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Introduction. These last three verses of Chapter 3 are critical context-setters. They help us understand what this letter, why it was written, and why its contents are so important to the church. We have already seen that the church at Ephesus had some problems with false teachers (1:3-11, 18-20). Men who were not fit to teach were allowed to, and Paul himself had to expel them (Hymenaeus and Alexander). Teaching Christ's body is a daunting task which requires more than knowledge of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. There are character, testimony, and lifestyle qualifications. And thus we saw the qualification lists in the first part of this Chapter for bishops (i.e., overseers, pastors) and deacons.

Here now, and continuing into the first part of Chapter 4, Paul tells Timothy the purpose for why he has written. Why is combating false teachers so important? Why is the selection of the right men to leadership in the church so important? Surely we can intuitively name several reasons. But these verses give us the mind of Christ; through Paul's pen, here is the God-breathed answer to those questions.

Essentially, *what the letter is* is church conduct instructions. And *why it is written* is three-fold: we are God's house, we are His "called out" people, and we are the pillar and ground of the truth. The chapter then concludes with a summary of that truth; we are told what it is that leaders unashamedly embrace and churches boldly stand for.

1. Verses 14-15 - The reason for the epistle.

- v.14 - ***These things...*** the instructions of the previous chapters concerning false teaching, men and women in the church, church leadership, etc. ***I hope to come to you...*** We know from Chapter 1 that Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus purposely.

- v.15a - ***...so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself*** The preceding chapters were instructions for conduct in church life, and in particular church meetings; this is the great value of this letter. What should we do? Who should lead? Who may do what in the meetings? All of that and more was addressed. *Churches of every era and every culture* must be well versed and trained in practice when it comes to these instructions.

- v.15b - This verse identifies the church as three things: 1) ***house of God...*** we are God's house; He lives in us, we are His dwelling place. No building or organization can contain Him - we call those things "church" in our present vernacular but really that's not what they are. He dwells *in His children*. 2) ***church of the living God...*** church, or *ekklesia*, means "a people called out"; God, by His grace through faith in Christ, has separated us to Himself. The spiritual reality is that *we are holy*, and therefore *we must live holy, as He is holy*. 3) ***pillar and ground of the truth...*** pillars hold things up, and the ground represents a place. This is how the church handles the truth: we hold it up, and it can be found here. A good local church always holds up biblical truth. A person in a good local church should have confidence that they will regularly hear and learn truth without compromise. What truth? See the next verse.

2. Verse 16 - The mystery of godliness.

- v.16a - ***without controversy...*** The Ephesian church did suffer from controversy because there were false teachers. The truth should be solid and consistent. The idea here is that these truths are *shared in common*. They are certainly "controversial" and disputed in the world, but not in the church!

great... Greek: *mega*. That is, *huge*. Immense in its magnitude, importance, effect. **mystery...** unknown in former times. These facts of the Christian message were heretofore hoped-for prophecies; now they were realized and to be embraced, affirmed, maintained and preached.

- v.16b - **God was manifested in the flesh...** Jesus Christ is God, as this refers to the Incarnation. **Justified in the Spirit...** vindication is in view. That is to say, when Christ rose from the dead, he was vindicated in the power of the Spirit. **Seen by angels...** Jesus was vindicated in plain view even of the spiritual realm (compare with Hebrews 1:1-6). **Preached among the Gentiles...** This speaks of both evangelization in general and the spread of the Gospel from the Jews to the entire world. **Believed in on the world...** we see here the fulfillment of the previous point; the Gospel was preached to the world, and the world received it and believed it, building one body of Christ from all people, Jew and Gentile alike. **Received up in glory...** This refers to Christ's ascension to heaven. This six-point confession summarizes and affirms all that Christ had accomplished from His birth to His ascension and even beyond to the period of world evangelization which continues today. Or, essentially, we see all that is contained in the biblical Gospel accounts and into the Book of Acts. There is still more Christ will accomplish of course, as evangelism continues, and as we await His glorious return. But as we serve and wait, these truths must be embraced, constantly reaffirmed, preached and taught, obeyed, and defended. The next chapter begins with a warning of future false teaching which would threaten these simple truths in the life of the church.