
Title: Commissionial in Education

Text: 1 Timothy 3:14-4:16

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Introduction It was just a few weeks ago we began a series on what it means for our church to be growing in our understanding of what it means to be commissionial. Mark began the series with “Commissionial in Worship”. Pastor Russ followed with “Commissionial in Preaching”. Last week, Pastor Dan walked us through “Commissionial in Evangelism.” This morning, my aim is to briefly touch on what it means for Clearcreek Chapel to be “Commissionial in Education.”

We have been thinking about being a commissionial church in the midst of change. Education is an integral part, a necessary component of what it means to be commissionial. In Matthew 28, where Christ utters what many have called the great commission, he instructed his disciples to go make disciples. The two prongs of making disciples in that passage became the mission for Christ’s apostles: baptizing and teaching. Those disciples took Christ’s words and that two-pronged mission to heart: in the book of Acts, as the church comes to life and the gospel is proclaimed to the nations, again and again, the proclamation of the gospel in the form of preaching is also accompanied by teaching the good news of Jesus Christ AND the baptism of those who received the good news in repentance and faith. The proclamation of the gospel occurs throughout the book of Acts in the preaching and teaching of the grand story of redemption wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ. The disciples well understood that being commissionial meant preaching AND teaching the gospel and baptizing those who responded in repentance and faith.

The result of the making of disciples through baptizing and teaching was the subsequent planting of churches all over EurAsia and the Middle East. Christianity exploded throughout the Roman Empire and beyond... to the end of the world.. through the commissionial baptizing and teaching in the proclamation of the gospel. This pattern is so pervasive, it becomes quite apparent as we study the pages of the New Testament that wherever Christ is proclaimed in the preaching of the Word there is also the teaching of the Word. The unilateral or unidirectional act of preaching is not replaced by, but always accompanied by, the dialogical or bidirectional act of teaching.

And we’re not simply speaking of teaching here. Since teaching is bidirectional, since it involves dialogue, teaching presumes learning. One broad and grand implication we may and must make from the inclusion of teaching as a fundamental part of making disciples is that the body of Christ is a community of learners. If no one is learning, teaching is not happening. Teaching and learning are inseparable in the proclamation of the gospel.

This kind of commissionial preaching and teaching must be kept in mind as we move toward a new model of ministry here at the chapel. Certainly the question arises: if we are moving to a new model of ministry, what does this mean for our teaching? After all, are we not known, even a bit pejoratively, as “the teaching church”? It would be really easy at this point to suggest that whatever Russ said a few weeks ago about preaching is good for teaching. But there are some things to think about when it comes to the idea of commissionial teaching.

The mystery of godliness

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 3. Few places in the New Testament emphasize the role of teaching in the life of the body than does this passage. Fundamental to Paul's directions for Timothy is an emphasis on teaching the Word. But teaching, for Paul, is not simply an academic exercise. Teaching is fundamental to the very existence of the church. And it's not simply the act of teaching Paul emphasizes. Paul puts the content of what is taught front and center.

As we begin to look at this passage, I want us to stand and read in unison verse 16 of chapter 3:

16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

And let's read it again:

16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

You may be seated. What we have read together, or more accurately, what we have recited together, what we have confessed this morning is nothing short of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel is why we have gathered this morning. And I would submit to you that as we affirm these words as our confession, we are confessing the gospel of Jesus Christ and the glory of Jesus Christ himself with the church at Ephesus of which Timothy was a leader. It is this confession that was the lifeblood of the church at Ephesus, a confession of that church's "First Love", as John the Apostle would state it in the book of Revelation.

Paul places this confession quite literally at the center of what he has to say to Timothy in this first pastoral letter. Why is that? Because the gospel is the lifeblood of the New Covenant people of God. The gospel brings to life and sustains the very life of the church. The formal confession of Jesus Christ is at the heart of what it means to belong to the body of Christ and, as Paul mentions in this passage, what is expected in terms of behavior in the body of Christ. It is this confession of Jesus Christ in the gospel message that gives shape to Paul's directives to Timothy, and by extension to the church community in Ephesus.

Gospel-birthed church

In fact, it was the preaching and teaching of this gospel that birthed the church in Ephesus. Christian education was ingrained in the foundations of the church. In the great farewell address to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20, Paul says "I did not shrink of declaring to you anything that was profitable (there's the preaching)...and teaching you (there's the teaching) in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Acts 19 tells us that for three months, Paul *reasoned* with those early Ephesian converts in the synagogue about the kingdom of God. And when he began to get push back in the synagogue, he went to another large gathering place where he *reasoned* daily...for two years. Paul says to the elders, "I never shrank back from teaching in public and from house to house the whole counsel of God."

A few years later, there are some serious issues in the Ephesian church. Timothy is there, already having been instructed by Paul to deal with false teachers who threatened the ministry there. Paul now writes Timothy the first of his pastoral letters; in it, he lays out his expectations for Timothy in regard to how Timothy will handle the false teachers and their false doctrine. Based on various references in this letter, we can surmise that these false teachers were Jews whose own particular variation on the legalism theme that we find in various Jewish groups throughout the New Testament involves asceticism, or the monastic practice of denying oneself some material benefit. We'll see how this is playing out as a threat to the Ephesians church in a moment, but typically asceticism involved some sort of fasting, chastity, physical separation from the world, renunciation of material possessions, and other forms of denial and abstinence. Asceticism, contra some of the claims being made today, is never portrayed in the New Testament in a positive light, including what we have here in 1 Timothy. And in fact, Paul speaks of those who promote asceticism as making shipwreck of the faith and departing from the gospel.

In this pastoral letter, a pattern develops that helps provide the framework for understanding both the confession of faith and Paul's instructions to Timothy in regard to the false teachers. Three times, Paul addresses the problem of the false teachers, their false doctrine, and their unchristian lifestyle. And each time, those warnings are followed by encouragement or instruction regarding some aspect of church life, especially with Timothy as an example for others to follow. This is important to note. Paul understands not only that wrong teaching and wrong living go hand in hand, but the antidote for such false teachers is right doctrine, grounded in the Person and work of Jesus, produces right living.

Embedded in this pattern is the confession we've read this morning. Following remarks about godliness in the life of the body and the qualifications for elder and deacon, Paul now inserts a confession of the gospel, and in fact, places it in the center of the book. He does so because it is the gospel that Timothy is to defend against the likes of Hymeneus and Alexander who are making shipwreck of the faith. It is the elders and deacons who are expected to not only proclaim and defend the gospel, but example the gospel for the rest of the community. The proclamation of Jesus Christ found in the confession of faith is antithetical to the false teachers, their false doctrine, and by implication, their shameful lives.

Purpose statement for 1 Timothy

We do not know the specifics of the behavior of these false teachers. What we do know is that Paul throughout the letter, but especially in our passage this morning, tightly binds together the gospel and godliness. Let's begin with verse 14 of chapter 3:

1 Timothy 3:14-16 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, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

This section is considered the purpose statement for this pastoral letter. There is a visual cue here for those of you following along as the Ephesian church would

have heard it. This is the first in a series of mentions of the phrase “these things”. In fact, there are seven of these “these things” in this series... we’re not going to look at them all, or even try to follow through on what Paul is doing by employing this phrase. But for our purposes this morning, we simply note that “these things” generally refers to the content of the letter, but specifically to the gospel that gives rise to everything Paul writes. The confession that follows the first mention of “these things” provides the basis for, the reason for, and the source of “these things” Paul writes to Timothy.

And verse 14 already is beginning to clue us in that Paul’s instructions to Timothy in this letter. Between the Jewish asceticism of the false teachers who are trying to be teachers of the law and their lifestyles, Paul writes Timothy about body life in the church, Paul singles out Hymaneus and Alexander, Paul gives qualifications for elders and deacons, and Paul places the confession of faith front and center for the purposes of right behavior in the household of God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Behavior, rightly understood in the light of the gospel, will align itself with the truth; and the truth, as proclaimed and taught by the household of God, will result in right behavior.

Notice the confession of faith that we recited this morning is called the “mystery of godliness”. Elsewhere, Paul calls the Christ event which brings salvation to His people the “mystery of God”, “mystery of Christ”, the “mystery hidden for the ages”, the “mystery of God’s will or plan”, and the “mystery of the faith”. Here, it’s called the “mystery of godliness”. All of these references are referencing the same thing: the great salvation plan of God which had been hidden throughout the Old Testament age, has now revealed and manifested and proclaimed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ himself is the culmination of the salvation story that had been embedded in the pages of the Old Testament and the history of Israel. Christ’s story, proclaimed to the nations, affects (and effects) behavior. Much more could be said about the nature of this “godliness” as it has been unveiled in the Person of Jesus; but for our purposes of this morning, we want to simply note that that the behavior of a Christian begins with Jesus life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. Jesus life, death, resurrection, and exaltation will result in behavior that comports with the life and character of Jesus. That’s what it means to be godly. That’s at the heart of godliness.

Liars devoted to teachings of demons

But not all are on board. Not all are satisfied with Jesus as the sole satisfaction for life and godliness. There are those who set themselves up in opposition to Jesus. Oh, it’s not obvious. In fact, as is the case in other places throughout Paul’s ministry, most of the time, those who want to add something to Jesus’ work, those who do not think the gospel is enough for the daily Christian life, cloak their false gospel in the highest of ethics and human virtue.

Chapter 4 verse 1:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times (note that phrase, “later times”; the Ephesian church is already in the “later times”, equivalent to the “last days” mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments) some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that

God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

For our purposes this morning, due to the brevity of our time, I want to focus in on one phrase in this paragraph. “Some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” Earlier in this letter (1:3), Paul had warned against those who teach a different doctrine, echoes of warnings elsewhere by Paul against those who teach a different gospel. In the last chapter, Paul again warns against those who teach a different doctrine than he has taught, and also includes a warning against those who disagree with “the teaching”, or the gospel of Jesus Christ. These “liars” have added asceticism to the gospel. These are the “wolves” Paul warned the Ephesian elders about in Acts 20. Paul, in his farewell speech, predicted that there lurked wolves around the work at Ephesus ready to devour the sheep. And here they are, just as he had said.

Here in chapter 4 verse 1, teaching another doctrine and disagreeing with the teaching of the gospel is explained as devotion to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons. Paul describes the ascetic nature of these teachings in the following verses. But in the end, Paul paints these false teachers in direct contrast to the confession of Jesus Christ in verse 16. What is at stake for Timothy and the Ephesian church is nothing short of the gospel of Jesus. Those who are not satisfied with Jesus and what he has done in salvation history are following after deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

Trained in the words of the faith and good doctrine

In setting the teaching of the false teachers in contrast to the confession of Jesus Christ in chapter 3 verse 16, Paul sets the false teachers against Jesus himself. And he encourages Timothy to continue in preaching and teaching the salvation story of Jesus as a defense against these false teachers. Note the second mention of the phrase “these things” found in verse 6... it leads off the next paragraph:

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith (a reference to chapter 3 verse 16) and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths (another reference to the false doctrine of these ascetic Jews). Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Leading the paragraph is a declarative statement, loaded with implications. This paragraph picks up the theme left off in chapter 3 verse 16. The warning against the false teachers sits in contrast to both the confession and Timothy who is the defender of that confession. Not only is the gospel at stake, the gospel ministry of Timothy in the Ephesian church is at stake. How is it that the confession of Jesus in the gospel will take root and keep the false teachers at bay?: the very same way that the community in Ephesus came to life as a church. “Putting these things before” has behind it the idea of suggesting or teaching. Armed with the gospel

and the doctrine that necessarily accompanies the gospel, Timothy (and the elders and deacons and the rest of the church, by implication) like Paul, is a servant or a minister of Jesus. Timothy's service to Jesus Christ and his church is conditioned by his faithfulness to the task of teaching the gospel. This description of one who teaches the community the Person and work of Jesus and the behavior that comports with the confession of Jesus is in contrast to those who are "liars whose consciences are seared".

There are two commands that occur here as implications of being a servant of Jesus. The first is "have nothing to do", and the second is "train". The first is set in the negative: don't do this. The second is set in the positive: but do this. This word "train" is an athletic term that carries with it the idea of "daily exercise". In this sentence, then, Paul is recalling for Timothy the circumstances of the birth of the church at Ephesus where Paul spent more than two years teaching the gospel from house to house on a daily basis. Being a servant of Jesus is hard work. Defending the gospel in teaching is time consuming. But Paul is interested in more than just teaching the facts of the gospel. His aim, especially against the liars with seared consciences who are teaching another gospel, is the lifestyle of the community. Train for godliness. There's that word "godliness" that introduced the confession of Jesus as the "mystery of godliness". This is why Timothy, in the words of Jerry Bridges, is to preach the gospel to himself every day. The gospel will be reflected in a lifestyle that aligns itself with that gospel.

Timothy is to immerse himself in the education of the congregation for the gospel's sake and for the sake of the community's eternal destiny. Notice the contrast in verse 8: "bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way." How many of you have heard that preached in terms of physical exercise is a good thing" and not only is "physical exercise is a good thing, but godly exercise is better"? Is that what this says? No where here does it say that godliness profits *more*. This isn't a good, better, best comparison. How is training in godliness described? Training for "godliness holds value in *every* way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." This isn't a quantifiable difference, but a qualitative difference being cast here. Training for godliness is an activity that is grounded in the eternal, that which cannot be seen. Training for godliness brings heaven to bear on the lifestyle. The comparison here is that which will pass away because it is temporal and of the earth and that which is heavenly and supernatural. This is why the church's hope is "set on the living God, who is the Savior of all kinds of people, most notably those who have confessed Jesus Christ in the community."

Why is it that the confession of Jesus Christ found in verse 16 is so important to Timothy? Because only the gospel changes lives. The gospel is invested with the promise of heaven itself, transforming those who embrace the gospel into a godly people. This is the mystery of godliness. Christ, the promise of the Old Testament has come, lived, died, arose... "he has been proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory". And those who confess and embrace this Jesus will find that their lives will take on the characteristics of the eternal... where Jesus was "taken up" becomes evident on earth in the lives of those who believe on him and proclaim him among the nations. It is to this end that Timothy is to immerse himself, to toil and strive. It is this life-changing gospel which motivates Timothy in his defense against the false teachers.

Command and teach

The third mention of “these things” begins the final paragraph of this chapter. Note verse 11:

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Command and teach. These are the third and fourth commands or imperatives in this passage, and they immediately flow into seven more. “Have nothing to do with”, “train yourself”, “command,” “teach”, “let no one”, “set”, “devote”, “do not neglect”, “practice”, “keep a close watch”, and “persist”. We will not begin to unpack all of these. But the running theme throughout all of them is the idea of education or instruction. The first two commands at the front of this paragraph summarize the rest of the paragraph... command and teach. Timothy, in following the footsteps of the apostle Paul when Paul first arrived in Ephesus is to continue the ongoing education in the gospel and its implications. And this teaching isn't simply “suggestion”. Because this teaching is grounded in the gospel and the proclamation of Jesus, it is invested with an authority from heaven. It is what makes this kind of education distinct from any other kind of education on earth. The ongoing teaching and training in the gospel and its implications, the gospel and the lifestyle that comports with the gospel is authoritative. By its very nature, the confession of Jesus that we find in chapter 3 verse 16 has its own demands. It is to be believed and proclaimed, and in so doing, results in lives that align with the message (Paul has already begun to explain what those lives look like in the qualifications of elders and deacons, and in the next chapter is going to expand on what those kinds of lives look like in the life of the community). But there will be a marked difference between those who teach an antichrist doctrine and those who are people of the mystery of godliness, the confession of Jesus.

Education is word-oriented

This teaching to which Timothy and the elders by extension are to commit themselves, or as Paul says, are to “immerse” themselves is accompanied by specific activity: the public reading of Scripture, exhortation or strong encouragement, and teaching. While this forms a list, this list is a cohesive unit... all of these things are intertwined with each other. Thus, the education of the community of believers is Word oriented. It is distinctly Scriptural. This is the thrust of collectively confessing the gospel as a community in chapter 3 verse 16. This isn't public reading for public reading sake. Or exhortation for exhortation sake. Or teaching for teaching sake. The Scripture that brought the community to life is to sustain the life of the community. The church is to immerse itself in the Word because The WORD who took on flesh has invested himself in the Word. This is why Timothy is to keep a close watch on the teaching, or the gospel, the confession of Jesus. The church devotes itself to the Word because it is in and through the Word that the church finds its salvation (verse 16): “Persist in this for

by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” The ongoing education in the life of the community has as its ends, through the gospel of Jesus, the very salvation of that community. This is why Paul spent three years in Ephesus daily educating the new church in the gospel. In Acts 20, Paul says he spent that time among the Ephesians “proclaiming the kingdom”. The heart of what Paul taught is found throughout this letter, most notably in chapter 3 verse 16, but also chapter 2 verse 4: “God our Savior (another way of saying Jesus) desires all kinds of people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one god, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all... for this I, Paul, was appointed a preacher and a teacher.” Timothy is to devote himself to the proclamation and teaching of the gospel for the salvation of himself and the community of learners that Christ has gathered for himself in Ephesus. The confession of the Person and work of Jesus produces godliness in the community of learners as that community commits itself to that very confession. As the community of learners continues to preach and teach the confession, and as the church continues to manifest the mystery of godliness in the lives of its members, it becomes a participant in proclaiming Jesus among the nations and believing on Jesus in the world.

Hopefully, the implications are obvious for us here at Clearcreek Chapel. We commit ourselves to the ongoing education of the community in the gospel because nothing less than eternity is at stake.

Conclusion:

1. It is in the education of the church that the gospel takes root. Teaching must always accompany preaching. While preaching feeds Christ to the people, teaching sustains and maintains Christ in the life of the people. In preaching, the church receives or ingests from Christ. In teaching, the church digests what it has received from Christ. The unilateral proclamation of the gospel will always be followed by and complemented by dialogue over that gospel and its implications.

2. It's in the education of our church that the gospel not only takes root, but the people of God are transformed into the image of Christ. Proclamation of the gospel in preaching and teaching produces godliness in the lives of those who receive it and confess it. So much of what passes for Christianity today is simply ungodly. And the reason ungodliness is a mark of so many so-called Christians is because attention has not been given to the gospel. Compromise over the gospel is everywhere, just as Paul said would be the case not only for the Ephesian church, but for those of us who follow in the same gospel. This compromise plays itself out in lives that do not look anything like the gospel found in the pages of Scripture. The gospel, even as it is confessed in chapter 3 verse 16 has life-transforming power. As we educate ourselves in the gospel and the implications of the gospel, the gospel will manifest itself in our lives as “godliness”.

3. It's in the education of the church that the gospel keeps false doctrine at bay. While we would not be so arrogant to suggest that it could not happen here, we must be ever vigilant and ever jealous for the gospel. And that kind of jealousy must be apparent in our teaching as well as our preaching. Just as was true in Paul's day, there are wolves that lurk ready to prey on us, ready to tickle our fancy, ready to “wow” us with the latest and greatest, ready to seduce us with promises of glory and success. Our education is a hedge against this kind of seduction.

4. And as we've noted in the confession, it's in the education of the community of learners that Christ is proclaimed among the nations. If we do these things, we will find our education to be commissional. As we commit ourselves to preaching and teaching the confession of faith, we will increasingly find ourselves in the activity of "making disciples". Education centered and rooted in the gospel will produce lives of godliness that accompany the proclamation of Jesus among the nations. Understanding Paul's directive to Timothy to command and teach in the training of godliness in chapter 4 through the lens of the confession of Jesus in chapter three, it becomes quite apparent that commissional education has as its end the confession of Jesus Christ "godlinessed" in the lives of His people. As the confession is preached and taught it produces in the church a godliness that adorns the proclamation of Jesus to the nations, even in our own back yard. If we devote ourselves to educating ourselves continually in the mystery of godliness as it is unpacked here in 1 Timothy, we will find ourselves participants in the very gospel we proclaim. Our education will be inherently commissional.

So the question becomes: How committed are we to this confession? Many of us are excited about what's in store for this body of believers. Some may be a little concerned. Change, for the right reasons, can be a good thing. We are praying to that end. Change can be a difficult thing. We are praying and working toward unity to that end. But in the midst of change, we must keep front and center Who it is that has given life to this congregation. And we must again and again and again remind ourselves of that which we have confessed.

How committed are we to this confession? We could burn the format for ministry down, keeping those essential elements of a true church intact. We could meet outside on a Sunday, we could gather in groups, we could gather around a meal, we could do away with drums, the piano, the microphones, the padded chairs, the Adult Bible Education hour, the church building....think of all the things in our church circumstance that are our pet ministries and projects (many of which are good, right, and necessary... even found here in 1 Timothy). The one thing we must never give up, the one thing that must drive us, the one thing that we must confess, and affirm, and lay down our lives, if necessary is this, the mystery that gives rise to our godliness:

He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

It matters little how we preach, so long as we preach. It matters little how we teach, so long as we teach. It matters little how we worship, so long as we worship. It matters little how we meet so long as we meet. It matters little where we baptize so long as we baptize. It matters little the circumstance of the Lord's Table so long as we participate in it. How we do church can take many different forms... and it is about to next Sunday. But what we cannot do and we mustn't do is abandon the confession that gives life to our gathering. We cannot and we must not abandon the Christ who is in the confession:

He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Some of this may sound like overstatement. Perhaps. But as we change what we do, grab onto Jesus in the confession:

He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

If we do that, not only will we be known as a teaching church, we will be known as a confessional church.

Let us stand and confess together one more time this great confession which we preach and we teach in the proclamation of Christ Crucified:

16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.