

Vishal Man-gal-wadi (a Christian scholar from India) shared the following story after visiting America:

In November, 2011, I visited two classes at a Christian university in North America. I asked both: "How many of you would still believe Christianity if you found out tomorrow that Christianity was not true. That is: God never became a man; Jesus did not die for our sin; or, that he did not rise from the dead?"

*Twelve hands went up in [the class of about 25 students]. These sincere and devout students had grown up in Christian homes, gone to church all their lives, and studied in Christian schools. Some had been in that Christian university for three years! They respected their elders who taught them that Christianity was all about **faith** - **with little concern for truth.***

... [P A U S E] ...

The conclusions that he reached from his observations are astounding:

*Christianity lost America because 20th-century evangelicalism branded itself as the party of **faith**. Secularism (science, university, media) became the party of **truth**. This is one reason why 70 percent of Christian youth give up meaningful involvement with the church when they grow up.... Secularism acquired the "**truth**" brand by default because evangelicalism began defining the Church's mission as [just] cultivating **faith**, not [also] promoting knowledge of truth.*

We can easily see the results of this today... and they are **tragic!** ... Our culture recognizes that the church deals in **faith**... and science deals in **truth**. ... (Sadly)...The church (as a whole) has **conceded** to this distinction of being the authority on matters of **faith**... and allowing science to fill the vacuum as the highest authority concerning **truth**. ... How often do we hear (as the trump card to any argument) – “Well... I believe in science!” ? ... And many believers back down (in silence) when that is spoken.

But we need to challenge the claim that science is the highest authority for truth. ... How would we do that? ... Here are some of my thoughts for when I hear someone say they believe in science:

“When you say science... I assume that you include its subjective process of reaching a conclusion. You believe the conclusions that science has provided to our culture. You see... every discipline of science must interpret the evidence that it observes... All science must create meaning from the data that it takes in... which is completely dependent on fallible human understanding.”

“The second thing that I am assuming is that you are believing scientific conclusions are completely objective and have not been influenced by human pride... human greed... or a blindness (or even an unwillingness)... to consider contrary data... because of political... practical... or philosophical prejudice.

All of that is not possible (or very unlikely) to your thinking.”

When I obtained my Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Science... I could easily tell you that there is a lot of human pride... human greed... blindness... and prejudice. (Scientists are not super-humans!) ... My professors had to publish science papers in prestigious journals – in order to keep their university teaching positions. It was a matter of pride to get published – and necessary for their continued employment. Every University does this. Science researchers are under enormous pressure to reach conclusions that capture the attention of journal editors... so the editors will publish their work... and the professors can keep their job.

The public façade is that science is pure... objective... and full of integrity. It is NOT. Human pride... greed... and increasing political influence has obscured all sense of objectivity... as well as its integrity. (Government funding for university studies and private laboratories is a major driving

force of science today. Government funding determines the bulk of what science studies today... and how it will be interpreted – if researchers want continued funding.)

Many of you know that I suffered a heart attack in August. What you may not know (until now) is that it came just days after I had my first Covid-19 vaccination. Last month I visited my cardiologist and asked if he thought my heart attack was related to the vaccine. His response completely “floored me.”

He said that he had absolutely no doubt that it was directly involved. He studied all of my symptoms and cardiac test results and said that they perfectly matched with several of his other patients – who had these same heart symptoms (amazingly) just days after taking **THEIR** vaccine.

Then he told me how he (and another cardiologist in his Clinic who also had patients with the same circumstances) wrote out a very careful report. They sent it to a prestigious medical journal – and were refused publication. They were told that thousands of other cardiologists had submitted similar careful studies... and yet the journal of medicine was not going to publish any of them. ... American science is turning a blind eye to critical truth.

Science makes a very poor pillar of truth. ... Forsaking objectivity... it has gate-keepers who are very selective about which of it's inferences and deductions will be presented as truth to the world.

But let me make something very clear. I am NOT anti-science. I do not wish for us to return to the “Dark Ages.” Science has provided us with understandings and modern conveniences for which I am very grateful. But whenever it pretends to be MORE than it is... (whenever a greater

authority is ascribed to it than it actually has... or it professes more objectivity than it really has)... then society becomes **vulnerable** to whatever agenda-driven conclusions... that it may have.

Why have I told you all this...? ... We are about to see in today's passage of Scripture... that the church's role is what science pretends to be! We **are** the pillar of truth for the culture around us. What does this mean? (And) how are we to fulfill this role? ... We need to reclaim our role. And in doing so... we must be fully convinced that science is not the pillar of truth. ... [P A U S E] ...

(NOW) before we begin our passage of study... I need to re-establish where we are in 1st Timothy... since it has been a few weeks since we were last here. (We return to it today... after two weeks of focusing our attention on the Christmas season that we just enjoyed.)

The first section of this letter from Paul is a personal message to his *discouraged* protégé (Timothy)... who he left in Ephesus... to straighten out problems. Paul focused on the work of ministry all the way through (1 Tim. 1:1 to 3:13... where we left off last time.).

Recall with me (please) some of what we have already covered. ... Paul reminded Timothy of his duty as a pastor (1:1–20). He named prayer as the first priority of ministry (2:1–8)... then he clarified the position and role of women in the church (2:9–15). ... He followed this by setting out the qualifications of church elders (3:1–7)... and then he celebrated the noble title of deacon and deaconess (3:8–13).

Next week... we will break open the second section of this letter (which takes us from 4:1 to 6:21). There we will probe the inner life and conduct of

the minister... with particular emphasis on the shepherd/pastor. ... But first... with today's passage... (between sections one and two... we find a seam... a short... personal... and intriguing interlude - linking section one and two together. Our bridging passage today is 1 Timothy 3:14-16. Paul's emphasis is two-fold; Christian CONDUCT and CONFESSION.

Among the materials that Paul builds this bridge with... are three pictures that Paul gives of the church. ... 1. – He will describe it as the HOUSE OF GOD. ... 2. – He will describe the church as AN ASSEMBLY... and 3. – is where he tells us that we are SOCIETY'S PILLAR OF TRUTH.

1 Timothy 3:14-15

It has been quite a while since Paul left Timothy alone in Ephesus to do the difficult task of fixing its problems. From Luke's accounts in the Book of Acts... and Paul's letter to Titus... Bible scholars estimate that it has been at least two years. And now he writes saying that there may be an even LONGER delay. ... We can almost hear Timothy's centuries-old GROAN... when Paul wrote in verse 14: "*If I delay...*" ... The Apostle (obviously) saw a very possible hindrance... causing a further holdup.

In the meantime... (in case of delay)... Paul wanted Timothy and the Ephesian congregation to have **these instructions** in hand. ... The "instructions" (no doubt) refer to what we studied already in chapters 1-3... as well as the exhortations to follow... that we will see in chapters 4-6.

Paul's purpose for writing this letter was... "*so that you*" [**singular**] (in other words 'you – Timothy') "*...will know how one ought to conduct*

himself.” ... We see here Paul is concerned about CONDUCT... and in verse 16... he shows concern for CONFESSIO*N* of belief.

Now... concerning Timothy’s CONDUCT... Paul (probably) could not have offered new information for Timothy. The older minister had diligently trained his student as they planted churches around the Empire together. Sometimes (however) a mentor has to re-center his student’s thinking... and bring him back to basics.

I find that I need to be reminded from time to time about the significance of the church. It is so easy to be worn-down by the world’s view that we are inconsequential (not very important at all.) ... But what I believe about the church – will affect how I conduct myself in it. ... So Paul drew upon three images to describe the local body of believers: a household... a civic assembly... and a pillar of truth.

“The household of God” draws upon the patriarchal... **multi**generational family structure found in most cultures. ... Homes were not single family dwellings in the first century. Brothers... sisters... and their spouses... along with grandma and grandpa all lived together. When a young man married in those days... his father expanded the family home to prepare separate quarters for the new couple. There was close accountability and responsibility for one another. Everyone contributed to meet each need of the extended family household... taking orders from the patriarch. That is how Paul pictured the church.

“The church of the living God” uses the Greek term *ekklēsia*. ... The word *church* is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*... which means “assembly.” ... It referred to the political assemblies in the Greek cities

where business was transacted by qualified citizens. ... But it is used about 100 times in the New Testament to refer to local churches... assemblies of believers. ... The Greek word (most literally) means “*those called out.*” (It is picturesquely used in Acts 7:38 to describe the nation of Israel. They were called out from Egypt to assemble in the desert... an assembly of the Lord... just as the New Testament church is an assembly of the Lord... that is formed by God calling out believers from the world.

But “**the pillar and support of the truth**” is where I would like to spend the majority of our remaining time and attention today.

This is an architectural image which would mean a lot to Timothy in Ephesus... because the center-piece of the city (great temple of Diana) had 127 pillars... soaring 60 feet high. They all held up an ornate roof - about the size of one and a half football fields. Those vital supports made the dwelling possible – and were a dominate feature of its architecture.

According to Paul... the Lord established the local church to become the support structure of divine truth. Such support is absolutely critical. ... It is likely that the *pillar* aspect of the church’s ministry... relates primarily to displaying the truth of the Word... much as a statue is put on a pedestal so all can see it. ... We must hold “forth the Word of life”... so the world can see it.

Every January (as we close one year and move into the next)... (especially lately)... I have been tempted to treat the transition the way golfers take a mulligan. Let’s just play on... and pretend that the events of this past year never happened. This global pandemic... the mad riots... the horrific political theater... which litter the landscape of our previous year – never

happened. But to do so... would be a missed opportunity for us (as a church) to be the pillar of truth to our panicked society. rediscover some of our central beliefs about sin... repentance... and redemption.

All through human history... from Cain and Abel onward... has amply demonstrated that destruction and stupidity... the perversity of fools – being everywhere... and only a very thin veneer distinguishing civilization from anarchy... is the norm - not the exception. [P A U S E] ...
Welcome to Humanity 101. ... And don't worry: it won't get better.

But if we act like we are “the Church of Chicken-Little”... instead of the Church of Jesus Christ... we are not being the pillar of truth. ... We do not need to run around screaming that “the sky is falling.” ... There is no panic in heaven... and there doesn't need to be any in us.

(You see...) over the chaos of this world... reigns the King of kings... (Jesus the Resurrected)... before whom every knee will eventually bow... whether they like it or not. ... Every governmental authority now — presidents... kings... prime ministers... (you name it...) — are in lame-duck administrations. Their time is ending.

Hold up the truth! ... What we trust in... is greater than science or politics. Christ and His kingdom is everlasting. ... What we confess as truth... is far more secure than anything politics or science has ever proclaimed.

Verse 16 expresses the truth that the church (as a pillar) holds high for all to see... (Remember... in this bridging paragraph... Paul is concerned about CONDUCT and CONFESSIOIN. Here is our confession.

1 Timothy 3:16

Most scholars agree that this verse was a 1st century hymn that the church used in worship. It was the church's confession (or doctrine) of what they believed. ... And the first thing we should see is how closely CONDUCT and CONFESSIOIN are related to each other. ... Is doctrine really important...? ... ABSOLUTELY ! ... It regulates a sincere Christian's behavior. ... We have just seen how seeing ourselves as the Church of Jesus Christ (instead of the church of chicken-little)... we will behave differently.

One of the last Men's Round-up events at Camp Tadmire that I attended featured Donald Miller as the main speaker. This week I read a quote from his book Blue Like Jazz which I think addresses our point very profoundly.

The trouble with deep belief is that it costs something. And there is something inside me, some selfish beast of a subtle thing, that doesn't like the truth at all because it carries responsibility, and if I actually believe these things I have to do something about them....

I used to say that I believed it was important to tell people about Jesus, but I never did. [My friend] Andrew very kindly explained that if I do not introduce people to Jesus, then I don't believe Jesus is an important person. It doesn't matter what I say.

Doctrine (that is believed)... and behavior... are closely related.

Paul gave three confessions (or doctrines) in this 1st century hymn of the church... that we must deeply believe – and if we do... our behavior will be affected. ... The hymn is written in three couplets (or pairs) of lines. The first two lines are to be taken together... then the next couplet... and finally the last. Let me show you what beliefs these couplets confess.

1. We confess that he was REVEALED by his incarnation and resurrection. (This is expressed by the first two lines.)

*He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit.*

2. We confess that he was WITNESSED by heaven and earth. (This is expressed by the second two lines.)

*was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations.*

3. We confess that he was RECEIVED in earth and in Heaven. (This is expressed by the third and final couplet.)

*was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.*

We just finished celebrating the first part of the three confessions with our Christmas services. Jesus' appearance "in a body" is a reference to his birth and incarnation. ... So here is our confession... Do you deeply believe this - enough that it affects your behavior?

Jesus did not appear to men what He really was. Man did not recognize Who He was. ... The One... Who... in the beginning was God... was with God... and who made all things... became a little... helpless baby. He was the image of the invisible God and had all power in heaven and in earth... but down here He took upon Himself human flesh.

Because He was not recognized by man... He was treated as an imposter... a usurper... and a blasphemer. ... He was hated... persecuted... and murdered! ... God manifest in the flesh was poor... was tempted and tried... and actually shed tears.

Yet in all that... He was not justified in the flesh... but in the Spirit.
("Vindicated" is an unusual form of the Greek word for "righteousness." It

means “shown to be righteous.”)... He was manifest in the *flesh* — that is how the world saw Him. But He was shown that He was indeed righteous or vindicated in the *Spirit* in His resurrection.

Romans 1:4 explains that Christ “through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” So the first two lines are a confession of the supernatural *incarnation* and *resurrection* of Jesus that revealed Him as the Messiah. This is the Jesus that every member of the church **must** confess.

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was vindicated by the Spirit.*

2. We confess that he was WITNESSED by heaven and earth.

*was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations.*

This second doctrine contrasts the witnesses—heavenly angels and earthly nations. One is supernatural... the other natural. ... One is superhuman... the other human.

The angels saw everything. ... After Christ’s temptation... “*the devil left him, and angels came and attended him*” (Matthew 4:11). ... In Gethsemane as He sweat great drops of blood, “*An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him*” (Luke 22:43). ... Angels witnessed the Resurrection and sat by his empty tomb (Luke 24:4, 23). ... Angels comforted the disciples as Jesus ascended to Heaven (Acts 1:10, 11). ... And presently Jesus is adored in glory by vast angelic hosts who sing, “*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and*

wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Revelation 5:12). ... And this same Jesus will return with His angels as our King and deliverer (1 Thessalonians 4:16). ... He was indeed “seen by angels.” He was witnessed by heaven – AND earth... “was preached among the nations.” Although this ancient hymn used past tense... it is referring to the work of evangelization conducted in the first century... and continuing through the church today. ... There was (and is) cosmic witness to Christ... on earth... and in Heaven.

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“*Believed on in the world*” (of course) doesn’t mean to imply that everyone in the world will believe the gospel... but that some from every part of the world will place their trust in Christ. ... (And) “*taken up in glory*” obviously refers to Christ’s ascension. ... If the angels sang in wonder at the birth of Christ when he came down to earth, how they must have sung when he returned to Heaven! What a shout must have gone up when the everlasting gates lifted for the King of glory!

Here is the point: The magnificent Christ of this grand confession makes possible the godly conduct that Paul calls for in verses 14 and 15. ... If you and I actually believe these things... then we have to do something about them...

Be a pillar of the truth... or let man's *impure* scientific interpretations try to fill the void.

... [P A U S E] ...

Before I close... I need to make an obvious point about the church today being the pillar of truth. How can we be the pillar of truth when so many believers today don't know what we believe and why we believe it? We don't know what we are supposed to be holding up... and for what we do know... if questioned about it... many (in the church) will drop it and run.

Can I tell you something? There is a great need for strengthening this pillar. This is why the elders and I have been praying how this church can become a better pillar of the truth. We have sensed God leading us to engage in a serious effort of teaching the truths that we are to be holding up - Doctrinal truth.

Do you need some strengthening on what you believe and why? ... We are in the process of developing a series of Adult Sunday School classes to teach systematic theology. These classes will be designed as applications to life. As we saw in our passage today... Paul taught a systematic theology using a 1st Century hymn! (You see) theology is meant to be lived... and prayed... AND EVEN SUNG!

I pray that one of your major take-aways from our passage today is how closely related doctrine and personal behavior are. The more we know

about God... about His Word... about His relationship to the world and human-kind – the better we will trust Him – the better we will praise Him – and the more readily we will obey Him!

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (ESV)

²³ Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”