



## 1 Timothy - Chapter Three

### III. 1 Timothy 2:1-3:13 - Descriptions of Gospel-Shaped Living (continues/concludes)

#### Summary of Chapter Three

The initial focus of this chapter is the personal attributes that should be displayed by those who are called to lead local churches. They are clearly mandatory and not just Paul's recommendations.

The chapter ends with a brief but extremely important summary statement describing the instructions that Paul gives to all churches. It describes the mystery that underpins the Christian faith given in poetic form, a hymn probably well known to the church in Ephesus.

#### III.b 1 Timothy 3:1-13 - Qualifications for Bishops and Deacons

Paul turned his attention to the personal qualities and characteristics that are essential for those who would serve in church leadership.

This was a few years before the apostle John arrived to become an elder in the Ephesian church. The moral lapse and defection of some of this church's leaders undoubtedly had left the fellowship in a state of instability. Therefore, the internal disruption was likely to be met by severe criticism from unbelievers. For these reasons the two lists included at this point describe the necessary qualifications for the offices of the bishops and deacons. In each case the focal point is the candidate's reputation among believers and unbelievers alike, which is to be computed on the basis of proven moral character and maturity.

#### III.b.i 1 Timothy 3:1-7 - Qualifications of Bishops

After dealing with issues that arise from corporate worship, including the barring of women from the role of teaching and exerting authority over the assembled congregation, Paul now discussed who should exercise these roles. Paul did not give a job description of the pastor/bishop, but instead described the character of one who would serve in this office. The list of qualities is not intended to be

exhaustive but pictures a person of mature Christian character, one whose faith has had tangible impact on his behaviour unlike that of Paul's opponents.

<sup>1</sup> The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.

### 1 Timothy 3:1

The saying is sure introduces this as the second of Paul's trustworthy sayings, as first noted in: <<*The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost*>> (1 Timothy 1:15).

The terms bishop, overseer, elder, pastor or shepherd are all used in the NT to refer to the same office. In: <<*I left you behind in Crete for this reason, that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it*>> (Titus 1:5-9), elder and bishop or overseer are used interchangeably.

Paul summoned the Ephesian elders, Greek *presbyteros*, to a meeting: <<*From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him*>> (Acts 20:17). Paul then told them: <<*Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son*>> (Acts 20:28), using Greek *episkopos* for overseers and Greek *poimainō*, i.e. to pastor or serve as shepherd of the church of God.

Peter also wrote: <<*Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly*>> (1 Peter 5:1-2), using Greek *presbyteros* to describe his fellow elders and Greek *poimainō* to tend, act as shepherd or be the bishop or pastor the flock.

Paul commended the role of serving the church in this way as being a noble task. By including this in his sure saying, Paul was offering encouragement to those who hold such posts and perhaps had become discouraged and disenchanted due to the problems they were then facing. It also alludes to the office being only as good as the person who is called to fill it, something for those in the modern church to consider, especially if their busy lives prevent them from giving the role their full and sufficient attention.

Bishop stresses the role of watching over the congregation: <<*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give*

*an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing – for that would be harmful to you>>* (Hebrews 13:17).

<sup>2</sup> Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.

### 1 Timothy 3:2-3

Paul listed the characteristics that a church leader should possess. Elsewhere, he indicated that it is an office for those who are called to it: <<*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ*>> (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Above reproach heads the list as the key qualification for a bishop or overseer; it is then expounded by the words and phrases that follow in these verses. It summarised the main point, which the rest of the list fills out: there should be no legitimate accusation that could be brought against a church leader that would bring disrepute on the Gospel or the church; a leader's life should be seen as worthy of imitation.

Married only once is often translated husband of one wife Greek, *mias gynaikos, andra*, and its meaning is widely debated. The Greek phrase is not common, and there are few other instances for comparison. The phrase literally states: 'of one woman wife man husband'. The options for consideration include:

1. Many commentators understand the phrase to mean having the character of a one-woman man; that is, faithful to his wife. In support of this view is the fact that a similar phrase is used: <<*Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once*>> (1 Timothy 5:9), as a qualification for widows, Greek *henos andros gynē*; one-man woman, i.e. wife of one husband, and in that verse it seems to refer to the trait of faithfulness, for a prohibition of remarriage after the death of a spouse would be in contradiction to Paul's advice to young widows: <<*So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us*>> (1 Timothy 5:14). Interpreters who hold this to first view conclude that the wording of v.2 is too specific to be simply a requirement of marriage and not specific enough to be simply a reference to divorce or remarriage after divorce. In the context of this passage, the phrase therefore prohibits any kind of marital unfaithfulness.
2. Another view is that married only once means polygamists cannot be church leaders. Interpreters who hold this view note that there is evidence of polygamy being practiced in some Jewish circles at the time, although monogamy was the norm in the culture and polygamy was often regarded as abhorrent. On this view, the phrase means at the present time the husband

of one wife, in line with other qualifications, which refer to the present character. On either of these views, Paul was not prohibiting all second marriages: *<<A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgement she is more blessed if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God>>* (1 Corinthians 7:39-40); that is, he was not prohibiting from the leadership a man whose wife had died and who had remarried, or a man who had been divorced and who had remarried; for these cases should be evaluated on an individual basis.

3. A third view is that Paul was absolutely requiring that a leader be someone who had never had more than one wife. But that does not fit the context well, with its emphasis on present character. On any of these views, Paul was speaking of the ordinary cases and was not absolutely requiring marriage or children v.4, but was giving a picture of the typical approved bishop or pastor as a faithful husband and father.

Being temperate is a key requirement, for leaders are called to show self-restraint, especially with regard to food and drink, for it gives poor witness to have leaders who are grossly obese or frequently drunk, claiming that their body is a temple holy to God!

A sensible approach to life is something else that will be judged in a leader. There are those who are given to wild claims about the faith that are clearly outside of the Gospel message. Also, there are those who take on direction changes on a whim, causing upset in their churches. It may not be listed as a Spiritual gift but common sense is something God surely expects of all his people, and especially his designated leaders.

Respectable leaders are essential as they, the church and their faith will be judged by personal characteristics of such individuals.

Showing hospitality is a Spiritual gift but being hospitable goes further than that. Leaders are to be genuinely warm in welcoming both members of their congregation and outsiders in a manner that is overtly sincere.

An apt teacher. Being able to teach is the one requirement in this list that is not necessarily required of all believers. It also implies having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Word of God. It is also not required of deacons. Thus, it is a distinguishing skill required of the pastor/bishop. It yields the only reference in this list to his actual duties and the ability to teach is the distinguishing mark of a pastor or bishop. This includes both teaching what is right and refuting error.

Not a drunkard. Paul, like Jesus, saw nothing wrong in drinking alcohol in moderation. Those who choose total abstinence are also in line with Paul's teaching: *<<I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean>>* (Romans 14:14). However, it had been prohibited for the priests when they came in service before the Lord: *<<And the Lord spoke to Aaron: Drink no wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons, when you enter the tent of meeting, that you may not die; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations>>* (Leviticus 10:8-9). The key point to this is that leaders are to maintain control and excessive

alcohol tends to make an individual lose that control, especially over their thinking, their words, and their actions.

**Not violent but gentle.** Violence has no place in any believer's life, let alone that of leaders who are to stand out as beacons for the faith. Tendencies toward drunkenness and violence are clearly reasons for rejection. The church cannot afford to be led by those who allow themselves to be controlled by intoxicating substances, which enslave the user and inhibit decisive thinking, or indeed those led by their emotions; evidence of these traits in any believer calls for immediate action. They are signs of a loss of control. Maturity and strength are to exhibit themselves instead in gentleness and humility, yet a strong faith, as they did in Christ: *<<I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when I am away!>>* (2 Corinthians 10:1), *<<And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth>>* (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

**Not quarrelsome.** There is nothing wrong with debating and holding to one's own opinion, but leaders need to be clear in their own minds where they are taking their church, make their position known and then avoid any meaningless arguments over either that direction or indeed any issues of scriptural interpretation, or church life in general. Leaders need to lead, they need to get on with people and accept that another's viewpoint is valid, not being afraid to admit when they have got something wrong and be prepared to change if they are wrong. They are not to fall back into the crowd.

**Not a lover of money.** This does not prevent leaders from being wealthy or from owning expensive possessions. Paul's primary concern is against those who seek wealth for its own sake and the worldly benefits that it may provide them with. Their attitude toward money must be one of healthy detachment, although they must not become irresponsible either with their own money or the funds of the church. Good stewardship is required with money as with all other gifts.

<sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way – <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?

### **1 Timothy 3:4-5**

The **management** of one's **own household** is highlighted as a qualification for leadership by the greater amount of discussion given to it. The home is the proving ground of Christian character and therefore the preparation field for ministry. This makes further sense in light of the picture of the church as the household of God, which Paul discussed in v.15.

**Society expected the householder to command the respect of his wife, children and slaves. To expect less from church leaders would have been to risk associating the church with charges of social disruption and political subversion, bringing it at least into disrepute. However, this particular**

condition was not meant to exclude the unmarried from holding positions of leadership in the church; in that day marriage was the almost universal rule.

Believers who have young children should bring them up to be respectful and to know the boundaries that are set for them. Frequently, children in church seem to be outside of the control of their parents, who are afraid to admonish them for they fear being seen as not loving enough toward them. Letting a child have its own way is not loving but actually harmful. Violence is not required but firm handling and meaning what you say is essential for a child to know what they can and cannot do.

<sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

### 1 Timothy 3:6

Not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit. No matter the level of giftedness, time is needed to both grow in, and demonstrate, maturity and character. It should be noted that this is not a reference to age, purely to the length of time a person has been a believer. There is also no duration of time specified for it is up to other mature leaders to nurture potential leaders and identify when they are ready to take on the responsibility of church office.

Fall into the condemnation of the devil. Paul knew the dangers this posed for those who would be ensnared and the devil is always on the prowl, looking for such people: <<*Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour*>> (1 Peter 5:8).

<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

### 1 Timothy 3:7

The concern for the opinion of outsiders emerges again. There is a concern throughout this letter for how the church and therefore the Gospel is portrayed to the watching world. It was common in the ancient world to emphasise one item in a list by placing it at the beginning or end and giving it more attention than the other items. By placing this requirement at the end of the list it appears Paul saw it at least as important as the ability to teach and perhaps even more so, for the reputation is not that of the individual but of the God they represent.

### III.b.ii 1 Timothy 3:8-13 - Qualifications of Deacons

Along with bishops vv.1-7, deacons are and always have been officers of the NT church: <<*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons*>> (Philippians 1:1). They primarily accept tasks delegated to them by the bishops and elders. Verse 8 suggests a link between the two lists of qualifications, and indeed there are striking similarities. Deacons, like bishops, are to exhibit lives shaped by the Gospel. One key distinction is that deacons are not required to be able to teach. This list, like the one for the bishops, focuses on character rather than duties. The NT contains little explicit discussion of the role of deacons unless Acts Chapter 6 is

understood to refer to the installation of the first deacons; but the Greek word *diakonos* means servant, so the office probably involved being responsible for various areas of service in the church.

<sup>8</sup> Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money;

### 1 Timothy 3:8

The office of deacon was first encountered in the early Jerusalem church when the Greek widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of food, so seven men were selected to serve this group of people on behalf of the apostles: <<***And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word'***>> (Acts 6:2-4).

Must be serious refers to the person's attitude to their duties and not their outward demeanour.

Not double-tongued. Another common expression for this is two-faced. Except where issues of confidentiality are overriding factors, church officers and leaders in general are required to be open and honest about matters of the church, not couching anything in spurious language and never misleading the congregation.

Both the list of qualities for a bishop (v.2) and those here for a deacon are relatively straightforward, showing that they are not prohibited from drinking alcohol but should remain in control at all times and should not be engaged either within the church or outside in activities where the pursuit of wealth is the primary aim in and of itself, for that can lead to corruption; a subject Paul will return to again, showing its potentially devastating consequences: <<***For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains***>> (1 Timothy 6:10).

<sup>9</sup> they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

### 1 Timothy 3:9

They must hold fast. The deacon must have strength of character to stand up for what is right in the church and to be able to deal with the day to day issues that will inevitably arise. As well as all the other characteristics, it requires someone of whom it can be said: <<***The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion***>> (Proverbs 28:1).

Mystery, Greek *mystērion*, is a common Pauline word and refers here to the entire revealed content of God's plan to bring salvation through Christ: <<***But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory***>> (1 Corinthians 2:7), and: <<***I became its servant according to God's***>>

*commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory>> (Colossians 1:25-27). Refer also to Ephesians Chapter 3.*

With a clear conscience. While deacons are not required to be able to teach, they are required to have a good grasp of the Gospel, and their behaviour is to be consistent with the Gospel. This was a personal quality that Paul endeavoured to maintain: <<*I am grateful to God – whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did – when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day*>> (2 Timothy 1:3), as did the author to the Hebrews: <<*Pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things*>> (Hebrews 13:18).

<sup>10</sup> And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.

### 1 Timothy 3:10

Deacons must be tested, presumably under the guidance and leadership of the bishops and elders, for the NT churches operated a plurality leadership model from the outset.

<sup>11</sup> Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.

### 1 Timothy 3:11

The Greek word for women *gynē*, here plural, can mean either women or wives. This ambiguity results in at least three interpretations. The text could refer to:

1. The wives of deacons, i.e. their wives.
2. Women deacons.
3. Women who assist the deacons in some denominations called deaconesses but who are distinct from the deacons.

Although not expressed in this translation, others, e.g. ESV, NLT, RSV, state 'their women'. However, the word 'their' is not explicit in the Greek text but, according to the first interpretation, it represents the sense of the verse in the context of vv.8-13.

These women appear abruptly in the flow of the text. A reference to the wives of deacons would make good sense, leading into the discussion of the deacon's family in v.12. However, the term likewise in similar cases often introduces a new group. Also, the discussion of bishops lacked any reference to their wives. This would support understanding these women to be deacons or their assistants, a position that many take Paul's colleague Phoebe to have held: <<*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreæ*>> (Romans 16:1), using the Greek *diakonos*.

If the office of deacon is understood as involving church-wide teaching or governing authority, then: <<*Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty*>> (1 Timothy 2:11-15), would not permit women to carry out these functions. The fact that teaching is not mentioned as a responsibility of the deacons would seem to indicate that this was not a role that Paul intended for deacons.

<sup>12</sup> Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well;

#### 1 Timothy 3:12

Married only once or husband of one wife was discussed earlier under the required characteristics of bishops. Similarly, the home is the training ground for such people as well, who need to demonstrate the ability to command respect at home if they are to do so inside and outside of the church.

<sup>13</sup> for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

#### 1 Timothy 3:13

Paul highlighted the value and importance of deacons by stating two results of good service in this role:

1. Good standing refers to respect and appreciation from the church to one who serves in this way.
2. Great boldness probably refers to the increase in confidence that comes from seeing the power of the Gospel regularly proven in ministry.

Both good standing and great boldness in the faith could only enhance the reputation of the church and the God it represents in the wider community as well. This would help to attract new comers to the faith.

### **IV. 1 Timothy 3:14-16 - The Mystery of Our Religion**

Paul paused to state the purpose of his letter and in so doing revealed its central focus. How one ought to behave in the church appropriately is summarised in the instructions to groups in the church, the instructions to Timothy, and in the warnings against false teachers. True doctrine leads to right living.

Firstly, Paul returned to the personal tone with which he began the letter. Secondly, he related godly behaviour to the very nature of the church God had formed. Finally, he inserted a piece of a hymn celebrating Christ's incarnation and redemptive ministry, a hymn that was probably well known by this church.

<sup>14</sup> I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that,

### 1 Timothy 3:14

I hope to come to you soon. Paul had learned from experience that plans were often thwarted and radically altered, completely outside of his control: <<*When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them*>> (Acts 16:7), <<*I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles*>> (Romans 1:13), <<*This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you*>> (Romans 15:22), and: <<*But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power*>> (1 Corinthians 4:19).

But I am writing. The purpose was out of natural and heartfelt concern for both Timothy and the church. Therefore, Paul did not wait until his return before issuing these extra instructions and guidelines that were intended to protect and strengthen the church, and to encourage Timothy in his ministry.

<sup>15</sup> if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

### 1 Timothy 3:15

In this very significant verse, Paul stated his primary reason for writing 1 Timothy, providing one of the key NT descriptions of the church's identity and mission.

How one ought to behave. This is a reference to Christian conduct showing that Paul's term is holistic, describing a manner of life in all of its aspects from personal to interpersonal, therefore, relationships are very much in view.

The use of household, Greek *oikos*, and related words to describe the church and its ministry are common in Paul's letters: <<*Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries*>> (1 Corinthians 4:1), <<*So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith*>> (Galatians 6:10), and: <<*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God*>> (Ephesians 2:19), as well as: <<*For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*>> (1 Peter 4:17). It describes the church as God's family, especially with reference to authority and responsibility within the church and the home. The stress is on God's authority over the church and the behaviour of people in the church.

In the Greco-Roman world, as in the Jewish home that Paul would have grown up in, the father was the patriarch and was due all respect from his wife, children, and in larger homes, the servants. By aligning the church as God's household, then Paul is identifying the Master of the house. It is not the leaders or any of the members but God himself.

The Greco-Roman household consisted of different groups, duties and responsibilities, and in the larger ones, stewards were given authority to see that each did her or his share so that the master's purposes might be achieved. The concept of household with its associated notions of interdependence, acceptable conduct and responsibility was so strong that Paul could borrow it to illustrate the nature of the church. It too, both then and now, is made up of different groups, i.e. men and women from every level of society, parents and children, employers and employees, who must depend upon and, in love, serve one another, and it is the task of the stewards, the bishops, pastors, elders, and deacons, to ensure that the household accomplishes the Master's goals.

Church of the living God highlights the church as the gathering, Greek *ekklēsia*, the assembly where God most clearly manifests his presence. Thus, references to God as the living God in Scripture often refer to his reality and presence in the community of believers: <<*Say to them, 'As I live', says the Lord, 'I will do to you the very things I heard you say'*>> (Numbers 14:28), <<*Joshua said, 'By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites'*>> (Joshua 3:10), <<*Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'*>> (Matthew 16:16), <<*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'*>> (2 Corinthians 6:16), <<*Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God'*>> (Hebrews 3:12), <<*For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!*>> (Hebrews 9:14), and: <<*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'*>> (Hebrews 10:31).

Identifying the church as the pillar and bulwark of the truth is a way of saying that God has entrusted to the church the task of promoting and protecting the Gospel truth; refer also to comments made on 1 Timothy 2:4. The architectural imagery presents the church's responsibility of holding up the Gospel before a watching world, probably with a view to repelling the attack of false teaching. This picture of the church is striking. The role of advancing the Gospel is divinely given to the church, and is not given to any other body in the same way. Para-church organisations have value, but they must support and not supplant the church.

Those with leadership responsibility can also be referred to as pillars: <<*and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognised the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised'*>> (Galatians 2:9).

This statement provides imagery of foundational strength, a place of refuge, for it is the same strength that is found in the cornerstone that God had promised: <<*Because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with*

*Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter'; therefore thus says the Lord God, See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: 'One who trusts will not panic'>> (Isaiah 28:15-16), one that has not been accepted by all: <<The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone>> (Psalm 118:22), yet in Christ Jesus are called those who would accept the message: <<So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone>> (Ephesians 2:19-20).*

<sup>16</sup> Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great:

He was revealed in flesh,  
vindicated in spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among Gentiles,  
believed in throughout the world,  
taken up in glory.

### 1 Timothy 3:16

The mystery of our religion refers to the entire content of God's revealed plan of salvation, as discussed in v.9. It is a mystery, for it could never have been comprehended by reason or come to light naturally. It had to be revealed in all its majestic glory.

Next comes a poetic exposition of that great Gospel message, which Paul offered here through the expression of a hymn. Song worship has always been a key focus at church gatherings: <<*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*>> (Colossians 3:16-17). Paul included this no doubt to encourage a corporate response of praise.

The mystery is at the centre of faith: <<*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*>> (Hebrews 11:1). Paul found it essential to warn the church of the difference in the false doctrine being taught that was driving a wedge between belief and behaviour, with damaging results. In this current age of institutionalised atheism and the popular heresy of humanism, the church faces the same danger. Even if dangers of this sort seem remote, believers can easily forget the practical implications of what they believe and profess to be true.

Without any doubt. This introduction may implicitly call upon the Ephesian church to affirm this confession and therefore the ethical and doctrinal implications drawn from it throughout the letter. The exact structure of this praise anthem or

hymn is debated, but the basic idea is clear. The mystery is now explained in six lines of three couplets:

- God the Son was revealed in human flesh resulting in the crucifixion.
- But he was vindicated by the resurrection through the Spirit.
- Afterward, he was displayed in victory before the angels in heaven: <<God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come>> (Ephesians 1:20-21), <<Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father>> (Philippians 2:9-11), <<He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs>> (Hebrews 1:3-4), <<And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him>> (1 Peter 3:21-22), and: <<Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.' Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!' And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the elders fell down and worshipped>> (Revelation 5:6-14).

Vindicated could be translated justified but the sense here clearly is vindication, which was a common use of the Greek verb *dikaioō*.

- Proclaimed among Gentiles was the result of Christ's life and ministry. The message of Christ has been and continues to be proclaimed among the nations, Greek *ethnos*. That is, it has been preached specifically to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews.
- This preaching has been effective: believed in throughout the world.
- Then taken up in glory, Greek *analambanō*, would naturally be understood as a reference to the ascension, as the same verb is used in: <<*So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God*>> (Mark 16:19), <<*While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven*>> (Luke 24:51), and: <<*They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'*>> (Acts 1:11). A difficulty with this view is that the final phrase does not fit chronologically. One possible explanation is that the ascension is presented as a foretaste of the ultimate exaltation of Christ.

As a consequence of these words being included, Paul's readers were and are reminded of their confession that the first advent of Christ introduced a new way of life in the present age. The hymn combines snapshots of important points of that past appearance - (lines 1, 2, 3, and 6), with references to the salvation introduced by that event - (lines 4 and 5). The appearance of the God-man is the essence of the new lifestyle, i.e. godliness, which, as Paul urges, must characterise the church as it gathers for worship and when it relates with the world. A believer's confession of Christ is their acknowledgment of the call to service and godly living.