

The Formation and Function of the 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: 24 June 2026

Preacher: Rev Callum Macleod

[0:00] 14. 1 Timothy 3 at verse 14. I hope to come to you soon, but I am 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 birthress of truth.

And so on to the end of the chapter. Now we know that physical health is a gift from God. And we know that as long as we have physical health, we're able to function in so many areas of life. We also know that if we lose our health, that we're not able to function as we used to do. We are restricted in different ways because we have lost our health.

When I look at health of organizations, we see that organizations that they run smoothly because they communicate well, because they are aligned with their vision and strategy well, and because they are flexible and they work together for the good of the organization.

A successful organization will work like that. We know that the church is very similar. A healthy church will function according to God's design and will do so by walking in the paths of God, by communicating the gospel clearly, and will also have flexibility and the availability for change as the church moves on and as things develop from generation to generation.

[1:40] And reflecting on that and reflecting on what this passage says, I want this evening and the times that we are together on a Wednesday evening in the future to think something of the New Testament and a healthy congregation.

It's important that we understand what the Bible requires of us as the people of God. And as we begin to do so, it's worth noticing that at the beginning of this letter, Paul is telling Timothy to remain in Ephesus.

And Ephesus was very close to Paul's heart. He worked there for many years. It was the hub of his missionary activity for quite some time.

And we read that as he left Ephesus in Acts chapter 20, that he put them on their guard that things might change after he left. And when you read Revelation chapter 3 and see the way in which the church of Ephesus had lost its first love, had abandoned its first love, then we realize that the warnings that Paul gave to them, they did not heed.

And because of that, we find Jesus Christ himself assessing the church in that passage. And so looking at these verses, I want us to think of three particular things with regard to the formation and function of the church.

[3:03] And first of all, just to think of the formation of the church itself. We read in verse number 15 that the church is the church of the living God.

And we understand from a personal experience that the whole sense of church is the calling of God. And the whole sense of this word in the New Testament that's translated as church speaks to us of those who are called out to be together and gathered into one place.

In other words, there is a forming of a group of people together in response to a particular call. And we understand from the gospel, for example, in Paul's read to Corinthians, we understand that we are called by God into the fellowship of his son.

And we understand from Paul in Galatians 1 that we are set apart and called by the grace of God. God works, God calls, and he brings us together.

And we are here this evening as a result of that initial call of God, where he took us from where we were and brought us into the church to be part of the people of God.

[4:19] And the church is described here as the church of the living God. Of course, it is God's church. And God is the only true and living God. But the church of the living God in the sense of ownership and possession, but also in the sense of his presence.

And Paul reminds the church of the church of the church of the church of the living God called by God.

And God dwells in our hearts individually and personally. And God also dwells in our hearts collectively as a gathering of God's people. We are possessed by him.

We are owned by him. We are indwelt by him. We belong to him. And Paul wants Timothy to see here that when the church is formed, that the church is formed as the family of God.

And that's again what we read in verse number 15. The household of God. Paul is using a domestic arrangement to describe the church of God.

[5:33] That there is in a community of those who are bound together in a family. They have a shared dwelling place. They have shared parenthood. They have shared brothers and sisters.

They are joined together by lot because they belong to the same household. And Paul wants Timothy and those to whom Timothy is going to bring the gospel.

He wants them to understand that they are the family of God. And it's key for ourselves to be reminded of that time after time.

That we're not just a scattering of individual believers. That we're actually the family of God. And that we have God as our Father. And that we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

The formation of the church. And as you saw from the beginning of this chapter, when God forms his church, he has it organized.

[6:32] And we see the way in which in that organization, he speaks of those who are overseers or elders. He speaks of those who are deacons. He speaks of those who are able to manage their own household well.

So that they can manage the household of God. Church leadership organized by God. Brought together by God for the purpose of managing the family of God.

And we read through the rest of that chapter. And we see the way in which there are those who are to keep themselves. Those who are to pray.

The women are to do good works. The whole of the family of God. They have a role and a responsibility in their service of God. And in their service of one another to ensure that the church keeps its formation.

And that it reforms in order to ensure that everyone is functioning according to God's design.

[7:39] And according to the way in which God has called us together. There is the formation of the church. Secondly, there is the faithfulness of the church.

And Paul reminds Timothy that there is a necessity. It's not Paul's necessity. It's the necessity that comes from God.

And he is writing these things to Timothy. So that if he is delayed, you will know how you ought to behave. When I read the word ought in the New Testament.

It's a necessity that arises not from what Paul wants. Not from what Timothy wants. It's a necessity that arises from the purpose of God. I read about the work of the Lord Jesus.

And Jesus is telling his disciples, I must go to Jerusalem. He ought to go. There is a divine necessity in the plan of God. He must follow God's plan.

[8:44] God has ordered it so to be. And it brings us face to face with the fact that together as the family of God, there is a necessity that comes from God alone.

And it's a necessity that speaks about our behavior, our conduct. It's important for us personally and collectively to recognize that God requires behavior and conduct of us.

And that's what Paul says here. How you ought to behave yourselves in the household of God.

It's the way you're going to spend your lives. And as we think of behavior in the household of God, let's see the distinction that Paul makes. He is not saying about behavior in the house of God.

So that what God requires happens only in the worship of God. It's what happens in the family of God. There is of necessity behavior prescribed by God for our Christian living.

[9:52] For our Christian living in a relationship with God. Our Christian living in a relationship with each other. Our Christian living in a relationship with the world.

And going back once more to the beginning of the chapter, and to the beginning of chapter 2. We see there the way in which he refers. First of all then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all people.

For kings and all who are in high positions. That they may lead a peaceful life. And so on. We see the way in which he speaks about those who are to pray with holy hands.

In verse 8. That woman should adore themselves in respectable apparel. With modesty and self-control. And so on and so forth. There is that sense of behavior that God requires. And of course we can, we could fill out the detail of that. The principles that Paul raises here. We could take from the other literature of Paul.

[10:56] And fill in and put flesh on these principles. To show what our behavior is. And we are familiar with that. And we can put flesh on these principles ourselves.

When we leave our meeting this evening perhaps. But the key thing is. That for you and for me. God requires particular conduct and behavior.

In all that we do in the worship of God. In all that we do outside of the worship of God. In all that we do in our daily lives. Godliness. And that behavior is described around these words.

And there's the whole idea of godliness. And that's what we have in version number 16. Great we confess is the mystery of godliness.

Godliness. We use the word godliness. Perhaps we don't even think what we're saying. We describe people as godly. Do we understand what we're saying? What exactly does that mean?

[11:57] When I read Paul's using the word godliness. He speaks about a life that is shaped according to rules and regulations.

A life that is formed around the revelation of God. A life that embraces the things that God tells us to do. And commits itself to the service of God.

And the basic meaning of the word godliness is the sense of falling back before something in awe and in adoration.

That's where our behavior begins. We stand back in awe of the glory of God. Of the glory of our Savior. And filled with that sense of awe.

We're in the place where we're constrained and persuaded to do the things that God tells us are necessary in our behavior. And I speak to myself as well as to all of us this evening.

[13:04] How often do I find myself with that sense of awe before my God and my Savior? That seeing as beauty and glory. You stand back in admiration and you are so persuaded with a sense of the urgency of honoring God.

In all that you do and in all that you say. The mystery of godliness.

It's not a mystery in the sense that we don't know it. I don't understand it. It's a mystery in the sense that God kept it hidden in the Old Testament. But now it's revealed to us in the New Testament.

It can only be known by God's revelation. And where do we see that revelation of the godliness that Paul speaks of this mystery?

It is in the following verses. Which are a great study on ourselves where we're going to study these verses together. 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.

[14:24] What is the mystery? It has two elements in it that remind us of who we are going to be in awe of and what we should be doing.

And the first element is that it speaks to us of the mission of Jesus himself. He was manifest in the flesh. He came into this world. He lived the life that he lived.

He was vindicated by the spirit. He was raised up and glorified. He was on a journey. He was on a mission for God. A mission which included and was focused upon rescuing and redeeming us.

But he lived his life in obedience to God's mission. And the second element is the mission of the church itself.

Proclaimed among the nations. Believed on in the world. Taken up in glory. Here is the mission.

[15:27] The message of Jesus. His finished, completed work. The Jesus who is now at God's right hand. Our mission together, our mission individually, is to proclaim this to the nations.

This is our service. And calling upon others to hear the message of the gospel. And to embrace this same Jesus for themselves. Believed on in the world.

We see people coming to faith. The mission of the church is carried out in obedience to the command of Christ. With the power and enabling of the Holy Spirit of God.

And people are called. People come to believe. And the church of Jesus Christ grows. And tonight, the focus of our conduct and our behavior.

The focus of our godliness. Is double edged. We have to see the finished work of Jesus Christ. If I don't see that clearly for myself, then the inspiration is gone.

[16:38] But when I see that clearly, the awe. The sense of my need to adore and to serve fills my heart. And then I'm inspired to do what Jesus called his disciples to do.

To do what Paul requires the church to do. Inspired to deny myself. Remind myself that I'm not my own. That I'm bought with a price.

Remind myself that God has called me for the purpose of serving him. And tonight, how transformational that would be for us personally.

And for us collectively. To have that sense of godliness. What God in Christ has done for me.

And what I must now do for him. And Paul goes on to speak of the way in which there is godliness with contentment.

[17:40] Which is great gain. That doesn't mean to say we won't have our troubles. That we won't have our challenges, our trials. But there is a contentment. And a settled view.

Of seeing what Jesus has done. There is a contentment. And sensing our need. Our call to serve him. And to seek to do so.

With all of our failings. With all of our shortcomings. Wishing that we could do it better. But with a sense that we have to do. What we can do. For the glory of his name.

There is. That sense of. Faithfulness. And we remind ourselves. Of the. Formation. We remind ourselves. Of. The.

People of God. In the old testament. When. The. The armies. Were formed. Around. The king. And they won't doubt. Successfully. Because.

[18:37] God was. With them. And there is. That sense. Of. and the unity and the oneness of of the gospel itself following King Jesus the victory is his he deserves our service we cannot achieve any by ourselves but we can achieve everything because of him the faithfulness and closely reach that and finally that is the function of the church and the function has to do with the Word of God in verse number 15 once more we see the church of the living God a pillar and buttress of the truth the truth being that of the Word of God the faithfulness of what God has said Paul says in second letter to me in chapter chapter 3 that that all scripture is breathed out by God this is the truth breathed out by God this revelation that we have in the Word of God this is the truth and alongside of that we read that grace and truth came with Jesus Christ and that Jesus says I am the way and the truth and the life and so the truth which is the focus of the function is the truth as we have it written in the Word of God it's the truth as we have it revealed in the person of Jesus Christ that brings us back to to the way in which our godliness is focused upon him a function is entirely

Bible-centered God-centered Christ-centered word of God inspired and led and as the people of God Paul highlights two areas of the function of the church based on agricultural terms where we read at the end of verse 15 a pillar and buttress of the truth and that speaks to us of two things that we are to do as we function as the people of God we are to be pillars of the truth I read Solomon building the glorious temple and he built great pillars and some of them had nothing on the top of it but they were ornamental he built other pillars which supported the purchase that were around the temple pillars are there to make sure that something is protruding up into the space and can be visible from a great distance and the Paul is writing to Timothy here is the Paul who knew well about the temple of our team is in Ephesus and all of its glorious pillars ensuring that across the city the temple of the goddess Diana could be seen one of the seven wonders of the world let's look at the temple of the goddess Diana there for all to see and Paul is telling them that's the way you should be as the church of God let this truth let this word of God stand up visible and to make it visible make sure that it shines across the the world of the world of which we live across our homes and our workplaces that there is the truth of God on its pillar not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ but making it known to all around and if you go to Ephesus today the place where the one of the seven wonders of the world was found all that you will see is the remains of one pillar that remind us of the judgment of Jesus and it was regard to the church in Ephesus in the book of Revelation that reminds us of the of the warning that Paul gave to the

Ephesians and that he gives to Timothy here how what was held high visible to everyone can suddenly crumble because the pillars aren't there and you and I tonight have that responsibility that this truth the gospel of Jesus Christ that it's up there that people can hear it and people can see it and it's held up there as long as the pillar is steady as long as the pillar is steady as long as the there's the pillar that is supported by the by our godliness and by our godliness and by our christ-centeredness and by our god-centeredness the pillar stands high it will not crumble and that's surely a challenge for us all this evening that as we function as the people of God that we ask

