

A Healthy Gospel Church

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[0 : 00] Well, it's lovely to be with you again this morning as we look at this series in 1 Timothy. As Thomas said, my name is Phil if we haven't met, if you're listening in online or here in person.

When you turn with me to 1 Timothy in chapter 3, we're going to be studying the whole letter over the next few months, but I'll explain in a second why we're looking at this central section in 1 Timothy chapter 3.

So let me just pray and ask for God's help as we read His Word. Heavenly Father, thank You that You speak truth to us in Your Word. Thank You that it's by Your Word that You feed us, by Your Word that You save us, You uphold us, You grow us, and it's Your Word that we take to the nations as You've commanded.

Lord, thank You that it's Your Word that we will be drinking of in heaven as we know You more and more through Christ. So Lord, please as we come to read now, as we come to meditate on what You have to say to us, help us to have that, the awe and the joy of knowing that we're hearing the living words of God.

Amen. So 1 Timothy chapter 3, we're just going to read 3 verses, verses 14 to 16 that form the core of this letter.

[1 : 22] So Paul says, 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 manifest in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Well this morning we're beginning our series as I said in 1 Timothy and I've been really excited about this. Back in September to December we studied 1 Timothy in our Bible studies in St Andrews and I came to just see how relevant a book this is to the church in every age, but especially now.

So when the New Feetree Church vision statement came out about a healthy gospel church in every community in Scotland, I said to Thomas, we've got to study this letter. We've got to study 1 Timothy because 1 Timothy is all about how to build and maintain a healthy gospel church.

Now I think it goes without saying that we want to be a healthy church. There's no church that doesn't want to be healthy, but the question is what makes a healthy church? What does a healthy church look like?

[2 : 42] What does a local church need to do, need to be, to be a healthy church? And can I just suggest that's a question we all need to be thinking about. That's a question that we'll see definitely the church leaders need to think about as they help to guide and direct the church.

But it's also a question for all of us at whatever part we have to play. It's a question that as believers we need to think about, those of us who are trusting in Jesus, we need to say what kind of church should Carl Waifrey church look like?

How can I help to make the church more healthy, to make it more according to God's design? But if you're listening online or you're here in person and you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus, so you're still thinking things through and you have questions, it's still a question that you should be asking as well.

And we'll want to ask, I think. Because regardless of, you might have had different experiences of what church is like, both good and bad, but it's essential that we ask, what's God's intention for a church?

What kind of church does God want his gathered people to be? And also if you're considering being in Carl Waifrey church, what does this church want to be?

[3 : 59] Do I want to be part of this people? Do I want to identify myself with them? So it's a question that we all need to ask. And 1 Timothy is a great place to go because Paul is just crystallizing all these ideas for us.

So I've forgotten to be flicking through these slides, there we go. I'll pay attention to that. So this is our aim today, to be thinking about how a healthy gospel church holds up and holds out the gospel. And so 1 Timothy, you'll see, it's from Paul to Timothy. So Paul, the apostle Paul has been around lots of different churches and his missionary journeys. And he's writing to Timothy, who he's now sent to Ephesus.

So Paul helped to establish and plant Ephesus back in, I think it was Acts chapter 18. He spent over two years in Ephesus. And this is one of Paul's many letters, one of Paul's letters to help to strengthen the church.

And Paul's writing because he wants Ephesus to be a healthy church, or maybe there's a bunch of house churches and he wants them to be a collection of healthy churches that fulfill God's purpose.

[5 : 09] And he's writing to give instructions to Timothy, who's overseeing this, so he can help make the church so. And Timothy is the main recipient, you'll see that there.

But you'll notice I put on the slide that verse, chapter 6, verse 21, which ends with grace be to you. And that's a plural you, you see that in your footnotes in your Bibles.

And that tells us that while Paul is writing to Timothy, he's also writing to the whole church. He wants the whole church to be listening in, to be reading along and helping Timothy make the changes.

So that's just another little thing that reminds us, this is for the whole church. Making a healthy church isn't just the leadership, it's something we all have a part to play in.

So why is Paul writing though? So he wants them to be a healthy church, but there is a particular presenting issue that has made Paul, given him the urgency to need to write. And that is the issue of false teaching.

[6 : 07] So false teaching, I'm just going to be flicking through bits, but you'll see there's a few verses I put up there that some Paul had warned in Acts 20 when he was leaving Ephesus that false teachers would come to the church.

And now we see that that's happened and the church hasn't plunged into heresy, but the false teaching has started to distract from the gospel and distort the gospel.

And the church is becoming more and more unhealthy as a result and less able to fulfil its purpose.

So you'll see in the verses I put up there, there's people teaching a different doctrine that Paul needs to correct.

Again the book, the letter begins and ends with that charge. Do you see that? A lot of people teaching different doctrines. This is a really, that shows that it's what's on Paul's mind.

That shows what the thrust and the purpose of why he's writing is. And in contrast, Timothy is to guard what is true. So we've got, so that's the presenting issue.

[7 : 07] And as we go through the letter over the next couple of weeks and months, we'll see that that looked like some legalistic teaching in chapter one. It looks like a bit of a seticism in chapter four saying, oh everything of this world is, you know, even God's good created things we can't touch.

Even looked like a materialism that we see in chapter six. So the truth, when you turn away from the truth, that can completely distort church life.

But the result though, wasn't just that there was false teaching in the church. The result was that the church was no longer this outward looking church, but it turned inward.

You'll read again and again Paul says to Timothy, don't get involved in squabbles and quarrels and stuff. The church had become inward. It was quarreling. There was inner fighting. It was become characterized by ungodly behavior.

And as a result, the witness of the church was being damaged. In fact, it gets so bad that Paul can say in, where is it? I think it's towards the end of chapter six that the gospel was being reviled because of you.

[8 : 12] So that's pretty serious. But Paul's writing them more than just a troubleshoot. That's what one thing that's really important for us to understand.

Paul isn't just writing about this one situation. He's giving bigger principles, positively telling us what a healthy church should look like.

And he does that in verses 14 to 16. That's what we're looking at. So you'll see Paul says, I hope to come to you soon. So he's going to give further instructions when he arrives.

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.

So Paul wants to positively explain to them, to give them a picture, a pattern to aspire to, of what a healthy church should be. And it's from that principle that he lays out in verses 14 to 16 that the rest of the letter unfolds.

[9 : 12] Now I'm going to briefly show you this letter structure. I don't know if you can see that well on the screen. I don't know whether the highlighting helps or hinders. I was hoping it could show how it mirrors.

And we'll talk through it a bit more as we go. But essentially there at the core of the letter, verses 14 to 16, where Paul gives us these principles and pattern of what a healthy gospel church looks like, God's household holding up his truth.

And the whole letter is bookended by these commands to tackle false teaching. So chapter one, chapter six, that's about battling false teaching.

Then if you go inward, that's, then we see how the church's behavior relates to that. And then right on either side of that center section, it's about godly leadership and Timothy's example there.

So that's, that's briefly the structure. We'll come back to it. But we're focusing on these verses at the heart of the letter, because there as it were, the key that unlocks us, that unlocks the whole letter for us.

[10 : 13] And we're going to do that under three headings. So the identity of the church, the purpose of the church, and the healthy church. Now those, all the different verses and the headings and various stuff is going to come up on the screen behind me as we go through.

But can I encourage you to be also following along in a physical Bible on your phone? Because one of the advantages of studying the whole letter over many weeks is that we get to know our way around the Bible.

And so for me, this is why I swapped and had my Bible up here, because I might not have memorized the letter, but you know, I know where stuff is on the page. And hopefully as we get, as we study this over the next few weeks, you'll start to know, okay, I remember where this bill is on the page.

And the whole thing will start to fit together so we know the whole letter well. So let me just encourage you to read one Timothy as well.

Maybe this afternoon or throughout the week, read the whole letter. It won't take long. It's just three pages in my Bible. And maybe each Sunday or coming up to each Sunday, read the passage that we're going to look at that will help us to make the most of what we're going to study.

[11 : 26] And we can pray over that. So let's go in now to our first point, the identity of the church. Let's read verses 14 to 16 again.

Paul says, 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 manifest in the flesh vindicated by the spirit seen by angels proclaimed among the nations believed on in the world taken up in glory. So you'll see verse 15 Paul is writing so that the church may know how they may know how they ought to behave. But before we get to how we can the behavior before we can get to purpose, we have to know what lies behind that.

The church needs to understand their identity. You know, we're often quick to want to know, you know, how should I live? What do I need to do? But throughout the Bible, we're reminded that actions follow from understanding who we are.

[12 : 32] And so that's why we're going to focus on first, who are we? Who are we as a church? I don't know whether you've asked that question before.

What is the church? Who are we? What are we? And Paul, what we have taught here is that church is the household of God.

It's the family of God. And Paul says, questions need to know how to conduct themselves as the household of God. And literally that's that is God's house.

The church is the house of God. Now we'd be mistaken though for thinking that Paul's talking about a building when he says, conduct yourselves in the house of God.

Only because even if you were to just glance up in your Bible to chapter three verse four, Paul explains how the elders need to manage their household well, because that's a requirement for managing God's household.

[13:28] There he's talking about managing people as a qualification for managing people. So God's house, it's the same, it's the same word. God's house refers to God's people, the people of the church, not the building.

And to understand it more fully, I just want us to briefly see that concept of the house of God, the people of God, in the widest scope of the history of redemption and how the temple, that which is the house of God in the Old Testament, I should do it this way at the time, the temple as the house of God goes not to, isn't fulfilled in the church building, but it's fulfilled in the people of God.

So let me just, we thought a bit about this on Thursday night if you're listening. So let me just skim over it again, because it's essential we understand that. So Solomon's temple, it's time to think, Solomon's temple, the house of God, that's fulfilled in the church building.

There you go, it's not. What we see as we go through, as the Bible shows us a fulfillment, is that rather it's fulfilled in Jesus.

So the temple was the place where God dwelled, where God made his glory known, where God met with his people. But it was always a shadow of what was to come.

[14:46] And what it was a shadow of wasn't a building, but a person, and there are people. So that's why when Jesus comes, and in John chapter one speaks of Jesus, he uses the words, the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And that word dwelt is significant, doesn't come up lots, but it's the word tabernacled. The word became flesh and tabernacled among us. John's point is that Jesus is God tabernacling, God templeing among his people.

And so from there, and so Jesus even says himself that, he says, speaking of himself, he says destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up.

But when Jesus ascended to heaven, that didn't suddenly mean, okay, we're back to needing a temple again, a physical temple. Because if you remember, Jesus promised his spirit. He promised to send his spirit to dwell in his people.

And that happened at Pentecost. And so when God's spirit came to dwell in his people, his people became the house of God, the dwelling place of God.

[15:53] Just as was promised in the Old Testament, just as was promised by Christ. And we see that clearly. The New Testament writers helped to join the dots for us. I know I'm going quickly and I'd love to chat about this more afterwards.

But in the reading we had, Paul to the Ephesians says that you are members of the household of God, a holy temple in the Lord, being built together into the dwelling place of God by the spirit.

So we are a temple building project. Not these four walls in the roof. You and I, as the people of God, are God's temple, temple in progress.

We are God's dwelling place by his spirit. And that's finally fulfilled in Revelation. I forgot to flick to that bit. But the point is, so the house of God is the people of God.

That's the thing I want us to remember. That's the thing that's fundamental for the logic as well of one Timothy and a lot of the Bible. And I realize that might in some ways be a new concept for some of us.

[16:56] You might have heard the church building or the church organization even referred to as God's house. And that might be due to good intention, seeking to maybe apply psalms that speak about, I love the house where you live or I want to be a doorman in the house of God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

And the fact that the house of God is God's people rather than a building doesn't mean we can't sing those psalms. Rather it just means the application of those psalms gets better. It means that instead of saying, you know, I want to dwell in the building, we're saying I want to be with God's people.

It expands it. Instead of saying I'd rather be a doorman in the house of God, that gets better than just standing at the door of the church. It's saying I want to serve God's people. Do you see that? The fulfillment in God's people makes it such, makes it so much better and bigger. So the verses, these verses aren't talking, that were first talking about the temple, for example, that they're now applying to us as a people. Back to 1 Timothy, though, the house of God, the household of God is the people of God. And so that means just very significantly then, that means that Paul isn't giving instructions in 1 Timothy about how to behave in a sacred space. [18:17] Because there aren't any sacred places anywhere on earth. Paul is giving instructions about how to conduct ourselves as a sacred people.

Let me just impact a few of the implications of that. I've stuck them over here. First of all, great privilege and dignity. What the temple was, that's what the church is to be now. The dwelling place of God Almighty. We, you and I, people. We are the dwelling place of God Almighty, the Creator, the sustainer, the immortal, invisible, God only wise. The God who is uncontainable, as Solomon says, and yet has somehow mysteriously, wondrously said that he is dwelling in us as his people. Because we're united with Christ. What an amazing privilege. That gives us such great dignity. Second is great responsibility as God's house. [19:22] As if we as people are God's house, then our whole lives should be one of holiness. It's not just when we come through the front door of the church and we sit on the pew that our lives should be distinctive and respectful and all the other things you might associate with maybe coming into God's presence.

Actually we are in God's presence every day. We are, and so it matters, our behaviour when we sit at the kitchen table is as important as when we're sitting on the pew. Because we are always in God's presence as God's people. That's why 1 Timothy has so much to teach us about just practical godliness in day to day life. Paul wouldn't be concerned with that if what only mattered was how we behaved inside a church building. Third is great mission, as God's house and God's household we should be to our neighbours, to the area around the same thing the temple was meant to be. So the temple was meant to display God's glory to the nations. And we with our words and lives are meant to do the same. [20:35] More on that in a moment. But finally our identity as God's house takes us to our identity as the family of God. I just want to focus a bit on this. If you do have a read through 1 Timothy this afternoon you just see how much family language there is.

Have a read, have a count, try to count how many times Paul calls Timothy his child, how many times he uses the words as a father, mother and sister and brother. I love how in 5 verse 1 and 2 you might see if you just look across the column in your Bible Paul says, do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters in all purity. He's saying that family should determine how we relate to one another. Let's just start praying that over the next few months not just that we'll act that way but that we think of ourselves as that way. Actions flow from the thoughts. Let's start praying that we'd see ourselves. We'd see the people sitting next to us. We'd see that same familial warmth as Paul sees Timothy in calling his child. [21:43] This also has massive implications. Would you see that again over the next few weeks? That's the thing with doing an OV. You just can't say everything. There's so much that could be said. We just got a skim.

But chapters 3 and 4 will focus on leading God's household like fathers. There's just another little thing. Do you see yourselves as the fathers of the church? Those of you who are older women in the church, do you look and see other people as daughters, as sisters? Chapters 2 and 5, though, going out from chapter 3, they focus on relationships in the family of God. I just want to look again in chapter 5. I think it's amazing that Paul spends more time talking about how to care for widows than talking about elders and deacons.

Would you have expected that? Would you have expected that he would have that kind of concern for those who are needy and neglected? Why is that?

[22 : 42] Well, it's because church families are a building, church families are a business. And so care for people is more important than care for fabric and for finances.

We call it to care for the weak and the lonely and the vulnerable in the same way that we would our favourite and relative or our dearest grandmother.

We should be instant family in that way. Church should be the best place for the person who's a widowed or single or feeling lonely in all those places because in Christ we should be instant family in that way.

It's wonderful the ways I've already seen that. Can I just encourage you to grow in that, to keep throwing your arms out in that, to anyone and everyone who knows who God will bring to take your arms, who God will bring to bring into the church in that way?

We could keep talking about this for ages and we will be as we go along through this series. Can I encourage you to take some time this week though to pray about your identity, about as the house of God and as family, to think about that, to think about who we are.

[23 : 55] We need to move on to our second point though. We are short on time. We'll be skimming through. You see identity determines our purpose.

So when you get a bunch of bits of metal and you turn them into a lawnmower, those bits of metal now have a purpose. Their purpose is to cut grass. And God saves us, gives us an identity as the household of God for a purpose.

And that purpose is far more glorious than just cutting grass. We read that here in verse 15. The household of God is to be a pillar and buttress of the truth.

What's the purpose of the local church? Well it's to be a pillar and buttress. It's to be, you might say, a foundation of the truth. It's to hold up the truth, to hold it out to the world.

That's what a pillar does, it makes something visible, it upholds it. We're reminded of that in Ephesians 2. But as we go through, we'll see the church is to defend the gospel, to commend the gospel.

[24 : 57] The church is the way that God brings the gospel to the world. And in that way the church fits with God's desire and his purpose. So chapter 2 verse 3 and 4, we read that God our Savior desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

And how does that happen? Well that happens through the church, offering out the truth. That's why it's so important that the church fulfills its purpose.

But how can, so the church fulfills that purpose then. The church as a pillar and buttress of the truth is like a beacon on a hill. Like a lamp on a stand as Jesus talks about.

I've heard the church described as God's megaphone to the world. How does God get his truth out? It's through the church speaking, it's through the church living. Just as the temple was the focal point of God's revelation in the Old Testament.

So now it's the church, which is the focal point. And that happens as the church speaks the truth and lives out the truth. Can I just ask you, do we share such a high vision of the church?

[26 : 07] Not that we're just God's households, but do we remember that we're the church of the living God who continues to work and act through his church? I don't know about you, but do you ever look at Scotland or maybe you look at the church and you think maybe you're just discouraged?

And you think, well what am I doing here? What difference can we make? Well let these verses be an encouragement to you.

God has a far higher view of the church than you or I ever will. And he has placed us at this place, in this corner of the world, at this place in time, because he desires that through these people here, his purposes will be made known.

And it's easier to maybe think, and I wish I was maybe in a big city church that I was booming and there was just loads of people there, or even I wish I was Christian 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 40 years ago, when there were loads of people and this building was maybe full.

And it's not that kind of nostalgia, maybe, or wishful thinking, maybe understandable, but God and his sovereignty has placed us here and now.

[27 : 22] He's placed us here because he wants us, and he wants us to be part of his purpose, to take the gospel to the world as a pillar and buttress of the truth. And that's why he's placed us here.

To share the gospel with our friends and neighbours in all, in Carloway and the villages beyond. But to carry out that mission, the church needs to stay faithful in the gospel and as we'll come and see, that's where, that's where Ephesus had gone wrong.

As false teaching had crept into the church, as we'll see more detail next week, but essentially that had all come undone. So you know, a healthy church you might think of like a building site that's working well, there's good leadership, there's purpose, there's focus, they know what they're doing, they've got one task, everyone's working together.

Well that had all unraveled with false teachers coming into Ephesus. Instead you had people, the mission as it were had been put off to one side, the gospel had been distorted, the focus wasn't on building up the church as a pillar and buttress of the truth, but scrolling through genealogies and, you know, just distraction from the gospel.

So when, so that's why Paul is wanting to get the church back on track, because when the church loses the gospel at its heart, it loses its focus, it loses its purpose.

[28 : 49] And the church as I said had become inward looking, full of quarrelling and was not making an impact on society. But how should a church get back on track? We're going to flick quickly to our third point and that's with, to a healthy church.

See Paul's instruction is that Timothy are very simple. How does a church get back on track? How does a church, how can you maintain a healthy church? How do we make sure that we don't go downhill, that we go uphill and that we keep going as a healthy church?

And that's to keep the gospel truth at the heart, to proclaim the truth in word and indeed. We see that here.

We read, he was manifest in the flesh vindicated by the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

And we see verse 16 says, says great indeed we confess is the mystery of godliness. And when Paul says mystery, he's not saying something that we can't understand, rather when Paul here is in also Ephesians three, the word mystery is used in the New Testament to describe something that was once hidden, but now revealed.

[30 : 03] So godliness that was once hidden is made fully revealed in Christ. And now Paul is saying in the church, Christ ascended to heaven.

So that doesn't mean that God has left himself without witness. That doesn't mean that God has left himself without a way to reveal himself. He now does that through the church.

Do you see all that revealing language? Manifest, vindicated, proclaimed, believed on. That's how Christ displayed the truth of God to the world.

And now he does that through the church preaching Christ and living like Christ.

I've heard that very helpfully described as the church then is the mirror of Christ. So this is quote from Charles Bridges, I think sums it up. Well, the church is the mirror that reflects the whole effulgence of the divine character.

[30 : 59] It is a grand scene in which the perfections of Jehovah are displayed to the universe. So that's what we should be. And so practically Paul says that's how Timothy, that's how he basically Paul is saying that's Paul's, the rest of what Timothy is working that out in the latter, teaching the church how to be a mirror of Christ.

And even just dancing quickly at that structure. That's how he does it. He's saying through proclaiming the word. So to the leading those who lead the church proclaiming the truth, Timothy, be an example of that through guarding against false teaching, making sure stuff that detracts from the word.

The false teaching doesn't happen. But as well as positively proclaiming the truth, as proclaiming Christ indeed, Paul's focuses more in this section of elders and deacons, not in teaching, but in how they live.

Godliness in life, training and pursuing Godliness. What we, the doctrine that we, that we know, the doctrine that we hold to has to overflow into how we live.

They're inseparably connected. That's why Scotland's own Moral of the Vary McShane says the greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.

[32 : 26] What's consistent is if we care about the salvation of the lost, then we must guard and protect the gospel, the truth, but we also must live it every day.

Paul says to Timothy, keep a close watch on yourself and your teaching. Persist in this for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers. The salvation of the lost in some ways, God's, in sovereignty stands and falls on how we live and how we speak.

People will hear and respond to the truth based on what we say and how we live. We've really run out of time. So let me just close. In summary, the healthy gospel church should be a pillar and buttress of the truth holding up and holding out the gospel.

We have that privilege. We've been called to be that kind of church, but that doesn't have to be intimidating. That doesn't have to be something that is a burden for us.

I just love how the letter begins and ends with Paul saying grace to you. The same God of grace who called us and saved us is the one who preserves us and who by his spirit dwells in us as the house of God and who empowers us by his grace to be the church that he is designed and created and saved us to be.

[33 : 49] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much that you have saved us for such a noble task as displaying the excellencies of your glory to the world.

Lord, there's so much of that we don't understand. That's so often we don't feel worthy of that or able. But Lord, help us to just grasp even in a small way, even just start to understand the great task, the great calling that you've given us.

Lord, please over the next few weeks be shaping us as a church more and more into the household of God that you want us to be.

Lord, please help us to see ourselves in that way, to see the noble calling as being the temple of your spirit, to being brothers and sisters one another.

And please may that overflow into all the way we live. May we value your word above all else. May we proclaim your word in our words and in our deeds.

[34 : 59] We pray all this by your spirit. Amen.