

1Tim 24-04-28a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're continuing this morning to look at this really helpful section of the Word of God from Paul writing to Timothy, and when he mentions the great mystery of godliness, we find that this has at least seven facets or components that are specifically identified by Paul. Uniquely so, it gives us a fresh appreciation of the commission that the Lord Jesus gave him on the Damascus Road to reveal these truths, to preach them in the Greek-speaking world to the Gentiles, as well as to those Jews who are receptive and who transition from their Jewish faith to an understanding of the new people of God who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptized into His body, and are a unique gift from the Father to His Son, the Lord Jesus, exclusive to this age, exclusive to this time, and all of the attached details thereunto.

So we're going to pick up that study this morning. We're going to complete it. We're going to look at our summary of the three spheres of love as they are touched upon in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, very famously the love chapter. We're going to look at what's coming up in 1 Timothy chapter 4 with regard to the latter days. We're going to see some of the outworkings and implications of the mystery of iniquity that is already at work, and how we see the ever-more-visible aspects of that. And, Lord willing, by the close of our time together this morning, we will find fruitful principles, promises, and doctrines from the Word of God that enable us to apply what we've learned, give the Holy Spirit something with which to guide us and illuminate our path, and enable us to represent the Lord Jesus as His body, as His incarnation on this earth, in an effective and God-glorifying way. So let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and time to study, and we'll begin.

Father, what a privilege it is to gather with believers who love You, who appreciate the Lord Jesus and the wonderful opportunity that You have granted us in Christ to live a life that has meaning and purpose and definition, that has eternal goals and values, that enables us to establish priorities that invest in not just time and effort in this life, but redeem the time and give it eternal significance. We pray that as we look at these passages of Scripture together this morning, that the Holy Spirit will find us teachable and impressionable, that we can remember and see the ways in which we can put these truths into practice in our conversations, in our personal interactions, and recognizing that these may seem small and insignificant on the world stage, You have granted us the opportunity to live a life of significance, and that significance can extend in ways and outer repercussions that far exceed our understanding.

We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified, and we ask it in His name. Amen.

Let's begin by reviewing real quickly. I am just going to name these, the seven aspects of mystery that Paul specifically identifies.

The first was the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, that God would become flesh and dwell among us, and we would behold His glory, as John puts it in chapter 1. This was foreshadowed with the birth of Emmanuel in the Old Testament, but the fulfillment could not have been understood, could not have been grasped except in retrospect. Matthew does a wonderful job of invoking the Old Testament anticipations that Jesus fulfills. He shall be called a Nazarene, a netzer, a root shoot from the stump of Jesse.

These things resonate as you review the Scriptures. Jesus reminds the two men on the road to Emmaus that it was the Old Testament Scriptures that should have enabled contemporary people to identify Him. They couldn't necessarily predict when and where and how God's grace in delivering Israel and establishing the kingdom would appear, but when it did appear, they should have been able to recognize it and have aha moments, if you will, where their knowledge of Scripture would match the pattern and reveal and resonate with the words and the works of the Lord Jesus.

I am pointing this out because we live in a similar time. No one knows the day or the hour of the return of the Son of Man. We can't pinpoint, as Harold Rawlings and others have attempted to do.

There was a book—Harold Camping, I think, is who I may be thinking of. Dr. Rawlings is a really good friend of mine, but he hasn't made any predicted prophecies. He was a wonderful and gifted pastor in St. Louis for many, many years.

He has written books about the history of the Word of God and a wonderful friend and pastor. Harold Camping—I picked up his book for a dollar, in anticipation of something like 1992, I think was the name of it. Then he revised it and thought that the Lord Jesus was going to return in 2004.

He is dead wrong with regard to this, as have so many others who are counting jubilees and observing blood moons and eclipses and so on. We don't make predictions so much as we identify in our current day fulfillments of the anticipation that are recorded in Scripture. This is the proper understanding of prophecy.

Turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 4. This is where we are going to pick up our study here in coming days and weeks. You remember the great mystery at the close of chapter 3 that has enabled us to take a departure, if you will, to study it. The mystery of eusebeias, the mystery of godliness, or of being attuned to the divine plan and purpose, is how I like to think of it.

God manifested in the flesh, and this is number one of our sevenfold facet reckoning, is the incarnation: the life, the death, the burial, resurrection, ascension, and session, or seatedness, of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father. The word God—you have a text note in your New King James, of course—is not there. It is who was.

Great is the mystery of the outworking of divine plans and purposes. There was a manifestation of manifestation in the flesh, and we know this to be the Lord Jesus Christ, but I don't want to add anything to the Word of God any more than I would take away from it. The word God has been added here.

If Paul wanted the word God, he would have put theos. It is not there because the focus here is on the events, not the person or persons of the Trinity that are involved, because the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh is brought about by all three persons. The Father planned it, timed it, issued the commission to the Lord Jesus, the second person of the Trinity.

We have a reference to this in Philippians chapter 2. When this opportunity was presented to the Lord Jesus, He did not think His equality with God was something that He had to hold on to at all costs. He was willing to humble Himself, come humbly as a servant and in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He was obedient to the cross and so on.

Manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit. Your New King James capitalizes this. I believe it is lowercase. This is talking about the flesh and the spirit of the Lord Jesus, of the incarnate Christ. He was visible, He was manifest, He was revealed, He was experienced, if you will, by the people in that generation: the disciples, the religious leadership, the masses of people to whom He preached and for whom He gave demonstrations of the power of the Spirit. The miracles that He did evidenced that the Holy Spirit was present and evident.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the finger of God. "If I do these works by the finger of God, if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then you know that the kingdom is here." But it is a full involvement and participation, just as in Genesis chapter 1. John tells us that in the creative process that is detailed in Genesis chapter 1, you have God speaking, you have the Holy Spirit hovering and enabling and empowering, and you have the Lord Jesus.

John says, "Without Him nothing was made that was made." So that great creative act, the participation of all three, is reflected again in this great mystery of the divine purpose and action that Paul speaks of here. So there is a manifestation in the flesh.

This is at the behest of the Father, commissioning the God-man, the Lord Jesus, who is going to live His life in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He is going to pray to His Father in that spirit, just as we do. Seen by angels, and once again I personally believe that while angels certainly observed, both elect and fallen, that He is seen by messengers, by those who are going to be witnesses unto Me, as Jesus says.

"You shall be witnesses unto Me. You have seen Me. You have been with Me from the beginning. You shall be witnesses." They are going to be both *marturoi*—martyr is the word, but that is how it is translated—witness, and *angeloi*. They are going to be messengers.

They are going to make disciples and teach them everything that the Lord Jesus has entrusted to them to teach. Seen by messengers, preached among the Gentiles. This is Paul's almost unique privilege.

John is going to enter into this. Peter is going to enter into it to an extent. But opening the door to the Gentiles and proclaiming the mystery involving salvation through Christ to the Gentiles is Paul's unique commission. Preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and this is the issue.

When the messengers preach the message, who believes? Notice it says believed on in the world, not by the world. The whole world doesn't believe, but in the world of human beings there are some who respond in faith. Received up in glory.

And notice these are not necessarily chronological. The ascension took place before the gospel is preached to the Gentiles, but this is a summary. It is a poetic expression of this revelation of the new creation, the new covenant, the new life that is possible through the Lord Jesus.

Now we come to chapter 4. This is where we will be picking up very soon. "Now the Spirit expressly says," wonderful introduction to this turn in the epistle. The Spirit expressly says.

Paul doesn't say, "Let me tell you," or, "This is what the Lord Jesus revealed to me when I spent time with Him in the wilderness." The Spirit reveals. Why is this important? You and I have the gift of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

And when it comes time to identify the fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures, not that we can pick a date or figure out who the Antichrist is or identify various metaphorical representations in prophecy, Old Testament or New, that pertain to the future when we won't be here. But in our current day, for our personal application, for our stability, for our reflecting of the glory of God through the Lord Jesus, our Spirit-filled life in whom we walk and by whom we are guided, it is the Spirit who leads us into truth. It is the Spirit that gives us wisdom. It is the Spirit whose presence and voice we cultivate in our daily life.

And when the Spirit—it doesn't just say—He expressly says, He emphatically says. This is a big part of the Spirit's message. The people just blow right by the word expressly. The Spirit makes a big deal out of saying that in latter times, some will depart from the faith.

What do you know about the word depart? Depart reminds me in an opposite way of the word fetch. You've heard me in the past mourn the loss—only in Oklahoma and maybe Texas and a few Southern states do people still use this wonderful word? There's no other word that encompasses the actions fetch. Fetch means I'm standing here, I'm going to go over there, I'm going to get something and bring it back. I'm going to go, I'm going to get, and I'm going to bring. All three actions are beautifully summarized in the word fetch.

Now think about the word depart. What does depart tell you? I am in a place and I'm going to leave that place and be somewhere else. It doesn't say people will refuse to come to faith or that there will be widespread atheism and disbelief and attack on scriptural truth. What does this say? The Spirit expressly says, emphatically says, notably emphasizes that in latter times, some will depart from where? From the faith.

From the truth. From the truth. From the truth. From the truth. The revelation of the Word of God. They are in it, they know it, and they're going to leave it.

This is defection inside the one another, inside the family of the church. Family members are going to leave the family. The faith is what unites us in Christ. The faith in the hands of the Holy Spirit is what gives us one Lord, one baptism, one understanding of the truth, one God and Father of us all, one witness, unity closer than physical relationship, unity in Christ, brothers and sisters in Christ, elders, fathers and mothers in Christ, children, those who are responsive to truth being spoken in love.

In latter times, some are going to make the decision to depart that sphere, that wonderful realm of reciprocal love, common understanding, unity, and corporate effectiveness. The whole being greater than the sum of the parts, the Holy Spirit not just working in individual lives, but also in and through the fellowship. A witness to those who are outside that Jesus describes: "They will know you are My disciples when you love one another." People are going to, in latter times, willfully exit.

John is going to talk about this. They were with us, they were among us, and they left us. Tragic. We'll see this in more detail.

Depart from the faith. Why are they departing? What is it that motivates them to leave? It's in the next phrase: giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines that come from demons. Deception in the realm of belief.

We're going to understand Scripture differently. We're going to take it in new and innovative ways. We're not going to use Milton Terry's wonderful summary of the entire science of biblical hermeneutics. He had a book.

It's a very thin book because you don't need a whole lot of guidance in properly and rightly dividing the Word of truth.

Milton H. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics. Wonderful textbook. One of my first at Tulsa Seminary. When the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.

If you go to the Word of God, look for the Word of God. The plain and the simple. Do it prayerfully. Encourage the witness of the Holy Spirit who is here to lead us into the truth. Ask and seek and knock.

Submit conclusions to the throne of grace and say, "Lord, this is what I believe Your Word is telling me. If I'm wrong, please invoke the two-by-four brand of guidance. Smack me on the right or on the left and get me back on the narrow road. I want to live my life in a way that is pleasing in Your sight and that glorifies the Savior. Lead me, guide me, correct, rebuke, and instruct me from Your Word. This is what I believe it says. This is how I intend to apply it."

This is wonderful content for our prayer life, isn't it? Go to God and say, "Lord, I believe this is what I should do based on Your Word. I'm endeavoring to have an environment in my soul where the Holy Spirit can speak. I'm confessing my sins. I'm seeking to walk in the light. I'm cultivating fellowship with fellow believers. And this is my understanding. If I have gotten this wrong, please, please let me know. Bring me a believer who will speak the truth in love. Let the Holy Spirit bring to my mind other Scripture that will moderate and refine my understanding of this principle or this promise."

Is there any way God is not going to answer that prayer? If we ask for light, is He going to leave us in darkness? If we ask for bread, is He going to give us a rock or a snake or a scorpion? There's no way. You can pray this prayer with confidence. You can wait expectantly for either affirmation or correction.

When we submit our understanding and our intentions for application to the Father, we can rest. We will have peace. The Lord Jesus said, "My peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives." There is a supernatural peace and confidence.

Now, there may be stress involved in application. The sword that divides households, that is never without stress. We love people that we have to separate from. And yet there is a peace that undergirds and provides a foundation for doing the right thing, knowing that God can use what seems like adversity and hardship and pain and separation, as He did with the father.

That separation was necessary. That interruption of fellowship and communication between the father and the son was vital to that profligate son reaching the point by the hog trough of change of mind, of appreciation, of recognition. Evidently, he could come to that conclusion in no other way. And the father of that young man was wise in knowing that maintaining his integrity, maintaining his walk, concentrating on the son who remained and on the operation of that which was under his control and a part of his stewardship, focusing on those things that he could control, he could not go fetch his son. The son has to depart the hog trough and return.

Confidence and having a basic inner peace doesn't mean that it won't be difficult to be obedient, that the challenge and the temptation won't be there to compromise or to shade or to choose our own way and implement our own plan in the short-sighted belief that, well, this has to work. Faith in God, walking by faith and not by sight.

The Spirit expressly says that in latter times—are we in latter times? What do you think? We are 2,000 years out from the life of the Lord Jesus. In 0024, the Lord Jesus was walking this earth. We are 20 centuries after. We're 19 and a half centuries after these words were written by the Apostle Paul. These are manifestly latter times.

And in these latter times, some are departing from the faith. Why? They just lost their enthusiasm. The stimulation of new faith and excitement has worn off, and that's why they're leaving. They are deceived by what appears to be truth, what seems to be right, and yet it's the ways of death. And it is an active deception that is enabled, empowered, and undergirded by unseen forces of darkness.

This is not just misguided people, the blind leading the blind, and they both fall into the ditch. This is the manifest activity of principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age. Why does that matter? What does it matter if somebody just misunderstands Scripture and leads people down a bad road, or if there are demons and dark forces behind it?

Somebody who is misguided or confused or a poor Bible interpreter, a bad Bible scholar, can make a mistake in understanding what the Word of God says. That can soon be corrected. The Bereans go to the Scripture to see if these things are so.

The hazard in this kind of deception and these varieties of doctrine is they are enabled, empowered, undergirded, affirmed, supported by unseen fallen angels who have an agenda. This isn't just a mistake. "Oh, I was reading the directions and I put this part on before I put that part on. I've got to take this apart. I made a mistake."

This is agenda-driven. There is a purpose. There's a strategy. This is a coordinated effort that has connections and underpinnings and foundations in other places. It's not just, "Can I get this group and deceive them and get them to depart?" I will join them to others to whom we have done the same thing. We will group them. We will coordinate them. We will create a trend. We'll give it a hashtag. We'll have blogs. We'll have books. We'll have videos. We'll have seminars. We'll have debates, and we will successfully defeat those who try to defend the old view.

It's coordinated. There is strategy and purpose behind it, and there is spiritual power, dark spiritual power, at work in it. Those who leave the light can be influenced spiritually.

This, the most egregious and far-reaching manifestation, is demon possession. We believe that because of the sealing of the Holy Spirit in coming to indwell believers, that you cannot be indwelt by a demon if you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Our belief is that at the point of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes and seals individuals into the body of Christ.

That, however, does not mean that you cannot be powerfully influenced, because if you silence the Holy Spirit, if you quench the Holy Spirit, if you grieve the Holy Spirit and you take away His ability to speak and to guide because you give Him no Scripture with which to work, you can be powerfully misled, powerfully misguided, and persuasively convinced that you are in fact on a right road. And your I-am-right meter is pegged on a hundred, and you look with pity and condescension and derisive attention to fellow believers who have the old ways and the old understandings, and they are benighted. And look at the failures that have existed during the days when believers believed these things. The failures are because of the beliefs, which is not true.

It is a lie that believing biblical truth leads to failure. Failure comes from not believing and not paying attention to the entire realm of Scripture. You say, "Well, there were Bible-thumping churches, and look how racist they were, and look how oppressive they were, and look how mean-spirited, and look at the failure of believers who abandoned their wives and families and ran off with their secretaries in churches, and the problem is they believed the wrong things." That is a lie, but it is so persuasive.

We have got to change the church. Its beliefs are not protecting it from abuse and misuse and misapplication and horrible failures and sins and evils. The problem is not the biblical truth that is formally embraced by churches that end up having grievous failures. The problem is lack of attention to that truth, lack of obedience to that truth, lack of submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ and the presence and guiding power of the Holy Spirit. And to wrongly identify the beliefs and the understandings from Scripture as the cause of failure is the devil's own lie.

But people are leaving churches, not just failing to come to faith or failing to attend. They are in church. They grow up in church. They spend time in church, and they depart because they become convinced that the biblical foundations and the right understandings of Scripture are responsible for evils in the world. Therefore, those beliefs, those understandings, those truths from Scripture are flawed.

War is bad. People justify war using Christian nationalism. We need to defend our country because we stand for freedom and opportunity and value life, and there are other nations and countries and religious systems that devalue life and don't believe in the Lord Jesus and are anxious to oppress and to confine and to enslave others. And we have a righteous cause. We want to defend our own country from the incursions and the invasion of people who would take away our freedom to worship, our freedom to value life, and to seek genuine justice that punishes crime and rewards goodness.

Somebody's got a different system, and because of this deception that biblical belief and Christian truth is flawed and wrong and has resulted in evils in the world, people depart. They have been seduced by dark spirits. They have been taken away by doctrines of demons.

Notice doctrines, alternate constructions, alternate understandings of what Scripture says. This isn't a different political philosophy. This is, "I will take the Scripture and rework it and say that, well, some of these things that Paul says about women being silent and honoring their husbands—and well, Paul didn't write that. Somebody wrote that in Paul's name. That's not inspired. You can safely ignore that."

Joshua fighting the wars of the Lord, David going and defeating the Philistines and the Amorites and the other enemies of Israel in the land—that was a misunderstanding. Those people were feeling after God, but they misunderstood. God didn't really want them to slay the Canaanites. That was a misunderstanding, and so you can ignore that. That's not right. That's not biblical, and there's no such thing as just war. War is always wrong because you're taking a life, and people, here it comes, are made in the image of God.

As we go to the break, I want to read you something. This is a philosophy that has come about called Christian personalism. Christian personalism, and it is contrasted somewhat artificially with another approach called the utilitarian approach.

I'm going to summarize. If you search on Christian personalism, you will get 19 references to the very same article, and I'm going to give you a summary from it. Very quickly, I'm not going down a rabbit trail here. You need to understand this.

Christian personalists have an approach to love and suffering that is based on valuing the individual. Utilitarian approach is the philosophy that we want to seek the greatest good for the greatest number. It does not concentrate on individuals so much as supporting a system or an environment where there is opportunity for people to determine their own way.

I am, and I suspect you are, in the utilitarian camp. I'm not going to meddle in an individual's life. I support a nation and a society and a culture that provides opportunity for self-determination.

So I'm going to read you this paragraph, and then we'll go to the break. Personalism emphasizes the unique value and dignity of each individual person. This philosophy teaches that every human being has intrinsic worth and is worthy of respect regardless of their usefulness or ability to contribute to society.

This means that active terrorists, committed felons, wildly rebellious, sin-of-the-high-hand individuals that God told Israel to purge from their midst in the Old Testament, that's a bad idea. You should never consider anybody beyond redemption. Nobody should be the recipient of capital punishment because they have intrinsic worth and they are worthy. No matter what they've done, no matter what a bad actor they choose to be, they are worthy of respect.

Love is a fundamental aspect of human nature which should be expressed through relationships characterized by respect, compassion, empathy, and mutual understanding. Drawing on our study of the spheres of love, are there times and categories of people for which this is true? Are there those with whom we come in contact that we have relationships characterized by respect? Who would that be? At a minimum, neighbors. Even those who are outside, we can treat them with respect.

Compassion: you are the Samaritan, you see the man in the ditch, you treat him with compassion. That's neighbor love; you can have compassion. Somebody's ox got out, you can corral it and find the owner and get it back to him. Golden Rule: do unto others.

Empathy: I wouldn't want someone to treat me with a grudge or try to seek revenge if I messed up in some way. Mutual understanding: there are spheres in which we endeavor, to the extent that is up to us, to live peaceably with all men. Do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

But are there exceptions where we cannot, in good conscience before the Lord, do good to all, treat people with the idea that they are worthy of respect? If someone comes in and slaughters your family before your eyes, trying to take your stuff, believing you've got gold secreted somewhere in a jewelry box, and they slay your family, are you going to consider them worthy of respect, compassion, empathy, and mutual understanding? If someone is actively and violently opposing everything you stand for and is seeking your death, and is willing to

kidnap you and behead you on video to further their political and social and religious cause, are they still qualified for respect, compassion, empathy, and mutual understanding? No, they are not.

And the Bible says, "Purge the evil from your midst." This happens on an individual level when people commit felony capital crimes. This happens at a national level when a nation is intent upon destroying a fellow nation, a different nation, on religious grounds, on social justice grounds, or whatever it might be.

And there are times when we suspend the expression of love. When and where are those exceptions? What about one another love? If someone is in the one another camp and they willfully depart and they embrace doctrines of demons and deceptive spirits, do we continue to try to express one another love? Love has its limits.

God so loved the world that He sent His Son, but God is also going to send a sizable portion of that same world into the lake of fire for eternal destruction, right? Love has its limits. We have to know those limits so that we do not end up being seduced and misled and depart from biblical faith. More about this when we come back from the break.