

Paul's stated purpose for writing to Timothy is contained in verses 3:14 & 15.

*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: 15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Paul did not know when and if he would be able to return. He makes provision for Timothy, and us, to keep the faith even if he did not return. We can read into his statement "if I tarry long," a hint of the long wait indeed there has been for those awaiting the Lord's return. So we can see behind Paul's words the Lord's own concern for us in His absence. It has been over 1930 years since Paul wrote this. The Lord still has not come. But His instructions are still valid and good for us. They aren't out of date or out of step with the times in which we find ourselves. Indeed these "last days" epistles are remarkably appropriate for believers today.

Up to here we have been given some basic elements of godly conduct in amongst the saints of God. In this chapter the church of God is mentioned for the first time in this letter, verses 5 & 15. The order and conduct prescribed for elders, for Timothy and all of us, is what is to be found in what is called the House of God. We are told this House of God is the Church (called out assembly) of the Living God. And the church is the pillar and ground of the truth.

So the intent of Paul's letter is for individual believers to know what is expected and appropriate behavior among the assembly of believers gathered out unto the Lord's name. As we individual saints conform to Paul's charge, each assembly locally (as well as the entire body of believers throughout the earth) will be a godly, orderly, effective testimony to God's uniting love, the Household and Temple of God on the earth. Individuals' bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit. Together these comprise the assembly which is collectively the Temple of the Holy Spirit, with the Lord in the midst. There is One Head and One Body and One Spirit, One Lord, One hope of our (one) calling.

While the assembly on earth is a pillar upon which the truth is supported and displayed, and is the stay, support or base of the truth displayed, it is not said here or anywhere to be the source of the truth or the teacher of the truth. The truth that is in Jesus, Ephesians 4:\_\_\_\_, who through the Holy Spirit revealed it through the apostles and prophets and recorded and preserved it in the inspired word of God. The truth is displayed through orderly loving conduct in the assembly. This allows and enables gifted saints to minister the truth to believers in the power of the indwelling Spirit of God within the assembly and to reach out from the assembly with the gospel to sinners. Note the assembly itself is never said to teach or put forth doctrine, creeds or

the like to be held and defended. It is the pillar and stay of the truth. The truth is found in scripture. The Lord, through the Spirit, raises up individuals within godly assemblies to evangelize teach and shepherd His own. If the assembly, the House or Temple of God, is in disorder or out of order, the Spirit is quenched, united praise, prayer and prophecy is impeded, the gifts within it are stifled, the light of testimony is dimmed and the work is hampered.

Immediately Paul spontaneously turns attention to the Lord. The mystery (secret) of godliness. "Not the mysterious (as with the English word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by Divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit. ... truth revealed." Vine.

. Great indeed is the secret of godliness. It is Christ Himself.

◆He is God manifest in the flesh. The "WWJD." (What would Jesus do?) Or better, the "WDJD." (What Did Jesus do?). In Him we see the truly perfect, godly Man, our example indeed. But we see infinitely more than that. We see God. God made clearly known in the flesh, in the flesh as an ordinary but sinless human, being born into this sinful, sin-cursed world through a virgin after conception by the Spirit.

◆He was justified in the Spirit. He was proven to be completely righteous before God and man (and angels) in the Spirit. As a Man He lived for God for thirty years and was proven to be the Man in whom God could state at His baptism, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Upon that pronouncement of perfect satisfaction the Holy Spirit descended upon Him to remain in Him forever. As He remains in Him, so the Spirit remains in us forever, John 14:16-17.

◆He was seen of angels. We always assume the angels in heaven "see" God all the time. But they apparently first truly saw God in all his fulness, Colossians 1:\_\_\_\_ the same way men first saw Him, manifest in the flesh. In Jesus full of grace and truth, John 1:14, 17.

◆A marvelous thing has now occurred. God is preached not only to His chosen nation Israel but to the whole world. To the Jew first and also to the Greek, Romans 1:16 What grace! What marvelous condescension! Paul's mission was especially to the Gentiles, (the nations). Now he, though once an insufferably proud and selfish Pharisee now rejoices in the mission given him, Chapter 1:12.

◆And not only is Christ preached to Gentiles but actually believed on in the world. Paul rejoices in the results obtained through the Spirit. Timothy was among the predominantly Gentile assembly at Ephesus.

◆This godly Man, Jesus, was received up into glory, but not without dying as were Enoch and Elijah, but after rising

bodily from the dead. His godliness paved the way for our godly walk which will culminate in resurrection and ascension for most, and direct ascension for “we who remain.”

**Yes, great is the mystery of Godliness indeed!**

Paul now turns again to speak of conditions soon to be arising among professing believers. He already pointed up the tendency toward departure and urged Timothy to hold fast to the faith. Here he tells us the **Spirit itself** had spoken expressly (distinctly) about what would occur in the latter times. Paul wasn't just giving an educated guess. Did it happen? Paul's second letter to Timothy tells of its beginnings and gives principles and detailed instructions for the path of faith in the last days. They are here, brethren, and have been for centuries. How long, O Lord, will you wait?

What a release the Spirit gives us. Free from the superstitions and impositions of laws and traditions introduced by religious men but having no scriptural basis. Men who speak lies in hypocrisy. Who have their consciences cauterized so as to be without feeling. Men wickedly altering basic, God given, human relationships such as marriage, a blessing bestowed upon the whole human race from the beginning. An wicked men altering the permitted menu of food and drink. Neither of these, marriage or menu, were issues to the One who is God manifest in the flesh. His first miracle was in blessing a marriage feast. Although He didn't marry, He strenuously upheld marriage as normal and preferred, .and condemned fornication, adultery, (and divorce unless for due cause). He was denounced for eating and drinking and that with publicans and sinners. He declared that a man is not defiled by what goes into his mouth but by what comes out, Matthew 15:\_\_\_\_. Paul's statements are based upon, and consistent with, the Lord's teaching while here on earth. Both have God's mind. Paul writes about marriage and food in more detail in his letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians Philippians, etc. and in some preaching recorded in Acts, 14:15-17. There is no intrinsic merit in remaining single, 1Corinthians 7, but there may be blessing in that for those called to it. A person may choose to remain single in order to serve the Lord, but not to feel more saintly than others, much less to pursue worldly ambitions for career, wealth, pleasures, and other self centered objectives. One may choose temporary or selective fasting, or abstinence when praying or mourning etc. but certainly not just to appear godly or to prove personal moral strength. One may avoid self indulgence or overeating or abstain from certain

foods and beverages in order to keep sober and fit to serve the Lord, but not to tout his self control. Self control is part of the fruit of the Spirit not an end to itself. It is but a means toward presenting oneself to the Lord, to be “at His service.”

The dietary limitations of the Mosaic Law no longer apply to those who have received and know the truth. All food is to be received with conscious thanksgiving. Food set before us is not to be refused for religious scruples. Paul writes more in Romans 14, 1Corinthians 8 through 10, Colossians 2. It is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. Food once thought unholy is now considered set apart to us for our use by God. (Similarly a marriage of two unbelievers is now sanctified if one partner becomes saved, 1Corinthians 7.) The New Testament has changed things. Those who try to carry the Old into the New snub God's grace. He instituted the New at the infinite cost of giving His Son to die on the cross. Satan laughs.

Note the historical changes in dietary limits as God graciously increased revelation of Himself after the fall. Originally, Man and the animals were given grain, green plants and fruit for food. (Only the fruit of one tree was forbidden as a test of Man's recognition of his Creator's rights.) After the flood man and animals were allowed to kill and eat animals, except the blood was not to be eaten. (It still isn't!) The Law given to Moses forbid many foods. Israel couldn't keep it. The Lord sent the Holy Spirit after ascension. Through Peter Jewish believers were relieved of the requirement to observe the Mosaic law, Acts 10 and 11. Paul reinforces that change and emphatically teaches against requiring Gentiles to observe the Jewish law (and the covenant of circumcision made earlier with Abraham as well) Romans 6-7; Galatians, and others. But men persist in attempting to impose restraints on human nature (the flesh) both to prevent sin and to teach self control (and sometimes to to gain a following, or worse, to gain religious power over others, or to exact money for promised intervention with God, etc.) Self control and avoiding sin both are to flow from the believer's love of God arising from having received life in Christ, and to be carried out through the power of the indwelling Spirit. These virtues are not to be imposed upon anyone except parents upon their children. Furthermore they are not to be self imposed. Great is the secret of Godliness. It is found in Christ and our devotion to Him.

Meanwhile, more on a godly walk next time.

By Ron Canner, March 29, 2006