

Household Management

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[0 : 00] Our God and Father, we ask that as we turn to your word, that our hunger may be satisfied and our thirst quenched, and the deepest longings of our hearts might find their response in the provision that you have made for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask this in his name. Amen. The passage on which I'm going to speak this morning is 1 Timothy chapter 3, which was read this morning as the epistle, and is found in your prayer book beginning on page 195.

It's 1 Timothy chapter 3. If you look at the chapter, you will see on the next page actually in verse 15, I am writing these instructions to you so that if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.

And so the instruction this morning is how we ought to behave in the household of God. So a little lesson on behavior. Now, one of the things that I would like you to notice first is the wonderful extravagance of the decorations, including those 10-foot corn stalks, which I think are magnificent, plus the wonderful display of nickel-miss daisies, plus the leaves and the pumpkins and the potatoes and the Okanagan apples and the bread and all the things that are around and the profusion of them.

It's a lovely, lovely thing, the decoration. And even more, perhaps, is the love and care and artistry that went into putting it all together.

[2 : 10] And that was a lovely thing to see, too, yesterday. So that the church, you know, we have this sense of the piety of tackiness.

And we do things that way so often. So it's lovely to see something done with sort of an abandoned extravagance.

Extravagance. It's a lovely thing. And I hope we might pick up the pattern for it. And I would like, on the basis of 1 Timothy chapter 3, to justify why we should be totally extravagant as we behave ourselves in the household of God.

The reason is given in 1 Timothy chapter 3 when it talks about the wonderful extravagance of our God. And that extravagance is spoken of in verse 16.

If you look at it, chapter 3, verse 16, where it says, the wonderful extravagance of our God is great indeed, the mystery of our religion.

[3 : 24] One person has translated that unquestionably, a mighty mystery which unfolds and shows us the extravagance of our God.

And what is the mystery that unfolds? It is the mystery of God himself. You will see he was manifested. And you'll see in the footnote that that can be translated God.

So God is manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Now that's thought to be a hymn. I don't want you to sing it, but say it with me, just so that you get the sort of beat of it and you see the extravagance of God as he has revealed himself to us, beginning with God.

Together, here we go. God was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

[4 : 41] Now, the fact that he was, I mean, all of those sentences, a theologian could take and write a book on, each one of them. But they're all compacted into these few lines.

And in those few lines, you see the wonderful extravagance of our God. Now, how do we respond to the extravagance of our God?

Well, as this chapter tells us, we respond at least in part by the ordering of our life together. Look how Paul does it.

He says, to begin with, the saying is sure, if anyone aspires to the office of a bishop, he desires a noble task.

Now, I want you to remember that these are the early days of the Christian church. And the office of the bishop was marked more by hazard than by honor.

[5 : 43] Standing out as one of the leaders of the Christian church would be like standing up and shouting in Tiananmen Square for democracy. I mean, it would be a place of exposure to hazard.

And so, when Paul says, it's a good thing to desire the office of a bishop, he's really saying it's a good thing not to be ashamed to stand up as a leader of the Christian community and be exposed to the scorn and perhaps the violence of the community that is around you.

What's more, bishop is used in a different way than we might understand it in that it doesn't refer to somebody who is wonderfully dressed and leads processions in various directions.

It means a kind of congregational elder, a bishop, presbyter, leader of the congregation. It's the kind of office that is needed.

I mean, we need about somewhere between 20 and 50 such people in this congregation alone. It's not a high and holy office that lives in the far distance.

[6 : 59] It has something to do with the direct oversight and care and shepherding of the congregation. And that's what Paul says, it's a good thing to desire the office of a bishop.

Now, the reason you need to be careful about the office of a bishop and appointing people to that office, you'll see in verse 7.

It's important that men of very considerable stature, men and women of considerable stature, must be well thought of by outsiders.

So you begin to see where the church is. It's concerned for outsiders. And the people who stand up to represent the church must be well thought of by those people who are the outsiders.

And why? The reason is because outsiders by nature seek occasion to slander those who would stand up for Jesus Christ.

[8 : 11] Now, the church in latter days has given the outsider ample reason to slander the leaders of the church.

But Paul warned from the beginning, be careful in the appointment of your leaders because they're going to have to stand up before outsiders and they must not be vulnerable to slander.

And so he tells them the conditions they have to meet in order not to be vulnerable to slander. And so that the outsiders may come to the place where they are not, they are ready to hear the gospel of Christ because they find no occasion to slander those who stand up for it.

The first encounter most people have with the gospel is the visible leaders of the church. And you know that in our time the quality of leadership has fallen badly and many people are turned off by the gospel not that they have ever heard it but they have seen those who represent it.

Now you see why it's very important to hear what Paul says about the leader. Well, the next thing that happens if you look at this chapter is that those who were outsiders then become baptized believers.

[9 : 49] And you can see that in verse 6 recent converts which means baptized believers. So that outsiders come into the household of God and are baptized into it.

Now Paul says don't make them leaders right away. You don't throw such people into leadership which so often we do in the church nowadays.

As soon as the person confesses faith in Christ we elect him chairman of something. We don't care what it is but we do. And he is given that responsibility.

And he said and Paul says that what happens to that person is they are extremely vulnerable and they will under the honor of being elected or appointed to that office will swell up and burst with self importance and destroy themselves spiritually because they haven't the maturity to take that office.

So you move from the outsider who is favorably impressed by the leader of the church to becoming a newly baptized convert to the church but then he is not immediately elected to office then he is given a period of probation a period in which he has to or she has to prove himself or herself and look at what it says about that in chapter 3 in verse 10 it says let them be tested first before they are given responsibility for service they are to be put on probation they were to be given an opportunity to prove themselves and they are to be given the time to put their life in order and they are in a sense to be included by the congregation and watched by the congregation in order that they might mature in their

[12 : 06] Christian faith and the signs of that are that they will not be you have to check to see that they are not double tongued not addicted to much wine not greedy for gain all those things are important again because of vulnerability it's not that the grace of God is not sufficient to forgive them it's not that they are not covered by the blood of Christ it's because in positions of responsibility within the congregation they are not to fall down themselves I mean it's exactly the same kind of thing as you might the way you might instruct an athlete who has to compete if he's going to compete he's got to be subject to certain discipline in fact I would say that the conditions for leadership in the church here are exactly the same as the conditions for leadership in the world around us people who meet these conditions in business and industry are offered six figure salaries and a house and expenses because to get people of capability and integrity that goes right through the whole fiber of their personal lives and their family lives is something that everybody wants and that's what Paul says is required in the church that people will be trained in this tested for it proved by serving well and that includes both men and women their whole life is to be brought into this period of proving themselves and establishing themselves in the faith of

Christ so that you move then from an outsider to a new convert to a probationer who is being tested and then they come to the place where in the exercise of their faith and conscience do you see where it talks about faith and conscience that they may in verse nine that they must hold the mystery of the faith the mystery of which we've already spoken they hold that mystery in with a clear conscience and you see that's where again the church breaks down so often as we talked about in 1 Timothy chapter 1 is that people learn to verbalize the faith so that they can describe it perfectly but it somehow doesn't touch their conscience and the ordering of their personal lives and relationships so that they are in a sense a complete mess on this level and totally articulate about the faith on this level and those two things have to be brought together so that you hold faith with a good conscience you bring these things up and

I you know we know so often that what we do what we in a sense tend to perpetually do is teach people to articulate the faith without allowing it to touch their conscience and it's got to do both and that's what happens during this so that they become in due course through this probationary period they become deacons and if we need 20 to 50 bishops in this congregation we need hundreds of deacons because the ministry is so important and the people who have the qualities or who are prepared to work through the probationary period so that they can take on the service of Christ in the congregation of Christ's church church they're there and they can minister to people in verse 113 you find out this is what happens to you when you're a deacon those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus if you're lacking in faith if you don't have much confidence in the gospel it may be because you have never taken it upon yourself to serve Christ by witnessing to pastoring caring for loving becoming involved with others the great focus of the John Chapman mission in January is that you may gain great confidence in your faith by serving the outsiders of the community in bringing to them the news of the gospel it's not just that some of them may indeed come to faith but it's that you by seeking to serve them through your prayer and through your witness through your love through your hospitality through your care and through your involvement that you yourself will gain great confidence in the faith because sometimes you have such a miserable view of yourself that you don't really understand the gospel and the thing that you need to know is the wonder of what happens when you share the faith with somebody else my friend who is a former alcoholic says when he's feeling a little a little under temptation to go back to the old ways to buy another bottle he says the best cure is to go out and find a wet one by which he means somebody who is drinking and tell him what to do about it to work with him so you will gain great confidence in your faith in Christ as you seek to share it with somebody else as you seek to share it through serving Christ in the church well that's how that's what happens to deacons one person has translated it this way this great confidence he says it's great liberty of speech in your witness to the Christian faith that's what happens as the result of serving and I guess the opposite happens too that if you're not serving your ability to give expression to the Christian faith shrivels up and dies and you feel tongue tied and incapable because you're not serving others in sharing the faith with them well this then you see is how we are to order the life and the household of God how we are to organize it if you look in verse 15 of chapter 3 you'll see that what

[19 : 26] Paul is doing here is taking outsiders bringing them into bringing them to baptism and faith in Jesus Christ subjecting them to a period of probation and testing then into a period of

service and commitment that leads them into a consolidation of their faith and then they are grouped together in what Paul talks about here as the household of God which is the church of the living God which is the pillar which is a pillar and bulwark of the truth that what happens is you create a community of people who hold before others the truth of Christ so that if you want to encounter the truth of the gospel if you want to encounter the truth of God then you encounter the church because the church is to be as a community it is to be the pillar and bulwark of the truth that's what you're to encounter as you come to church so that that is the kind of community that is created by this process that

Paul describes of training the servant leadership of the church of Jesus Christ the truth you see is that the community is created by an encounter with the mystery and it's only called a mystery because for centuries through the Old Testament people couldn't imagine how God was going to do what he did and then the mystery is made an open secret to the whole world when he is manifested in the flesh vindicated in the spirit seen by angels proclaimed in the world received into glory that whole picture of Jesus Christ is the revealing of the mystery and when you encounter the mystery then and you put your faith in

Christ then you are received into the church of the living God the household of God and you are trained to take responsibility to serve and give leadership within that community well that's why I think we need to be really extravagant about that the God who has wonderfully provided for us in the order of creation has even more profoundly provided for us in the provision of his household the care of his household incorporation into membership in his household well one thing more the epilogue service today is going to be a simple presentation of how you become a Christian how you move from being an outsider to being a baptized believer how you make that step of faith from being outside the household to being a member of the household how you respond to an encounter with the mystery which

God has revealed in Christ and Stephen James is going to explain to you in the simple pattern of that two ways to live how it is you do that so if any of you are interested in hearing that for whatever reason whether for you personally or for someone else or whether you're interested in hearing it just so you can better tell others then you're invited to take part in the epilogue service which follows this thank God for his wonderful extravagance in the gift to us of the Lord Jesus Christ and his care and love in bringing us in to the fellowship of his church amen