**Directions for worship- a confession** 28/7/24 dkm md sg pm

Read: , 1Timothy 3

Text: 1Timothy 3:14-16

Psalms:

Non-Christians, and even Christians, ask why there are so many different churches. If there is just one Bible, why are there so many churches with different forms of worship? Christendom is broadly divided in Roman Catholic and Protestant. At the time of the sixteenth century Reformation the church had departed from the fundamental truth of the gospel, namely salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The church had come to the point of placing the teaching of the church above the Scriptures. When the teaching or doctrine of the Bible is no longer the rule of faith, it is no longer the rule for practice.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism question 2 states, ‘The word of God is the only rule to direct how we may glorify and enjoy him’. Worship is all about glorifying and enjoying God. Among Protestant churches, differences in worship have developed because of what is called ‘the regulative principle’. Many churches adopt the principle that what is not prohibited is allowed; in other words, we have the freedom to worship God as we choose. Other churches, like ours, teach that we must worship according to what is taught in the Bible. God had told us how he wants to be worshipped so we should listen and obey him in worship as in all things.

What had God told us about worshipping him? When Jesus was asked about the place of worship he replied, ‘God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’ (John 4:24). Note that he was asked about worship by way of diverting his attention from personal sin. Still today, differences between churches is used as an excuse for not attending any church. Moreover, we can be so focused on our differences or distinctives that we lose sight of the fact that the essentials of worship, like prayer, Bible reading, and the sacraments, are found in most Protestant churches.

Worship is not simply a ritual. Our God is a living God with whom we have a living relationship through the risen Jesus Christ. Jesus is the truth, the living word, who has revealed God to us as a person, as a God of love. The apostle Paul picks up on worshipping God in truth, telling us that Jesus is the mediator, the one mediator between God and men (2:5). We are not worshipping the true and living God when we pray to church-declared saints. In 1Timothy 2 and 3, Paul gives Timothy directions for worship in the church at Ephesus, directions we must follow if we believe in the authority of the apostles and of Scripture (2Peter 1:21, 3:15).

Paul said that prayer must be part of worship, along with preaching and teaching. He then said that women should not teach or have authority over men, a principle that many churches have departed from. He went on to say that men must be chosen and appointed as elders and deacons, as rulers in the church, rulers under the headship of Christ. Again, some churches make up their own rules about rulers in the church.

We come to the end of 1Timothy 3, and the end of Paul’s ‘directions for worship’ in the church. We have been using used this title on the basis of what Paul says here in verse 15 about how Timothy should know how to conduct himself in the house of God. Timothy was the apostle’s appointed leader so he is talking about Timothy’s leadership in the church at Ephesus. Paul left Timothy in this church while he went on to Macedonia, hoping to return shortly (3:14). He would have given Timothy some directions but obviously he needed reminding or needed more specific instructions as the church grew, and as false witnesses came along.

**1.Church**

Here in the middle of his first letter to the young Timothy, the apostle pauses with a brief personal note explaining why he is writing; clearly, Timothy is the ‘you’ in verse 14. Paul hoped to visit him back in Ephesus soon; in the meantime, he wrote this letter, and we are so thankful he did! In the wonderful providence of God, this letter was written, and was preserved in the Scriptures as we have them today. The preservation of the Scriptures was, and is, part of the ministry of the church. But this does not mean that the church is more important than the Scriptures. The church has the solemn duty to preserve and to preach the Scriptures as the word of God. The church, however, is not a man-made institution, any more than we in the church worship man-made gods. Christ is the head of the church, and the Bible is his word.

The church is first described by Paul as the house of God (3:15). The house of God is the place when God dwells. It is the place where God dwells with his chosen people. The church is first seen in the OT when God established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Through Moses, God revealed himself as gracious and compassionate, the God who hears prayer and is powerful to deliver his people. This old covenant was made with the nation of the Jews. A tabernacle or temple was built according to God-given instructions. God dwelt among his people between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. This was the only place where God was to be worshipped, again according to detailed instructions given through Moses.

The assembly or gathering of God’s people in the desert is referred to as the ‘*ekklesia*’ in the Greek translation of the OT. In the NT the same word, ‘*ekklesia*’, meaning assembly, is used for the church. The church is the assembly of God’s covenant people, a group now comprising Jew and Gentile. This assembly is for the purpose of worshipping God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In NT times there was only one church in each city but as the church grew the people probably met in different parts or suburbs of a city. There were no ‘denominations’ as we have today.

With office-bearers in the church, we saw that they must rule their own house well because they have the duty of ruling or taking care of the church of God (3:5); ‘church of God’ and ‘house of God’ are the same thing. In NT times and today, we have churches in different places because God no longer dwells above the box called the Ark of the Covenant. God came to dwell among us in his Son, Jesus Christ: ‘The word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14). Jesus has returned to heaven and now his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, dwells in the church, not the building but the assembly of God’s new covenant people. Where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them’ (Mat 18:20). Moreover, Jesus said, ‘I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it' (Mat 16:18); he would build his church with those who profess Jesus as the Son of the living God, as Peter did.

The church is also called, ‘the church of the living God’ (3:15). God is not dead; he is alive! To represent God or Jesus in a dead idol or statue is an abomination. We usually make a statue of someone after they die, not while they are living. God not only lives but he is the giver of life, the ongoing ruler of his people and of all nations. Jesus died of course, but he rose again after three days, and, ‘ever lives to make intercession for us’ (Heb 7:25). Just as a living person speaks so God speaks; he speaks to us through his living word, the Bible, and through the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit dwells in those who believe. So no images in churches where we worship God. The second commandment still applies.

The church is described thirdly as ‘the pillar and ground/foundation of the truth’ (3:15). The first description of the church, ‘the house of God’ referred to the household or family, but this description or metaphor is of the building itself. The Messiah is spoken of as the chief cornerstone in Psalm 118:22 and Acts 4:11. Paul picks up on this metaphor, speaking of the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). The truth confessed by the apostle Peter, already referred, remains the pillar and foundation of the church. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). The church does not determine what is truth, it simply preserves and proclaims the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. The church that fails to preach this truth is not a church of the living God.

**2.Confession**

The closing verse of this chapter looks like a creed or part of a creed; it is in poetic format in the Greek. As one of Paul’s last letters, we have a glimpse into the church that is now three decades old. The NT was not yet complete, but the truths of the gospel were. These truths may well have been formulated into a creed or creeds like verse 16, and like in 2Timothy 2:11-13.

Paul introduces the ‘mystery of godliness’ as a matter beyond dispute or controversy, a matter settled within the church of the living God (3:16). He uses the word ‘mystery’ to describe the gospel of Jesus Christ as a truth once hidden but now revealed or ‘made known by the church’ (Eph 3:9-12). Back in verse 9 he writes of the ‘mystery of the faith’. Here in verse 16, it is the ‘mystery of godliness’ or devotion. Godliness refers to conduct. The change is a person’s life and conduct when they accept the truth of Jesus Christ is amazing. Paul himself was completely changed from a persecutor to a preacher of the gospel. He knew the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ personally, and he proclaimed the gospel of power with power to Jew and Gentile in many places.

The six lines of the confession or creed follow the historic timeline of Jesus. The eternal Son of God was ‘manifested in the flesh’ at the incarnation. John writes of the word who was with God becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:1,14). Paul himself writes of Jesus being ‘in the form of God … being found in appearance as a man’ (Phil 2:6-8). The second line of this first couplet is ‘justified/ vindicated by the Spirit’.

What about the cross we ask, as we jump from the incarnation to resurrection, to be vindicated by the Spirit and glorification. The resurrection presupposes his death, and the ‘preaching’ and ‘believing’ in the following lines also presuppose the gospel. Yes, a creed like the Apostle’s creed spells out the life of Jesus more fully but it is still brief: born, suffered, crucified, dead and buried. Jesus was sentenced to death like a criminal, but he was without sin. His resurrection, his being made alive in the Spirit (1Peter 3:18), was vindication or justification that he was innocent. His death, according to the sovereign plan and purpose of God, was propitiation for our sins.

The second couplet takes us into the realm of heavenly beings, namely angels. The Bible speaks of angels at the birth of Jesus, and at his resurrection and ascension. The early church believed in angels, and so do we. Angels directed men, as in the shepherds, to see Jesus. Angels are ministering spirits to men or human beings (Heb 1:14). The shepherds who were told by angels to go to Bethlehem saw Jesus and then made widely known what was told to them (Luke 2:16,17). The early church received this witness, along with the witness of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. They were told to make known or to preach this message to the Gentiles, or to all the nations of the world (3:16).

The last couplet of this creed takes us into all the world, and then to heaven (3:16). The gospel of Jesus Christ encompasses all of creation; it extends from heaven to earth and back to heaven. I trust you do not believe a gospel that is earth-bound, or only about heaven for that matter. The gospel is to be ‘believed on in the world’ (3:16). God’s message is to all people, to all races and tribes and tongues, and for all time. Those who believe become children of God; they enter the family of God (John 1:12).

The closing line of this creed takes us back to heaven where Jesus now dwells. He has been ‘received up into glory’ (3:16). Jesus himself made it clear that he is coming again on the clouds of heaven in great glory (Mat 24:44). This short creed points to this promise from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ.