus taught, the truths that He taught were always connected to pictures.

These illustrations or parables that Jesus would use, drawn out of culture so that people could see in their mind's eye these complex truths drawn out even from the surroundings.

[4 : 17] So Jesus would talk about the birds of the air. Or He would talk about the flowers of the field. Or Jesus would talk about the sower in the seed. He would talk about the vine in its branches.

Or the fig tree in its fruit. Or the shepherd in the sheep. And as you can almost imagine, as Jesus is walking His way from one place to the other, He's drawing out these truths, even in the pictures that He sees around Him.

Each of these pictures, of course, was meant to point to something greater, deeper, and better. It was meant to illustrate this restored life with God and all that God offered through Jesus Himself.

These pictures were meant to be memorable and tangible. But of course, that greatest picture was Christ Himself. Jesus, who came as a man, fully man and fully God.

This perfect portrait of one who had deep intimacy with the Father. This one whose union was possible and allows us to enjoy union with God as well through Christ's death and resurrection.

[5 : 29] Forgiveness of sin. Cleansing over because of the brokenness of our life. The fellowship that is now restored back to God because of what Christ has accomplished for us.

And a new life that we can enjoy because of the resurrection life of Christ. Christ's life was this picture. But something that Jesus said that was profound.

Something maybe even a bit surprising. The night before He was crucified, He's speaking with His disciples in John 16, verse 7. And He says this. He says, Nevertheless, I tell you the truth.

It is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Helper, the Holy Spirit, will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.

Somehow, the disciples would be in a better place, a better condition, when Jesus was gone. Because now the Holy Spirit would not only indwell them and help them to communicate, empower them for the work.

[6 : 34] The Holy Spirit would help guarantee their salvation. Would help sanctify their spiritual life. Would help them be the kind of gospel picture that now Jesus was calling every believer, every follower of God to engage in.

They were to engage the world with a message. But they were to engage the world not only with a message that they say, but a message of life. A life that showed this transformation of the Holy Spirit working in them and changing them from the inside out.

So that Paul will say to the church of Philippi in Philippians 1, verse 27. He says, He says, Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

So that whether I come and see you or I'm absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

That gospel message was punctuated by a worthy walk. It was the work of the Holy Spirit in their life that would show this portrait of the gospel coming through, that was accompanied by words that supported the life that was seen.

[7 : 50] So our life is a picture. A life is a picture of either the gospel for good or for bad, depending upon how consistent our life demonstrates that picture.

This morning as we turn our gaze to 1 Timothy 3, beginning in verse 14, really, I want to focus on this passage to help draw out for us the beauty of this gospel life that God has called us to.

And we're going to see the life and message of God's church here in verses 14 to 16. The life and message of God's church. Let me read for us, beginning in verse 14.

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, taken up in glory.

[9 : 03] We're going to see the two-fold way in which the church will powerfully portray the gospel. First, let's look to the church as pointing to God by our behavior.

Pointing to God by our behavior or by our conduct. He says that here in verse 15. If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.

The instructions in this letter that Paul gives come with purpose. He uses this phrase, so that. He wants Timothy to understand that God has a beautiful design for the church.

The purpose clause provides this clear instruction. And Timothy is not without this instruction or design. And as Paul has given now this instruction to Timothy, this instruction is also for us.

So why does this church exist? What are its priorities? How does the church carry out God's mission? Well, one way in which it does this is by behavior.

[10 : 08] To live, to conduct themselves. This way of life. This present pattern of behavior that marks us as people. This transformed life that shows a consistency with the standard that God has set.

And the evidence of the Spirit's work in our life to help us obey. Our lives illustrate the truths we believe. We have said throughout our times together, you are what you believe.

Not just what you say you believe, but your confession, the things that you actually believe, will bear itself out as you put them to practice.

Our life illustrates the truths that we believe. And so it becomes a picture of the gospel to the world. So we see Paul addresses several ways in which the church's behavior points to God.

First, it is the household of God. So our behavior points to the fact that God is present. That God is present with us. This concept of God's presence among his people would have blown the first century mind of the Jew.

[11 : 21] Because every concept that they had of God's presence among his people would have been in the temple itself. And the idea that God could dwell among his people is maybe captured for us well in Isaiah 66, verse 1.

Where the prophet says this, Thus says the Lord, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What is the house that you would build for me? And what is the place of my rest?

The house of God was so unimaginable because of how great and distinct and all-encompassing God was. And yet, this house of God, this temple that the people of Israel got to enjoy, was a picture of that reality of God's presence among his people.

But even the temple, the structure of that temple, its ornateness, its separateness, its holiness, it was inaccessible to outsiders, and even in the places of the temple were distant to the normal Jewish person, the people of Israel.

The Holy of Holies and the holy place being set apart from the people of Israel. It was a rigid reminder of the standards that God had set for his people. The separation of God, the holy standard of God, and being distinct.

[12 : 44] But with the death of Christ, the veil of separation in the Holy of Holies was brought down. And accessibility in the presence of God was made possible for every believer.

So that in Ephesians 2, verses 21 and 22, the Apostle Paul will communicate to this church of Ephesus this truth, and saying, In whom the whole structure is speaking about the body of Christ, the believers, 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. It is this truth of God's presence among his people residing in them and with them, that demonstrates that the church belongs to God, but also as his temple, as the household of God, that we belong to each other.

There is something quite amazing about the work of God on the cross, in drawing us into fellowship with him, but also drawing us into fellowship with one another. We are the household of God.

We demonstrate the presence of God among his people. Something unimaginable to the first century. Second, it is the church of the living God.

[14 : 06] The church of the living God. So it demonstrates that God is active. It shows that God is active among his people. We saw this identity or phrase or title used of God throughout the book of Daniel.

The fact that he is constantly pointed to as the living God, which demonstrates his position of authority, his engagement with the world, his activity among his people, that he is not only present with them, but he is involved in their life.

He is the living God. He is active. It is this quality of God that Peter will address when asked the question, Who do men say that I am?

And in Matthew 16, 16, Peter says, You are the Christ, the son of the living God. Not the dead God, but the living God who is active and present among his people, engaged in their affairs.

And then in Hebrews, the writer of the Hebrews says in chapter 10, verses 30 and 31, For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine. I will repay.

[15 : 17] And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God is the creator of life. God is the giver of physical and spiritual life.

We owe every part of our being to him. And because he is the living God who imparts life to his people, He is thus over all and supreme.

This living God is present with his people, dwells with them. And we, as God's people, have the privilege and responsibility of representing that living, active, engaged God to the world.

He is present in our life. He is an active God. And so when the people see the church, they should see a picture of God in the gospel.

This portrait of what God has intended to do among his creation from the beginning. And that is to create living souls, living subjects that are worshiping him and following after him.

[16 : 19] Third, it's the pillar and buttress of the truth. So the church will demonstrate that it shows that God is truth. He's present. He's active. He's truth.

Of course, Jesus will say this of himself in John 14, verse 6. Jesus said to them, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is the one way to God through the truth of the gospel, the truth of what Jesus came to accomplish. The truth that Jesus communicated about our brokenness and that we are all sinners and separated from the glory of God.

And only through faith in Christ can we have access. Our world needs to hear this truth. Our world needs for the church to be the repository, the preserving agent of truth.

The truth, the church or the group of individuals who not only preserve it but defend it. Who are willing to boldly speak it without compromise, without distortion, without fail.

[17 : 29] The truth is the only means by which the world will enjoy forgiveness of sin and fellowship with God. If the church will fail in this mission of truth telling and truth preserving, how will the world ever hear?

Next, not only does the church point to God by our behavior, the church points to God by its message or its confession. Verse 16, great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness.

He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. This message we have been given is essential.

It's essential. It's only message that leads to true godliness. Fellowship with God, power to obey, a future hope of salvation in heaven.

But this mystery, what is this mystery that the apostle Paul is referring to? Paul speaks about this mystery a number of times throughout his letter to the church of Ephesus.

[18 : 41] And perhaps the best summary definition is found in Ephesians chapter 3, verses 3 to 6. It says this, The mystery was made known to me by revelation.

As I have written briefly, when you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

This mystery of those who had once been alienated, had once been strangers, had once been separated from the covenant of Israel, and cut off from fellowship with God because of the work of Christ.

As John read from Ephesians chapter 2 earlier this morning, Because of Christ's work on the cross, he gave us peace. Through his person, through his death, through his resurrection, we can enjoy peace with God, fellowship with him, forgiveness of sin.

Christ opened the door, as it were, not only to the Jews, but also to Gentiles. To everyone who walks in every corner of the planet, every nation and tribe and tongue and language can come to Christ the same way, through faith in his Son.

[20 : 04] Paul will summarize this mystery in verse 16. We find here his incarnation. He was manifested in the flesh.

Jesus became a man and dwelt among his people. We find his confirmation as it were. We find the Holy Spirit was a special agent of help throughout his ministry.

We see the Holy Spirit showing up at Jesus' baptism. We see the Holy Spirit taking Christ away and helping him and proving him and testing him through the wilderness experience of temptation.

Jesus, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, worked great signs and wonders among people, testified to the work of God in his life.

It was the Holy Spirit, as we find in Romans chapter 1, who was essential and vital power to raise Jesus from the dead. The confirmation and validation of the Spirit's power was seen throughout the ministry of Christ.

[21 : 12] His celebration. Angels who announced his birth. The angels who announced his birth. They were there with the shepherds. They're on that silent hill out on the outskirts of Bethlehem saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men.

It was the angels who ministered to Christ after the wilderness experience. It was angels that ministered to Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. It would be angels who would sit on top of the empty tomb and would share the message with the women that Jesus was risen from the dead.

It's angels who are in heaven, even now, giving honor and glory and praise to the resurrected and exalted Savior. We see his proclamation.

He's proclaimed among the nations. The work of this gospel will go forth. It will have its way in hearts and lives of individuals. It will draw them to faith.

We see the invitation here. Believed on in the world. Speaking of the work of the gospel in the nations. As this invitation of salvation is made among the peoples. And people come to see and know the truth and the work of the Spirit.

[22 : 25] And opening blind eyes and drawing them to faith in God. And finally, his exaltation. He's taken up in glory. Now he's seated at the right hand of God.

Angels and authorities and powers being subjected to him. Could this be a chiasm? And I can't speak on this authoritatively.

But as you look at chapter 3, verse 16, you can almost begin to see how the lines of this hymn or the lines of this song, as it were, are kind of parallel to one another.

So that the first and last and the second and second to last. And the two middle phrases seem to be parallel to one another. We see there at the beginning his humiliation that is followed by his exaltation taken up in glory.

This work of God who will exalt those who are humble. Vindicated by the Spirit. I think of Peter's message on the day of Pentecost where he says, A man attested to you by signs and wonders which God did among you.

[23 : 33] And because of the attestation of the work and message of Christ, it led to believing in the world. Which would mean that these two middle phrases would stand as kind of the climax or the summary, kind of the main statement of this little hymn.

Sent or seen by angels proclaimed among the nations. Angels, as we know, the word angel means messenger. These are the messengers of God.

Connected to the proclamation of the saints of the gospel around the world. And so drawing to this center, it could be that really the Apostle Paul is staking another claim to say, You are the pillar and buttress of the truth.

With a mission and a priority to proclaim Christ among the nations. Of course, we know that from other parts of scripture. Direct attention that is given.

This priority of proclamation. Not only through the message of the gospel. But especially through the changed life. The behavior of God's people.

[24 : 44] Of course, this mystery is the message of Christ's saving work. This morning, have you come to a place of enjoying and experiencing Christ's saving work in your life?

Have you come to a place of recognizing your distance in sin away from God? And because of your sin, you are deserving. I am deserving. We are all deserving of God's judgment and discipline.

But because of the mercy of God in sending his son Jesus to take the punishment for our sin on the cross. Dying in our place. We have the joy and privilege of being able to lay those sins at Jesus' feet.

And he can pay that price for sin for us on the cross. And offer and extend to us the joy of forgiveness and cleansing. And a new life with God because of the resurrection from the dead.

New life we can enjoy. Victory over sin. The power of the spirit. Now join together not only with Christ. But join together as the people of God.

[25 : 49] With the mission of taking that message to the world. The joy that we have of representing, illustrating this portrait of the gospel in the world in which we live.

So it should be no surprise or no wonder that the leaders in the church also need to demonstrate some measure of consistency with that kind of transformation.

Their commitment to the truth will show up in how they live. And so to kind of finish off where we started last week.

I want to just wrap up our time this morning and looking back. Kind of reaching back a bit to see now how the deacons will represent and describe this gospel picture in the way they live.

This gospel life of a servant leader. Let me read verses 8 to 13 as we draw our time to a close. It says, It says, Let deacons each be the husband of one wife.

[27 : 17] Managing their children and their households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also a great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Now it should have been clear as we read through that passage that the gospel life and message is what's coming through in the ministry, servant ministry of these deacons.

We see it twice. First we see it in verse 9. They are to hold fast the mystery of faith. The mystery of the gospel that is showing up. This picture of transformation in gospel life as they are committed to the truth of who Christ is.

And then in verse 13. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

These deacons show through their lives that they are true believers. They demonstrate a commitment to who God is. And they demonstrate through their life a love for God and a love for people.

[28 : 28] Which is this gospel picture of transformation that is happening inside. We saw last week as we looked at deacons and we tried to describe their ministry and compared them with elders.

I used this phrase. I think it's there in your notes this morning. Elders serve by leading. Elders serve by leading. And deacons lead by serving. We recognize there are 15 characteristics that are given about elders in the first several verses.

And there's about nine characteristics that are listed in verses 8 to 13. Five of those characteristics that we see have pretty direct correlation between elders and deacons.

First, they're above reproach. They're being a one-woman man. They're not a drunkard. They're not a lover of money. They're managing their house well. So what we see in these men, and I'm not going to go through every single one of these qualities or characteristics, but just drawing attention to the fact that as dignified men, they're men who have this majestic quality of character that makes people stand in awe.

And not stand in awe of them, but stand in awe of their Savior. They've been so marked by Christ. The imprint of Christ is on their life.

[29 : 51] So when people see these men, they say, ah, they must be spending time with Christ. The Holy Spirit is doing a work in their life. They're blameless men.

They're not sinless men, but blameless men in that they have nothing against them. They're free from accusation. The kinds of men, when there is an offense, they will keep short accounts.

There's a humility about them, a desire to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. They're those who are not greedy for dishonest gain.

For elders, the word is not a lover of money, but for deacons, the word is a bit different. It's similar, but different in that this is a much stronger position, much stronger word than that's used of elders in chapter 3, verse 3.

This is a person, the person who is greedy for dishonest gain, a kind of person who is eager to gain even if it degrades his moral character.

[30 : 57] He's so interested in the prophet, he's so interested in what he might be able to get or filter off the top of the distributions that are happening, he doesn't care how it affects his personal character or how it affects his personal testimony.

So what is the safeguard for this? In 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 6 and 7, we find Paul encouraging Timothy, Godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. One of the safeguards for us in relation to money and keeping ourselves from the love of money is to grow in contentment, to learn to be a thankful people.

Not to be envious, not to be jealous, but to learn to have a posture of praise, a posture of thanks, a posture that says, God, whatever state I am therewith, I will be content.

That's what Paul says in Philippians chapter 4. But he will also have a posture, not just of contentment, but a posture of generosity. Generosity will help also preserve him from this love of money.

[32 : 09] As Christ will say in Matthew chapter 6, Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

You see how even something as simple as our posture towards money is a way for us to shine a light of the gospel into our world. What do we prioritize?

What's important to us? Where are we laying up our treasures? What kingdom are we seeking to build? Our kingdom or the kingdom of God?

He is thinking about the needs of others. He is not interested primarily in the needs of himself. He is the quintessential Philippians 2 kind of man.

Philippians 2 verses 3 and 4 says, He is the kind of man who is content, the kind of man who is generous.

[33 : 21] We see there are some differences as well. He is not a gossip, not a double-tongued kind of man. He is not the kind of person who says one thing to one person and a different thing to a different person.

He is a truth teller, which should help us understand if as the pillar and buttress of the truth, the leaders of God's church need to be those who put to practice the things they believe.

Being a truth teller. They don't just say what people want to hear. They speak with integrity, honesty, tenderness, in a way that's consistent from person to person in the church.

We saw this holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience there in verse 9. Basically, this is their service to the body resembles the service of Christ.

When people see the service and life of a deacon, they say, God is at work in this individual. This is the way Christ must have served his people.

[34 : 26] This is the self-sacrificing kind of love that I need to aspire to. Then we find in verse 11 something about their wives.

In verse 11 it says, Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Such a qualification is not given for elders.

There in the first seven verses of chapter 3. For some reason we find this qualification only coming for deacons. It's not that the wife of an elder doesn't matter, but I think it points to the fact that there's something special, there's something unique that deacons' wives do to enhance the ministry of their husbands.

The Greek word that's used here in verse 11 for wife is also able to be translated woman. So there are several commentators that would wonder if this is a new role, a new class of leaders and servant leaders in the church, like a deaconess, or if it's truly speaking about wives.

On the table in the back, there is a book that I have had out there for the last couple of weeks. It's called Men and Women in the Church by Kevin DeYoung.

[35 : 43] I would commend it to you. It kind of works through the biblical role of manhood and womanhood throughout the scriptures. It's really helpful. And when Kevin DeYoung addresses this subject, there are several reasons why he believes that it's best to understand this as being translated wives.

Let me just give you a couple of them. First, he says, It would be strange for Paul to introduce another office in the middle of his instruction for deacon. If verse 11 is not about their wives, Paul confusingly changes topics twice in two verses.

Beginning in verses 8 to 10, talking about deacons and their qualifications, then picking up in verse 13, to speak about some more of 12 and 13, speaking about more of qualifications for deacons, and now somehow inserted in the middle of that is this qualification for this other office of a woman deacon.

Kevin DeYoung would say, That just doesn't seem to fit the flow of the passage. Second argument he gives is, The requirement to be the husband of one wife in verse 12 makes sense on the heels of the qualifications for the wives in verse 11.

We're speaking about the family. He's introduced their wives, and now he's carrying it through to speak about his management in the home. This may suggest that a deacon's wife was greatly involved in her husband's ministry.

[37 : 11] And those of you who are deacons, and those of you who have enjoyed the benefit of the ministry of deacons, will know their wives are vital to the success of their ministry.

And there are ways in which a wife, a woman, will be able to engage and strengthen her husband's ministry, especially to women that would be inappropriate for a man to engage in.

So it makes sense that this would be wives. We find in our passage this morning two great examples of a gospel life.

And next week we'll turn our attention to chapter 4, and we'll see the same gospel picture show up in how we live, through our behavior and through our commitment to the truth.

We have the joy in responsibility of being a picture. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, through the message of God's word on our lips, through the transformation that God loves to bring to every believer, as we are engaged in the world, we have the chance through our conduct and through our message to show that the gospel is true.

[38 : 30] And especially as it relates to how we engage one another, how we serve one another, how we're unified with one another, how we overcome and forgive one another of offenses.

We demonstrate the power of the gospel working through our life to a world who desperately needs a Savior. Wherever you are this week, wherever you find yourself, whatever conversations you have, whatever difficulties you may be experiencing, whatever conflicts there might be in your workplace or in your family, challenges that you might face in the various locations that you are, allow the gospel message and gospel life to come through.

Be a picture of Jesus this week so that when people see your life, they say, ah, that's what it must mean to be a Christian.

That's what it must mean to have a relationship with God as God transforms us and changes us and gives us the joy of shining the gospel picture to this dark world.

May God help us to do it faithfully. Lord, we praise you and thank you not only for the pictures that you provide of your greatness through creation, but especially through that perfect picture of your son Jesus who not only came to show what life with God was like, but came to speak about that life.

[40 : 04] And Lord, we understand that for any of us to enjoy the benefits of that life, we need to know the truth. That faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

May we be people of the word. May we be people who are engaging in regular fellowship with you through your speaking to us through the scriptures and us speaking to you through prayer.

May that communion, that fellowship, that intimacy that we experience with you in those ways, those places, may they spill out into the world around us. May they affect the people that you have allowed us to engage.

May we have the joy, Lord, not only of sharing the truth of the gospel, but seeing many come to faith in Christ. This work of God to change them from death to life.

Thank you, Lord, for this joy and privilege. I pray that you'd help us to be faithful. In Jesus' name, amen. God bless you. Have a great week.