

The Pillar and Ground of Truth

1 Timothy 3:15-16

“So that if I am delayed, you will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith: Christ was revealed in a human body and vindicated by the Spirit. He was seen by angels and announced to the nations. He was believed in throughout the world and taken to heaven in glory.

It is believed that the original Christian confession consisted of three words: "Jesus Christ - Lord." I am convinced there is no better confession for the Church today. His person, claims and work are central to biblical literature and theology.

As we look at these verses, Paul is once again making much of the church. In the contents of this passage, Paul is speaking of the entire body of Christ. As an application, it can be applied to the local church.

This word "pillar" brings to mind an architectural image. It would mean something to Timothy. Once again, I remind you to remember the place that Timothy is. He is in Ephesus. It was the site of the Temple of Diana. This was one of the wonders of the world at that time. That temple had 127 pillars.

The word "ground" suggests a bulwark or a stay. The local church is built on Jesus Christ as its only truth. Jesus said this in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15, “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God, which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation

can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

The "pillar" aspect of the church's ministry relates to the displaying of the truth of the Word. It should be like a statue is place on a pedestal so all can see. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:16 that we are "hold fast to the word of life." **The idea that Paul is teaching us here is that each believer puts Jesus Christ on display in one fashion or another.** Have you ever noticed how the meat is displayed in the Meat Department in Ingles? The Meat Manager places his best cuts of meat at the very front for all to see. Paul is saying that as believers, we need to make sure that as the world looks at our lives, they see the best Christ has to offer.

But more than just living the Christian life, we must understand that the truth of the Gospel is the life, work, death, resurrection, ascension, and the coming again of Christ. Therefore, in verse 16 Paul sums up this great truth as the "mystery of godliness," "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."

The words "**without controversy**" simply mean that something is obvious; there are no grounds for argument.

The term "**great is the mystery of godliness**" refers to the revelation that God in the person of Jesus Christ entered into this world in which we live, paid the penalty of sin, and is making fallen men and women, who are scared with sin and failure, godly.

First, he says, "God was manifested in the flesh." **In Jesus, Spirit became flesh.** **Born of the Virgin Mary.** John 1:1-4, 14 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." **It is a biblical fact, Jesus came to live, breath, be tempted and tried, to experience life on man's terms, and finally die, like humankind.**

William Barclay wrote, "Look at Jesus, and you will see the mind and the heart of God, in a form that men can understand." Colossians 1:15 tells us that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." Colossians 2:9 says that, "In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Colossians 1:16-17 tell us, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."

The foundation of our Gospel is that holy God, who was before all things, who was the King of the Ages, he who created all things, became incarnate in man. **God with us.** Emanuel. Isaiah 53:3 says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not." **He committed no sin.** **The only perfect man, yet he carried our sin, and died for our sin, was buried for our sin, and rose again as testimony to his power and love to forgive our sins.** **Through him we see and reach the Father.**

Second, he says, "God was vindicated by the Spirit." The Greek word translated "vindicated" means, "justified, endorsed, or proved."

At his baptism the Holy Spirit publicly descended on him. His words and miracles, and wonders convinced and convicted and

converted hearts and lives. Even before his crucifixion, the disciples worked signs and wonders in his name, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Jews said he was an impostor, a blasphemer. He forgave sins and permanently changed lives. The crowds who followed him thought he was a good man, a powerful prophet. The apostles, at times, thought he was Messiah. After his death and resurrection they were sure he was God.

On the Day Of Pentecost, at the beginning of the church, the Holy Spirit, whom he had promised he would send, fell upon the 120 believers and under their Spirit blessed witnessing, 3,000 sinners were converted in one day. And countless millions have been saved in the ages to follow. The church began and will continue forever. The Spirit still gives him vindication.

Third, he says, “God was seen by the angels.” Before his birth, the angels who knew him in Heaven, told Mary and Joseph that they were to be his earthly parents. Matthew 1:21 records this word from the angels, “He will save his people from their sins.” Luke 2:9-10 remind us, “And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.” Matthew 4:11 tells us that after His temptations, “the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.” Luke 22:41-43 gives us this insight into Jesus’ Garden experience, “And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done. Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.” The Bible tells us in Matthew 28 concerning Mary’s visit to the tomb where Jesus was buried, and verses 5-6 say, “But the angel answered and said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen...” Acts 1:9-11 says, “Now when (Jesus) had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by

them in white apparel, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” 1 Thessalonians 4:16 reminds us that “the voice of the archangel” will announce Christ’s Second Coming.

Oh yes, He “was seen by the angels”!

Four, he says, “God was preached among the nations.” **The invisible God of the Old Testament was revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ and was preached to the then known world.** He was and is not just a nationalistic hero to be glorified by the Jews. He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of our world. **He is the Savior of all who believe.** Jewish prejudice towards the Gentiles was forbidden. A new covenant, a new testament in his blood was made with the whole human race. **He commanded the gospel to first be proclaimed in Jerusalem and then to the rest of the world.** The Christian is to work at this blessed task until he returns. When he comes, unexpectedly, he wants to find us doing all to the glory of God. He wants us to tell all of their need to be saved.

The message of Jesus Christ was, and is, to be preached through love, not the sword. His message was simply this; “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”

Five, he says, “God was believed on in the world.” The Psalmist gives us this invitation in Psalm 34:8, “Taste and see that the Lord is good...” **Someone wrote that Jesus is the center of all worlds.** Worshipped on this earth by the redeemed still in their bodies, and worshipped in Heaven by the redeemed who have gone to be with Him in the spirit. The Person of Christ has influenced the attitude of men toward men, as Christians make an impact on civilization.

Jesus made this promise in John 12:32, “And if, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” Paul said this in

Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” Whether through sermons, song, or films, millions have been had their lives transformed through the message of Jesus Christ. He truly was believed on in the world.

Six, he says, “God was taken up in glory.” After hundreds of appearances to believers, he ascended into Heaven. As the Lamb of God and also our High Priest, his blood atones for our sins. He lives to make intercession for the believer.

His prophetic fulfillment, his virgin birth, his baptism, his sin free life, his miracles, his love, his words, his sacrifice on the cross, his death, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension all testify that He is the Messiah, the Christ, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Before his crucifixion it is recorded in Matthew 26:63-64, "The high priest said to him, I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Yes, it is as you say, Jesus replied. But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." **One day, every knee will bow and declare him Lord!**