

August 13, 2017

“An Early Christian Hymn”

Focal Passage: 1 Timothy 3:14-16 (NASB)

Cross References: 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21f; 1 Peter 2:5; 4:17

Lesson Idea: We need to support the truth of our common confession that centers in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Aug 6 Isaiah 42-44	Aug 7 Isaiah 45-48
Aug 8 Isaiah 49-53	Aug 9 Isaiah 54-58
Aug 10 Isaiah 59-63	Aug 11 Isaiah 64-66
Aug 12 Jeremiah 1-3	Aug 13 Jeremiah 4-6

Background:

Most theologians and preachers agree that verse 16 of this passage seems to contain an early church hymn about the centrality of Christ Jesus for the church. David Guzik, *1 Timothy 3*, shares a quote from Charles Spurgeon concerning these phrases about Jesus:

“Observe that the comprehensive summary of the gospel here given is contained in six little sentences, which run with such regularity of measure in the original Greek, that some have supposed them to be an ancient hymn; and it is possible that they may have been used as such in the early church.” (Spurgeon)

1 Timothy 3:14-16

14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. 16 By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:

*He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.*

DISCUSSION:

- v 14. What was Paul’s hope? Why did he want to come?

- v 15. What was Paul’s purpose in writing to Timothy? How should one “conduct himself in the household of God?” After spending the first part of chapter 3 discussion the leaders of the church, why does Paul conclude that discussion with the theological foundations for the church?
- What does he mean by the phrase “household of God?” (see 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21f; 1 Pet 2:5; 4:17) How does Paul describe the church? How does the church serve as the “support of the truth?”

NOTE: from David Guzik:

The house of God: The church must be, very consciously, the place where God is. This makes a church more attractive than anything else. The Church is God’s house because . . .

- He is the Architect.
- He is the Builder.
- He lives there.
- He provides for it.
- He is honored there and He rules there.

The pillar and ground of truth: The pillar and ground (foundation) of the church is truth. Tragically, many churches today sell truth short and are therefore left weak pillars and shaky ground...

It isn’t that the church is the foundation for the truth, but that the church holds up the truth so the world can see it. “Pillars also were of ancient use to fasten upon them any public edicts, which princes or courts would have published, and exposed to the view of all; hence the church is called, the pillar and basis, or seal, of truth, because by it the truths of God are published, supported, and defended.” (Poole)

- v 16. What is a “common confession” and why is it important?
- Explain each of the phrases Paul uses to describe the great “mystery of godliness.” What does each of them explain about Jesus? Why is each phrase important for our “common confession?”
 - *He who was revealed in the flesh*
 - *Was vindicated in the Spirit*
 - *Seen by angels*

- *Proclaimed among the nations*
- *Believed on in the world*
- *Taken up in glory.*
- Which of these descriptions mean the most to you today and why?

APPLICATION:

- ✓ Read Paul's description of the church in v 15 again. Do you regard the church as highly as he did? Do you sense the importance and urgency of the church's work? Why or why not?
- ✓ As you read the early church hymn in v 16, did you sense the importance of worshipping Jesus? How do you express that daily? How should we express it in corporate worship?

Lesson by Bro Stan

NOTE: from Guzik:

(16) An early hymn to express the foundation of Christian truth.

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

Without controversy: "When he says 'without controversy,' I suppose he means that there ought to be no controversy about these facts, though controversies have arisen concerning them, and always will, since the most self-evident truth will always find self-evident fools to contradict it." (Spurgeon)

- ***God was manifested in the flesh:*** This is the essence of the incarnation; that God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, added to His deity humanity – and was thus manifested in the flesh.
- ***Justified in the Spirit:*** We can say that Jesus was justified by the Spirit not in the sense that He was once sinful but made righteous, but in the sense that He was declared to be, by the Holy Spirit, what He always was – completely justified before the Father. This declaration was made at His baptism (Matthew

3:16), and at His resurrection (1 Peter 3:18; Acts 2:32-33).

- ***Seen by angels:*** The ministry of Jesus, both on earth and through the Church, is of great interest to angelic beings. There were many instances when Jesus was seen by angels (Mark 1:13; Luke 22:41-43), and especially at the resurrection (Matthew 28:2-7)...

"The Godhead was seen in Christ by angels, as they had never seen it before. They had beheld the attribute of justice, they had seen the attribute of power, they had marked the attribute of wisdom, and seen the Prerogative of sovereignty; but never had angels seen love, and condescension, and tenderness, and pity, in God as they saw these things resplendent in the person and the life of Christ." (Spurgeon)

- ***Preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world:*** Paul himself did his best to fulfill these statements. He was busy preaching Jesus among the Gentiles and bringing the world to belief.

"God's way of creating faith in men's hearts is not by pictures, music, or symbols, but by the hearing of the word of God. This may seem a strange thing, and strange let it seem, for it is a mystery, and a great mystery, but a fact beyond all controversy; for ever let the church maintain that Christ is to be preached unto the Gentiles." (Spurgeon)

- ***Received up in glory:*** This reminds us of Jesus' ascension (Luke 24:51), His finished work on our behalf (Hebrews 1:3), and His present intercession for us (1 John 2:1).... Jesus ascended into heaven in a resurrection body; yet it was a body that still retained the marks of His great work of love for us. It still had the nail prints in His hands and feet, the wound in his side, all marks of His suffering on our behalf (John 20:24-29).

Paul's description of Jesus after the passage speaking of Christian character reminds us of the key to our own character transformation – beholding Jesus. It is just as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:18: *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of these descriptions of Christian character. We trust that Jesus will transform our life according to the same character, as we put our focus on Him. We sometimes want religion to build this character in us; but truly, relationship with Jesus is what really does it.