

The Household of God - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 3:14-16** (#533)

Introduction: Today is Reformation Sunday, the anniversary of the recovery of the Gospel driving our beliefs and actions. Most years, I like to give a special sermon on this day, either commenting on passages like Romans that were central to the Reformation or by weaving in biographical sketches about somebody who the Lord used to embody the truths of the Reformation. Today, I'd like to have J. C. Ryle – one of my favorite pastors from the 1800's – guide us into our text.

I've mentioned Ryle many times and gave a biographical sketch of him back in 2015. So, let me highlight just a few points as a reminder: John Charles Ryle was born on May 10, 1816 in Macclesfield, which is in the central-western part of England. His father was a well-established banker and politician, which meant that Ryle was born into a solidly upper-middle class lifestyle that included education at some of the best schools in the country, including Oxford. His family sometimes attended church but otherwise had little to do with Christianity during Ryle's upbringing. Only during college at Oxford – in the midst of a severe illness – did John finally begin to read his Bible. Flat on his back, laid low by sickness, that was when the Gospel finally became clear to him and was embraced by him.

A few years after his conversion, tragedy came to his family: the banks owned by Ryle's father had been led into risky situations by poor managers, which resulted in an unexpected bankruptcy. The results were disastrous. As John tells it: "Every single acre and penny my father possessed had to be given up to meet the demand of the creditors... We got up one summer's morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same night completely and entirely ruined."

This disaster affected everybody in the family: Ryle's father lost their home, so his mother and sisters had to go live elsewhere while he concluded the bankruptcy. Ryle himself was being groomed to take his father's place as a local politician – but the shame of bankruptcy changed those plans immediately. Ultimately, this tragedy is what sent J. C. into the ministry, and over time, he became known as a faithful pastor who loved God's Word and God's people. He ended up being the Bishop of Liverpool for the Church of England, and passed away in the year 1900.

I bring this up because you and I can find a friend in Ryle: he knows what true suffering is like (and I've only hit on the tip of the iceberg – he was also widowed three times!) and yet he also knows what joy is like, not letting the trials of the world – or the opposition even of church folks who mocked his commitment to the Bible – get him down, make him angry, or lead him into unloving attitudes and arguments. His solution to struggle, heartache, and trouble? It was to return to the Gospel again and again, to speak about it, write about it, think about it, and live according to it. That's good medicine that we need to see, and Paul's words to Timothy in **1 Timothy 3:14-16** speak to exactly that calling...

3:14-15 Paul's reason for writing these truths is so that Timothy can begin to immediately train up the church in Ephesus in the faithful ways of following Jesus. Though Paul himself hopes to return soon, he also recognizes the reality that he'll likely be delayed. Rather than keeping Timothy and the Ephesians waiting, treading water, Paul puts them to work on what matters.

And what does matter? Paul writes so that “you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.” When we speak of how the church is organized, with overseers and deacons and deaconesses, we need to see that the result is not a

business, it isn't some sort of non-profit corporate structure. Nor is it to be run like a top-down bureaucracy. The metaphor that Paul uses is more personal: the church is to look like a family. This is why he argued from **Genesis** earlier in this chapter; that foundational picture – not practicality or pragmatism – is why Paul is so clear on the roles of men and women in the church. The Lord has been clear on the purpose of men and women in the family, and the church is to act similarly.

Some might object to this. Perhaps it is hard to understand Paul's reasoning because your own family looks nothing like what the Bible describes. Maybe it was abusive. Maybe mom or dad wasn't present. Or perhaps you just can't fathom why the church would reject the business "wisdom" of our world – after all, so many large and wealthy churches are run just like businesses, shouldn't we do the same? But whatever your objection, let me gently point you back to the Scriptures: the church's mission isn't to be pragmatic. It isn't to change the culture. It isn't to be a fortress of traditional values. Instead, Paul tells us that when we behave as the household of God – when we are a family defined by our trust in the Lord – then, and only then, are we rightly called the church. For all of the church's failings and flaws, what you and I need to see is that there is a deep connection between how God created and made families and how the church is to carry forward that principle into a confused world. If your own family has provided a poor example, then let Paul's words here give you a new picture of what is intended to be.

So what, then, is our mission? It is to be "a pillar and buttress of the truth." Here, Paul has something specific in mind: the Gospel, which we'll come to next.

But before we do, I want to pause and call us to faithfulness: I suspect that most of us don't think of the church in these family terms. We haven't seen many – or any

– examples of churches that are run and organized this way. How, then, does our thinking need to change? Ryle, speaking about the mission of the church, says this: “Let it be a settled principle in our minds that the first and chief business of the Church of Christ is to preach the Gospel.” Which is to say, the mission of the church is to safeguard this Gospel – to treasure it, hold on to it, speak and believe it clearly, and hold it out to a world that needs it. Or, more plainly, Jesus tells us in **Matthew 28** that we are to be and make disciples according to this Good News.

Brothers and sisters, this is the mission! We have nothing to offer to our world if we don’t major on the Gospel. How can you be a part of that? What will you do this week to grow as a disciple? What are one or two tangible things you will call on the Lord to do in you to make you a more fit follower of Jesus? What are one or two things that you will ask Him to work in you through His Spirit so that you’ll better example the faith to your children, your family, and your neighbors? I tell you this, what our world needs isn’t more news, more “hot takes,” more social media reactions, or more protests. It needs every Christian to sacrificially and humbly live in a way that shows who Christ is and what He promises.

Now, I’ve said a lot about our mission being the Gospel, but I haven’t proven it to you from this passage yet. I’d be a pretty poor preacher if I just left off here!

Thankfully, Paul does not, so we won’t either. Look at **verse 16**...

3:16 You might rightly ask, what does this have to do with what has come before? And the answer: everything! If the church is a pillar and buttress of the truth, we need to ask “what truth are we exemplifying? What truth must we uphold and testify to?” Paul answers: the truth we cling to and exist to proclaim is summarized in this short saying, this condensed biography of the person and work of Christ.

Each sentence of this phrase tells us something about Jesus. “He was manifested in the flesh,” Ryle references this verse when he comments on Christ’s birth in **Luke 2**: “...never since the world began was a birth so marvelous as the birth of Christ. In itself, it was a miracle – God was manifest in the flesh. The blessings it brought into the world were unspeakable: it opened to man the door of everlasting life.” Christ’s birth matters because His life matters: Jesus is God with us.

Second, He was vindicated by the Spirit – testified to, just as we saw at His baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended on Him as a dove (**John 1:33**). This Jesus – not any other – is our Lord. He is the bridegroom of the church.

Third, Jesus was seen by angels. That might seem simple, but **John 1:1** reminds us that Jesus is fully God. He isn’t just some great teacher: no, He is God Himself.

That matters because Jesus is the One who was proclaimed among the nations – the prophesied Messiah, the promised Savior, pointed to from **Genesis 3:15** onward. This Jesus is who faithful folks for centuries had been waiting for, and He is the One who faithful folks – up through today – trust in as we await His return.

Fifth, this Jesus was believed. In saying that, Paul refers us to the fact that Christ’s claims have held true – men and women and children throughout the ages have measured what Jesus said and found it worth giving their lives, their hopes, their dreams, and their sufferings for. In **John 5**, Jesus teaches us that the dead would hear the voice of the Son of God and that all who heard would live. Ryle helpfully points out: “The prediction was fulfilled when dead souls were converted during our Lord’s own ministry and was much more fulfilled after the day of Pentecost,

when he was preached by his apostles to the Gentiles and ‘believed on in the world’.” The point? This Jesus is worth believing in – not only then, but also now.

Sixth and finally, Jesus not only rose from the dead, but has now ascended to the right hand of the Father. From there, we await Him as He prepares a place for us and intercedes for all who believe (**Hebrews 7:25 and 10:12-13**).

Taken together, what is Paul describing? This is the Gospel, this is the Good News of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished. This is why the church is organized the way that it is. This is why our mission must be nothing less than to hold to and hold out the truth of the Gospel – because this Good News of a Savior from our sins is the hope that every person in this world needs more than anything else, more than personal choices or economic growth or governmental freedom.

So, how shall we uphold this Gospel together? By valuing, holding to, and talking about this Good News more than the news of this world. We hold to this Gospel by living personally as the Bible teaches and by teaching others how to do so as well. We hold to this Gospel as a congregation by believing all that the Word teaches, even as we go through trials and hardships. Let’s have Ryle give us the final word this morning: “Think not to have your reward on earth, do not draw back because your good things are all yet to come. Today is the cross, but tomorrow is the crown. Today is the labor, but tomorrow is the wages. Today is the sowing, but tomorrow is the harvest. Today is the battle, but tomorrow is the rest. Today is the weeping, but tomorrow is the joy. And what is today compared to tomorrow? Today is but seventy years, but tomorrow is eternity. Be patient and hope unto the end.” Let’s show that Gospel-patience with one another and our world as we hold out what is needed most: the salvation our Savior offers to all who trust Him...