

Glimpses of Godliness (Part 1) – Introduction and Implications

Beau Hughes – July 27, 2014

Well, church, if you have a Bible, why don't you turn it to Acts, chapter 19, and that's where we'll start. If you're new here and you don't have a Bible with you tonight, you could probably download one on your phone or, if you'd like, there's a black hardback one on the back of the seat in front of you, and you can use that one.

Acts, chapter 19 (if you're not too familiar with the geography of your Bible) is to the right, and it's on page 928 in those black Bibles. I'll just give you a second to turn there. I don't know how many of you got the email I sent out this week, but in five out of the next six weeks, we're going to be studying different selections from the letter of 1 Timothy together.

We're going to begin that tonight, and I'm really excited. It has been a great day already in the services this morning. I'm just hopeful about what God's spirit might accomplish as we submit our hearts to a study of this letter and, in particular, just the timeliness of doing so (I think) as we head into what is going to be a year-long transition from being a campus to being a local church.

We'll get to that in a little while, just why I think this letter is uniquely helpful to us in this season. What I'm hoping to get across to my own heart and all of us tonight is how beneficial in general the Bible is for us, especially if we're Christians. The Bible is just really helpful. Truly, it is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path.

I know good Christian thinking leads you to go, "Well, duh!" but how many of us really experience that on a day-to-day basis in our lives? How many of us really think about what God has left us by his spirit in the Bible? The psalmist would say, "Listen, the Bible is sweeter than honey dripping from the honeycomb." Now I don't know what that sweetness is like. I've never taken a honeycomb.

I've had Honeycomb cereal, but that's not what he's talking about. It's the honey from a honeycomb. We use agave in our house, but what he's saying is it's sweet. He's using the sweetest picture that

his imagination can conjure up from what he knows is reality, and he's putting it next to the Bible and saying, "It's like that. That's what the Bible is like to those who are children of God, those who are wanting to follow God, those who are wanting to be led by God."

I'm hoping and praying that tonight (then, of course, over the next five weeks, but especially tonight) our hearts would just sense that as we read God's Word together. Let me pray to that end. I know Ben just prayed, but I want to pray as well just as we open up and divide God's Word together that he would reveal his goodness to us through it as he has revealed it. Pray with me to that end.

Father, we are grateful now to turn our ears and our hearts to hearing from you. We're thankful that you're not silent, that nobody is gathered here tonight to hear me. We're gathered here to receive a word from you because we know man does not live on bread alone. What we put in our stomachs doesn't ultimately help us to persevere. It's not what keeps us alive.

What keeps us alive is you and the words you give us to feed on, so Lord, we pray tonight that you would help us to feast on your Word, that you'd reveal yourself to us through it, that by your Holy Spirit you would come and you'd quicken our hearts, that you'd unite our hearts, that you would compel us and rebuke us and correct us and encourage us and lead us into rejoicing, lead us into greater joy in your presence.

Even as we think about Mary... We read the Scripture that, Lord, she was doing the one necessary thing. She was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to Jesus, perhaps even thinking about Psalm 27, that this one thing we have asked: that we would seek to be in your presence together and to behold your beauty. We thank you that you have given us a picture of yourself in the Bible, and as we read it now, as we submit to it, Lord, we pray you would become even more so our Lord. We ask it in Christ's name, amen.

Well, 1 Timothy... I don't know how many of you have read the letter or how many of you have read the letter lately, but it is really, really helpful. I know I have you camped out in Acts, chapter 19. That's on purpose because both the first and second letter written to Timothy are actually written to Timothy while Timothy is at the church at Ephesus, so I thought it would be helpful for us, before we dive into looking at the letter Paul wrote to him, to think about and talk about and familiarize ourselves with the background history of the church in Ephesus.

I won't spend too much time here, because we've covered some of these passages in depth over the years as a church, but I will just say background information is a really helpful thing when you're reading the Bible. If you're studying the Bible (part of what I hope you get out of this is just how to read the Bible), it's really helpful to know the background of what you're reading in the Bible.

That's the same way it is when you go see a movie. I don't know if you've been to a movie where you're watching a sequel, perhaps, and you haven't seen the first movie in the series. That's frustrating. It's frustrating for you. It's frustrating for your friend or your spouse who you came with and who you're going to have explain the whole background to you throughout the second movie. It's just not great.

It's more helpful to know the background so you don't sit there watching something like part 2 of *The Hunger Games* (whatever it's called, *Mockingjay* or whatever it is) and say, "Who's the girl with the bow and arrow?"

"Her name is Katniss!"

"Why is she so angry, and which boy does she really like?"

"Just watch the movie! Just watch it!"

The same thing can happen when you read the Bible, so background information is helpful, and even though the beginnings of the church in Ephesus in Acts 19 were sort of shrouded in mystery, we do have some pictures of what happened in the book of Acts, specifically in chapter 19. Look with me at Acts 19:8. This is what it says.

Paul, as he's on a missionary journey, has entered into the city of Ephesus, and he has found some disciples. Then it says, "**And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them** [the people who were there] **about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way** [the Way of Christ, that is] **before the congregation, he** [Paul] **withdrew from them and took the disciples** [those who had become Christians] **with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.**"

So he actually moved from the synagogue to the hall of Tyrannus. "**This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**" Here's

what we know from Acts 19. The church in Ephesus was planted by the apostle Paul, and the apostle Paul was there, and for three years he stayed there and taught them, led them, poured into them, and was the apostle over this church, getting them prepared, getting them ready to grow into a local church that could stand on their own two feet.

That's what I love about the apostle Paul. He didn't just go to the synagogue and share the gospel and then spend a weekend with whoever came with him and set out for the next town (not that that would have been sinful, necessarily). What he did was share the gospel, and as people came to be disciples, he spent time pouring into them and raising them up so they wouldn't be just a bunch of spiritual babies running around.

He got the church not just planted but actually established in maturity to the point that when it came time for him to leave town, the church would be able to continue on without his presence there. If you continue reading Acts 19, you'll see that's exactly what happens. As Paul is teaching and leading them, revival breaks out in town. It's amazing. We don't have time to read it in Acts 19, but revival breaks out.

People are being healed. The Lord is showing up in such powerful ways and transforming hearts in such a way that businesses are being shut down because there's no monetary support for them any longer because they were sinful businesses and people had been transformed. This made the townspeople very, very angry at Paul. They realized what was going on, so they actually drove the apostle Paul out of town, which is what happens in the rest of Acts 19.

Paul left town. He just went to another town and started preaching the gospel again and doing the same thing again, which is what you have to love about the apostle Paul. He kept a fond place in his heart for the church in Ephesus. He loved this church. He planted this church. He gave three years of his life building up this church, so even after he left on his way back to Jerusalem in Acts, chapter 20, he wanted to stop by Ephesus, and he wanted to speak into the life of their church once again.

He wanted to see the leaders of the church, the elders of the church, that he had established, presumably, and appointed there. On the way home, he stops nearby and he sends to Ephesus to have the elders of the church come to him, and in Acts, chapter 20, he gives this remarkable speech to the elders as he's headed to Jerusalem.

Again, we've read a lot of it before. If you remember from the Acts series... This (Acts, chapter 20) was the text we were studying when we talked about saying goodbye for the gospel, but I want to point to something a little different here in what he says. He actually gives the elders a charge and a warning so they can continue to faithfully oversee the church, because he had a premonition not only that he wasn't going to see them again but that something was going to happen in the church that would really test the young church's maturity and faith.

Look at verse 28 of chapter 20. This is what Paul says when he's on the beachhead, preparing to get into the boat and go to Jerusalem. He says this to the elders. **"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."**

He's saying, "I want you to be careful. I want you to be mindful and pay attention to what's going on in your own hearts and in the life of the church because God has made you overseers of this church to care for it. He loves this church. God loves this church. He purchased it with the blood of his Son." Then he says this, making it even more urgent in verse 29.

"I know that after my departure [when I get on this boat after I leave] fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock..." Then he gets even more urgent. **"...and from among your own selves..."** Listen. These are the elders, the leaders of the church. **"...will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert..."**

That's what he's telling the elders. **"...remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."** This is Paul's heart sort of coming out for the church, for the leaders. His concern, his vision for where he wants the church to be, and his awareness of what could hinder the church from getting there... All of these things are going to come into play as we read 1 Timothy.

If you have your Bible, turn over to 1 Timothy now. What's amazing is that despite Paul's premonitions that he would not ever see these men again, that he would never see the church in Ephesus again, history and Scripture seem to say he did. As we get to the book of Acts and read the book of Acts, Paul is in jail in Rome. He's in jail, and he's ministering freely in Rome.

But he got out of jail, and he went to jail again and was eventually martyred for his faith the second time he went to jail in Rome. Before he was martyred, he got out of jail, and he and Timothy and Titus apparently went on some missions together. That's where we get the Pastoral Epistles Paul wrote. They went on mission together again, planting new churches (like on the island of Crete as Titus was left to do) but also visiting churches that were already established, like the church at Ephesus.

Presumably, Paul and Timothy left Titus on the island of Crete and went to Ephesus and visited the church at Ephesus after Paul got out of prison the first time. When they showed up at Ephesus, as one book I read this week talked about, the stopover turned out to be a small disaster. What Paul and Timothy found at the church in Ephesus when they returned to see it and to strengthen it was a disaster.

Just as Paul had warned in Acts 20, which we just finished reading, some of the teachers in the church (presumably a couple of the elders who were on the beachhead for the warning Paul gave) were, just like he said, actually in the process of totally undermining the church with false teaching. In 1 Timothy 1:19-20, Paul is actually going to call these guys out by name. He's going to call these elders out by name and say, "I excommunicated them."

It's amazing that he came through town, he saw the mess, and he got to work, but what is kind of a mystery is Paul didn't stay in Ephesus for some reason. He left Ephesus. He came back with Timothy and he saw the mess, but he had to get on to Macedonia. He was compelled to go to Macedonia, so he went to Macedonia, but he didn't want to leave the church at Ephesus in all of the mess it was in, so he left Timothy there with the church.

Then when Paul got to Macedonia, he wrote a letter called 1 Timothy back to Timothy. Listen, this is helpful history, but I'm going to get to why it even matters here in a minute, okay? It's good to know the background to a point. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, but church, here's where I want to just encourage you to listen in, not just as individual Christians, even though you're obviously going to be doing that, and not as if this letter were just written for pastoral leaders like Timothy.

He wrote the letter to Timothy, but he wrote it hoping and knowing the church was going to overhear what he wrote, so the letter is not just for guys like me who are in pastoral ministry. "Oh, Beau is kind of a guy like Timothy. He's sort of young in his faith. He's leading the church. That's

good for him to study." No. It's actually good for all of us to study because the letter, although it was written to Timothy as an individual, was written to Timothy to be shared with the local church.

For us as a church, it's good to read these letters that were written to Timothy and Titus. I don't know if you've ever had a conversation where you were hoping or knowing somebody is overhearing it. Have you ever done that? Because you know they're listening in... Not for bad reasons. They're not trying to sort of spy on you, but you just know they're listening in, so you change or shape the conversation based on the fact that you know they're listening in.

Have you ever done that? We do this with my children sometimes. My son loves to get up at night after we put him to bed. He thinks he can sneak out of his room, but we live in an old house, so when he opens the door it's like somebody fires a cannon in the hallway. You know, "Oh, he's out of his room!" but he doesn't know that. I think he really thinks he can open it and fire a cannon without anybody noticing.

We'll just let him think that. Often he'll open his door to his room, and we'll go, "Oh, heads up. He's coming out of his bedroom." Then he'll sneak around the hall, he'll come to the kitchen, and then he'll sort of find himself under the dining room table. He doesn't think we know he's there, so Kimberly and I are in there folding laundry or doing whatever we do, and we'll start having a conversation and saying things, knowing he's right there.

Sometimes we'll even start talking about Haddon. It's like, "Isn't Haddon a sweet boy? He's just such a good boy. We put him to bed, and he just obeys perfectly. He stays in bed. He doesn't get up out of his bed." We'll do that. That's sort of what Paul is doing here. He's writing to Timothy about the church, but he's knowing the church is going to overhear. He wants the church to overhear.

He has something to say to this church. He loves this church. For three years he pleaded with them, taught them, night and day. There were tears. It's a letter that is profoundly significant, not just for Timothy but also for the church. There are plenty of ramifications there for us. Let's look at it. Verse 1 of chapter 1... We'll read through the first seven verses here and immediately draw out the whole point of the letter.

This is what Paul writes. He says, **"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."** This is his greeting, and this is a standard

greeting of Paul's. This is what he normally writes in letters. It's typical, but what's not typical is what he writes right after the greeting.

If you've read Paul's letters, what typically comes after a greeting... In fact, what comes after the greeting in every single one of his letters before this one except for the letter to the Galatians (which makes sense because the Galatian church was a train wreck as well) is him saying to the church why he loves them and why he thanks God for them.

He goes into thanksgiving. He greets them, and then he says, "I thank my God always for you as I remember you in prayer." You remember some of these verses Paul writes. Well, he doesn't do that here. He gets right to business. Again, I think this gives you a little bit of insight into Paul's heart, into his burden, into his angst for this church after writing the salutation.

In verse 3 he jumps right into what he wrote the letter for. This is what he says to Timothy. He says, **"As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine..."** That's the purpose of the letter. **"...nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship [work] from God that is by faith."**

In these two verses, verses 3 and 4, we have the whole purpose of Paul's letter. We have his angst. We have his burden, his hope, and his charge to Timothy, his command to Timothy and the church listening in. This is what it is. The charge he gives to Timothy and the church is to stop devoting themselves to the false teaching. That's what he's saying.

That's the big picture, what the letter is about. Everything that follows is tied back to this anchor idea. "Stop giving yourselves over to the teaching! Do a U-turn." Now we don't know exactly what the teaching was that was going on. In verse 4 it talks about how there are myths involved in it. There are endless genealogies.

We know what the fruit of the teaching is, maybe more importantly, and what the fruit of the teaching is... Look at the end of verse 4. It is these things that promote speculations. That's what false teaching has a tendency to do. I don't have time to go into it, but it's just a type of teaching about whatever it is about, whether it's myths or endless genealogies or whatever discussion topic you want to pick, that's not leading anybody anywhere.

It's just tireless and endless speculation. It's not helpful. Paul goes on to actually say it's divisive, it's frustrating, and it's not helping anybody go anywhere in their faith. Paul is saying, "Stop it! Stop this teaching! It's useless! It's worthless teaching. In fact, more than just being useless and worthless, it's actually hindering the very work of God among you that he means to accomplish."

That's what he says at the end of verse 4. He says, "It doesn't just promote speculations. It promotes speculations rather than the stewardship or the work from God that is by faith, the work of leading you to have faith in the gospel, which is what teaching is supposed to do." Good teaching is supposed to strengthen our faith in God, strengthen our faith in what he has done for us, strengthen our identity in Christ.

Paul is saying, "Not only is it doing the opposite of leading into anything of substance, but it's actually hindering you from growing in your faith in Christ, which is why teaching is given to the church to begin with." What Paul is saying here is a pretty amazing thing. Listen. Paul is not just in a grumpy mood about bad teaching. He's not on a rant here, not that that would be sinful or bad, but he's not on a rant.

He has a vision for why this is important, and that's what he even says in the next verse. He's saying, "Listen. The aim of our charge, the reason that this is so important is..." What? "...love. The reason that I'm giving you this charge is love. Your not growing in faith in the gospel is actually hindering you from becoming the very people God means for you to be, which is a community of people who love each other as Christ has loved them. That is exuded and made visible to the neighborhood, made visible to the world."

That's the virtue. We talked about it last week. Whether you speak in tongues or you prophesy... Love is what lasts. Love is what endures. A love for God, a love for each other that's birthed out of our love for God, a love for our neighbors... That's the greatest of these. That's what's to mark the church. That's what Jesus said. "They'll know you're my disciples by your love."

The gospel of Jesus is made visible in the church through our love for one another. Paul is saying, "That's the point of this. That's why I'm so burdened about false teaching. I'm not just in a bad mood about it. It's actually leading you to speculation. It's hindering your faith, which is hindering your ability to even love each other. The point of this is to grow up in love as a church."

Then he says, "**The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.**" There's that word *faith* again, tying right back into verse 4. Faith, which good teaching is meant to nurture, is what builds us up into loving each other. A pure heart, which is what good teaching is supposed to lead us into by grace, a good conscience... When these things are absent, there's no love, and when there's false teaching, these things are absent.

This is Paul's burden. Again, he's not just in a bad mood. Then in verses 6 and 7, he even says, "**Certain persons, by swerving from these...**" Here's the problem that's going on at Ephesus. "**...have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.**"

This is what is going on in Ephesus and why Paul wrote the letter, these four verses here. The purpose of this letter is to equip Timothy and the church to stop drifting doctrinally and following their doctrine in other ways to stop drifting and turn the ship around before it gets capsized by false teaching. That's why Paul wrote the letter. If you go home, that's what 1 Timothy is about.

If you study it in the morning, that's what it's about. That's the purpose Paul wrote the letter for. It should cause us to pause and go, "Okay, that's helpful background information. It's helpful to know the context. It's helpful to know the purpose. We're not here for a history lesson, though. What does this have to do with me? What does this have to do with The Village Church in Denton in 2014? Why is this relevant for us? Why is this letter so uniquely helpful as we're looking toward beginning a transition this summer?"

By all observable measures, our campus is not unhealthy. In fact, by God's grace, our health is actually one of the things that's driving us to multiply and to become a local church. Now sure, we have our imperfections, plenty of them. We have our weaknesses, our immaturities. If you're new here, if you stick around, those will become more and more clear to you as time passes.

We're not perfect. We are a church full of sinners saved by sheer grace, just a messy group of people growing up into who the Lord intends for us to be. At the same time, we do believe the gospel. We do love one another and our neighbors. Our love for each other is real. It's palpable. There are good things going on here. Unlike what's happening in Ephesus... I don't know of any of our elders who are wandering through the church, from home group to home group to home group (especially the

single women's home groups, like a lot of these elders were doing in this church), and spreading false teaching and extorting them for money and taking advantage of them.

I don't know of any of that going on, all right? Our elders are serving the Lord faithfully and lovingly. Now, no doubt, that's a problem in many churches still today, but by God's grace, that's not happening here. That's not part of the immaturities I'm talking about. Matt has not sent me here to Denton to clean up a mess like Paul did Timothy.

Again, it begs the question because the circumstances in Ephesus seem so different from ours. Why would we study this letter together this summer? Why is it so relevant for us? Well, besides the fact that the Bible doesn't need anybody to make it relevant and is just relevant by its nature... I just want to put that out there so we're not confused. I'm not going to make the Bible relevant.

You're not going to make the Bible relevant. God says, "I made it. It's relevant. That's what it is. It can't change." Even Paul, in his next letter that he's going to write to Timothy, would say that, that all Scripture is God-breathed. It's inspired. It's profitable for teaching, correction, and rebuke so you and I can be adequate and equipped for every good work.

I think one of the things that make this letter uniquely timely in the life of our church is a parallel between the church of Ephesus and ours. That parallel is that by the time the church at Ephesus received this letter, they had gone through a church transition similar to the one we're entering into. The apostle Paul spent three years in the church at Ephesus, preparing the church, teaching the church, maturing the church, getting the church to the place where it had its own elders and teachers and leaders so they could stand on their own two feet, as it were, as a local church.

Then he left. Now he was driven out by persecution, but his method was to leave. In the same way, over the last seven years, this is what we've been doing at our campus: getting healthy, getting established, growing in our maturity, becoming a local congregation that is ready, as it were, by God's grace, to transition and venture into being a new local church with its own leadership and its own membership. That's what we're heading into.

What's beautiful is that the group in Ephesus did it. They were way ahead of us a long time ago, so what we can learn from 1 Timothy is at least two things. First, we can look back at the history of the church at Ephesus and learn from their mistakes and dysfunction, right? If you don't understand

history, you're going to repeat it. I don't know who said that, but it's true. That's the reason that it's always quoted.

We can look back and go, "Okay, what happened in Ephesus? What happened to get to the craziness that Paul and Timothy walked in on?" You know what's sobering? The church in Ephesus wasn't always unhealthy. They were flourishing in many ways. There was revival going on at Ephesus. Remember Acts 19. There were great things happening, but somehow they drifted into what is described in 1 Timothy.

We need to be aware of that, and you and I need to know what caused that drift. Obviously, one of the biggest things is the elders were not elder-ing well. Of course, as an elder with the other fellow elders here at the church, I'm aware of that. That's not to say that I'm owning everything, that it's all rising and falling with me. That's not what I'm saying, but we need to be aware of that. You know what's amazing though is you need to be aware of that too.

When there was a mess at the church of Galatia, do you know who Paul was pretty upset with when he wrote the letter? He was actually upset with the congregation, that they let the leadership take the church where it was going. He wrote to the leadership and said, "You remove those teachers. You remove those teachers."

Even for the church... Again, I'm here as an elder, but I'm also here as a church member, saying, "Okay God, we can learn from that as The Village Church in Denton. We can look at the church at Ephesus and say, "This is how important doctrine is. This is how important leadership is. This is how important direction is. We need to be mindful of those things, not in a way that we're nitpicky or become sort of theological nitpickers, but just that we're aware of it.""

That's the first thing. We can look at the dysfunction in Ephesus and say, "Oh God, humble us and help us to be aware and sober of these things and to be on guard as you move us and lead us forward as a church." What I love about this letter is it's not just telling us how to play good defense. It also tells us how to play offense, so Paul is not just saying, "Don't do this. Put away the teaching. Realize what they've done wrong."

He's also saying, "This is what you *should* be doing. This is where the church *should* be going." At the same time as there are history lessons on the negative front, there are also lessons, as we read this letter, about which we can look in on and say, "What should they have been doing to continue to

flourish that Paul outlines in 1 Timothy?" That's the very thing he says in 1 Timothy 3. Turn over there with me really quickly, and we'll look at this.

He says it pretty straightforwardly in verses 14 and 15. He adds more clarity to kind of why he's writing the letter. He doesn't change his purpose, but he just adds a little nuance to it in verses 14 and 15. He says to Timothy, **"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God..."**

I love that sentence. It's so clear. "I'm writing so that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, personally and collectively, as members of the church." What I love about that sentence is that little word there in verse 15, the word *ought*. There is an *ought* to the Christian life, personally and corporately as a church.

There's an *ought*. The word *ought* communicates and assumes there is a clear and objective way that God has designed for us and desires for us to live together as individual Christians and as a local church. Let me just tell you something. Friends, this is great news. The fact that God has said, "No, no, no. I've not just saved you by grace so you could do whatever you want; I've saved you by grace to do something. There's something you ought to be doing as a church, ought to be doing as Christians," is refreshing.

That's not law; that's liberty. He's not leaving us in the dark. He's not just saying, "Hey, I've saved you for no purpose whatsoever." He's saying, "I saved you to do something specific and, maybe even more significantly, to be something particular together." I don't know if you've ever had a director, a guide, a manager, a teacher, or a coach who was not clear about what they wanted on the front end but then got frustrated with you on the back end when you didn't produce what they wanted that they weren't clear with you about.

Does that make sense? There's nothing worse than that, and I'm not trying to rile up your bitterness. I'm not trying to affirm or justify your anger in your hearts, so simmer down, okay? You deal with that later before we come to the Table. I'm just saying that is frustrating. It's not helpful. It's like, "Why didn't you do that?" "Well, because I didn't know you wanted that, and you didn't tell me how to do that. I would have done it. Just lead me!"

There's nothing worse than having a guide who doesn't really lead and give direction well. Apparently, I'm that kind of person, at least when it comes to walks with my wife. My wife and I will

often go walking. Of course, I'm a perfect leader in most every area of our marriage, you know, but in this one area, she sort of reminds me lovingly that I need to grow.

We'll be walking down the street here in the neighborhood, and I will be leading us, apparently, and I'm just in my mind going, "Well, I want to go left here. I want to go this way," but I don't tell her. I go left without telling her, and she keeps going straight until she realizes I've gone left, and of course, I haven't told her, "Hey, you're still going straight, and you're across the street. You need to come back." It's just frustrating for her, which makes sense to me.

Sometimes I'll even do the thing where if she's on my right, I want to go right, and I won't tell her, and I'll just kind of knock her over... It's not helpful. It's not good. I'm working on it. We're working on it, but that's sort of like having a leader or a coach or somebody who doesn't direct you well. What I love about this verse of Scripture and what Paul is saying here is that's not how God is.

God is not a bad leader. God has not ever left us to ourselves to wonder what he wants us to do as a church, but particularly as we transition into being our own church. He's actually giving us his Word and saying, "This is how you ought to live." That's really helpful, by the way. If you think about the Old Testament, the psalmists and others will talk about the Word of God in ways we don't.

They don't just say the Word of God but the law of God. They'll say, "Look, your law is a delight to my heart." Now I know for us, post-reformation... All we think the Old Testament law is good for is revealing our sin, and it is good for revealing our sin. Paul says that in 1 Timothy 1. But at the same time, the law is good (as so many point out throughout the Bible) because it tells us what God desires.

Now can we live up to what he desires? Absolutely not. That's the point of Christ's coming, which is what we'll get to. But at least it tells us. If you think about the Old Testament Israelites, in a time with all of these other gods, people would go to the temple and try to just put out sacrifices in hope that god would tell them what to do, hope the thunder god wouldn't get angry with them.

The God of Israel would say, "No, no, no. Let me write it on stone for you because I know you need that because you're not very wise. Let me tell you very plainly what I want from you." That is so gracious of God. That is so kind of God because we need that. We have to have that. We're not smart enough to not have that *ought* in our lives together.

It leads to liberty, not enslavement. It leads to flourishing, which is so enjoyable about the Christian life, yet we live in a culture that has rejected any standard of moral ought-ness, don't we? To say out loud with your lips, with your mouth, that there is any sort of immovable, objective, transcendent standard of morality is seen by many as outdated at best or barbaric at worst.

Some of you in here may even be there. You're not a Christian. You think the standards of morality that we have as Christians is just outdated or barbaric. I'd love to have that conversation with you. But that is the mood and the tone of our culture, and although this isn't the sermon to really dig into that, I will just say this.

When culture (not just culture, but the church) shrugs off any sort of binding moral compulsion, when there's no *ought* left in the Christian life or in the world in general, when there's no objective, transcendent moral standard, you know what we're left with? Of course you do. We're left with our own personal choice. We're left with our feelings, and whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian, that's horrible news.

That's a terrifying prospect. That is societal, moral, cultural chaos on the horizon, and that's how it is in our culture. That's how it is in many church cultures. That's how it was in Paul's day, yet what I love about Paul is that despite the cold cultural reception of this idea, Paul is saying, "No. There is indeed a transcendent living God who has revealed to us that we ought to live in a certain way as his people."

That's part of why Paul is writing. Maybe you're a professing Christian in here tonight and you've just shrugged off what God has told you that you ought to do as a Christian. Brother or sister, I just would compel you and invite you to repentance tonight. I don't know why that's the attitude of your heart. "You know what? I'm just going to keep this little area of anger and resentment in my heart toward this person. You know what? I'm just going to choose not to forgive them. You know what? I'm just going to look at that picture even though I know I'm not supposed to."

You've just shrugged off the authority of God in your life when he's trying to lead you to freedom, he's trying to lead you to flourishing. I would just invite you to repent tonight and to look at God, look at his Word, and look at his standard, and say, "You have my good in mind. You love me. You've designed me, so therefore your desires for my life are better and wiser than my own. Forgive me for being stubborn and stiffnecked."

That would be a great posture of heart to respond to this text with tonight. The point of Paul's saying...catch this...that this is the way we ought to live, that he's teaching you the way you ought to live, is not so we could be a group of do-gooders. That's not his purpose. He's not saying, "I want you to know how you ought to live in the household of God so you can all come together and high five about how you ought to live and how you're knocking it out of the park."

That's *not* what he says here. That's not the purpose. He's saying, "I want you to do what you ought to do as God's children more so because I want you to be who God means for you to be." That's exactly what it says in the next verse. It says we're to be "**...the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.**" This is Paul's vision.

We're to live a certain way that God has demanded and God has commanded because we're to be a certain people who he saved us to be. We'll actually sing about this later. This imagery here of the church of the living God is beautiful, deep imagery. This is going all the way back to the Old Testament. It's talking about the temple.

In the Old Testament, the temple was where God lived. It was where heaven and earth overlapped and God was with his people and they could be with him. Because of what Jesus has done, the Spirit of God is no longer contained in a temple building somewhere. Paul is saying, "You're the temple. You're the household of God. You're the church of the living God. God lives in you because you're in Christ."

That should blow our minds, that God is in us and among us and abiding with us. Paul is saying, "This is my vision for the church in Ephesus. This is why we ought to live the way God has desired and designed us to live. We're this. This is who we are." He even says, "This leads to the church becoming this pillar and this buttress of truth."

The idea and the imagery is there are these columns that are holding up the truth, not that the truth is dependent upon us but that when we're healthy, we're holding up the truth and holding it forth as beautiful to our neighbors, as beautiful through our lives and our lips to those around us who don't know anything about the truth.

He's saying, "This is the church." Paul's vision of who the church in Ephesus is to be and who the church in Denton is to be is God's vision. It's not this sort of shoddy, shabby house that's falling

down and about which Paul says, "Timothy, I'm just going to leave you there to prop it back up because it's really struggling."

That would have made sense because the church at Ephesus was struggling, but he's saying, "No. The church is this flourishing, vibrant temple where heaven and earth overlap, and through the ministry of God among those people, the gospel is made visible as the church holds it out and holds it forth." That's Paul's vision, and that is a good vision.

What he talks about in the rest of the letter is how you live this way as a church. That's what we'll key in on in the next four out of five weeks. What does it look like to be godly, to walk in godliness (which is what Paul calls this)? How do we be a godly church? That's what we're going to tap into in the next few weeks.

I love how Paul ends this. This is the second way we really can learn from the church in Ephesus. We can not only look at their failures, but we can look at what Paul says they are to be, who God desires and envisions them to be. Then he ends in verse 16 by saying this. We'll come to the Lord's Supper with this.

He says, "**Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness...**" I love that. He just ends by saying, "**Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery...**" and the mystery there is not like an *Unsolved Mysteries* type of mystery. *Mystery* actually means the deep truth that has now been revealed. "Great indeed is the truth that has now been revealed." The truth about what?

The truth about the godliness, the Christian life, the Christian faith. "Great indeed is this truth." What is this truth? Well, it's the gospel of Jesus Christ summarized in verse 16, in 18 Greek words. You know what these 18 words make up? They make up one of the most ancient hymns we have in our Bible about Christ and about who he is and what he has done.

It is not comprehensive, but it gets the job done, and it leads us right to the Table, and it leads us to remember that if we're going to be the people of God that he has saved us to be, it rises and falls with us believing this word about what Christ has done and who he was. Paul says it this way as he quotes this hymn.

He says, "**He [Jesus] was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit...**" He says that Jesus came, that God, in order to save us from his wrath that we've earned by not doing what we ought to

do, sent Jesus, the Son of God, who became man without ceasing to be God. Jesus, filled by the Spirit and entrusting his heart to the Father, did everything he ought to do perfectly for his entire life. Then he went to the cross to take upon himself the punishment for you and me, who have not done everything we ought to do our entire lives. He did it for us.

Jesus, as he was manifested in the flesh, hung on the cross, and his body was broken, and his blood was shed, substituted himself so we could become children of God despite the fact that we've acted like enemies of God our whole lives. Not only was he manifested in the flesh and died on the cross, but it says in the next verse that he was vindicated by the Spirit. That means he was raised from the dead.

He went to the ground and got up out of the grave, which is amazing. The resurrection proves Jesus is who he said he was. It's vindication for who he said he was, because if Jesus has beaten death, you know what that means he has beaten? It means he has beaten the sin that caused death. The root of death is sin, so Jesus, conquering death, says, "I've conquered sin as well. I'm vindicated here," as the Spirit raises him up from the dead.

It goes on to say what the witness was that went out about this, that he was seen by angels, he went up into the heavens, and he was proclaimed and seen and rejoiced in among the angels. He was also proclaimed among the nations on earth. In the Spirit, he went into the new heavens, and on earth he was going about through the witness and the testimony of the disciples and the response of the people as that message went out about who he was and what he did.

He was believed on in the world, and he was taken up in glory. When men and women through the nations, as described in the book of Acts, heard about him, he was believed on, and then as he went up into the heavens, the angels received him in glory as he triumphantly went to sit at the right hand of God where he is ruling and reigning until he'll come back to ultimately rescue us. All of these images that we've talked about won't even need to be anymore because we'll be with God, face to face forever.

The temple won't even make any sense anymore. This is our faith. This is the mystery, the truth that has now been revealed about Christ. This is what we hold on to. This is what keeps us from drifting into shipwreck as we move ahead, the very thing that sustains us to live as we ought to live and be the very people God has designed and desires us to be. Let me pray, and then we'll come to the

Table and remember this as we take the bread and the juice and rejoice together as we sing about it some.

Father, we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us, and fundamentally we thank you that was manifested in the flesh and was vindicated by the Spirit as we come now to remember that at this Table. We ask that you'd stir up our hearts, that you'd humble our hearts, that where we've been living in ways that we ought not live and we know it, that even before we come and take this bread and take this juice, Lord, we would confess that to you and we would confess that to each other.

Lord, as we come to this Table, we pray there would be sweet rejoicing that you've always said these things about us. This is who we are as a people. This is who we are as persons who have put our faith in you, so remind us of that. Encourage us in that. Give us hope in that.

Where we feel shoddy and shabby, Lord, I pray we would just look to you and say, "You know what? You're making all things new, and in you I'm a new creation," and that would just stir up our hearts all the more. We bless you, and again, we thank you for your Spirit and your Word that you've left for us. In Christ's name we pray, amen.