

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

HOLDING THE MYSTERY OF THE FAITH

We're coming to the end of the words that describe the qualities of a spiritual leader and, by default, a godly Christian man.

We'll finish next time (Lord willing) in Titus where it says you are to be "a lover of what is good" (1:8).

Today we see from both Timothy and Titus that the godly man is to be "holding" some things.

- A deacon is further described in First Timothy 3:9 as "holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience."
- An elder is further described in Titus 1:9 as "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

As we're fond of telling you, a "mystery" in the Bible is something once concealed that has now been revealed to God's people.

The "mystery" revealed here is "the faith." Jude spoke of "the faith once for all delivered for the saints." It is the body of truths taught by the apostles and now canonized in the New Testament.

What are some of the "mysteries" that comprise "the mystery of faith?"

- The incarnation of Jesus Christ as God in human flesh is a mystery revealed.
- God the Holy Spirit indwelling believers of the church age is a mystery revealed.
- The unity of Jews and Gentiles as one body in Jesus Christ is a mystery revealed.

- The coming resurrection of the church from the dead and the rapture of living saints is a mystery revealed.

We are to be all about revealing God, not concealing Him. For some reason it always seems more spiritual to add ritual and religion to our relationship with the Lord. It's a favorite tactic of those we label emergent. Create a prayer labyrinth; practice contemplative prayer. It all serves to conceal, rather than reveal, the Lord.

The "mystery of the faith" is to be held "with a pure conscience." The conscience is a human faculty Given by God to every person. It is there before we get saved. It is designed to warn us when we have violated God's moral law.

By the constant ignoring of conscience the internal voice can be dulled to the point that when evil is done the conscience responds very little or not at all. A conscience in this condition is referred to as a "seared conscience" in First Timothy 4:2.

I had a badly seared conscience. It was no help to me in terms of basic morality. But God broke through anyway with the truth of His Word and saved me. I found He had renewed my conscience.

Once renewed we must train the conscience. Exposure to the Word seems to train the conscience, to give it the settings it needs so it can respond appropriately. Conscience is not infallible but God's Word is. The more we train by the Word, the more sensitive we will become.

The Bible indicates there are three types of conscience for Christians:

1. The weak conscience is essentially an uninstructed conscience. It is lacking in a knowledge of the Bible to the point where it is overly sensitive and calls some activities "sins" which are not wrong according to the teachings of the Bible (First Corinthians 8:1-13).
2. A defiled conscience is a conscience which has not been heeded (First Corinthians 8:7).
3. A pure conscience knows of no offense against God or another human being that has not been addressed and taken care of.

“Holding the mystery of the faith” is continuing in the profound yet simple truths that have been revealed to us. We do it best when our conscience is pure.

A godly Christian man is also “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught...” “Word” is a synonym for the Scriptures. It is qualified by the word “faithful.”

I don’t know why but I thought of Old Faithful Geyser in Yellowstone. I thought it erupted like clockwork - at an exact interval. *Not so!* Old Faithful erupts every 35 to 120 minutes for 1 1/2 to 5 minutes. Park Rangers are able to predict its eruptions only fairly accurately. **It is not possible to predict more than one eruption in advance.**

I was a little disappointed in the ‘faithful’ part of Old Faithful until I read this quote from a park website:

It is only possible to make predictions of the time Old Faithful may erupt. The geyser will erupt when it is ready. **Its the prediction that is early or late not the geyser.**

God’s Word is kind of like that. It is always faithful but often in ways that challenge us to wait upon the Lord. It is our prediction or predicament or preference that is off - not the Lord.

The godly man waits upon the Lord to fulfill His faithful Word.

“As he has been taught” means something like, *according to the teaching*. It looks back to apostolic teaching - the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Then Paul said, “that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” The godly man knows the “sound,” meaning healthy, “doctrine,” meaning teaching, of the Bible. He knows what the Bible says about something; or he finds out what the Bible says about something. He applies it in his conversations and encounters with others.

Knowing it will bring spiritual healing and health, he “exhorts” and “convicts” others with it.

- “Exhort” is from the word meaning *to come alongside*. The godly man knows only God’s Word can come alongside to heal and bring real health.
- “Convict” means *to refute*. There is a lot of error out there, a lot of garbage. The godly man can use God’s Word to refute it and thus keep believers growing.

So many things out in the world “contradict” God’s Word. The current worldly wisdom on raising kids is as good an example as any. They’ve labelled spanking as ‘hitting’ and turned it into child abuse. Kids are not held responsible, not made accountable, for their misbehaving. Instead everything is a condition or a syndrome.

One child in a Kings County classroom has been diagnosed as being a “selective mute.” He only talks when he wants to. He can’t be disciplined for not speaking when spoken to because of his ‘condition.’

I’m preaching to the choir. You understand that we live in a contradictory world.

“Holding” is a strong word. We’re to hold on as if our lives depended upon it. Hold on tight; don’t let go; get a good grip on the truth.