

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Polycarp

1. In the mid-2nd Century, Polycarp, pastor of the church at Smyrna in Asia Minor was arrested for refusing to worship Caesar.
2. His conduct throughout his arrest & trial was so outstanding the officials tried to find a way to let him go.
3. When it was obvious he would not deny Christ they tied him to a pole in the arena & heaped wood around him.
4. His chief interrogator stood in before him w/torch in hand, offering him one last chance to save his life.
5. He said, "Why should you die like this? Just say the words, 'Caesar is Lord,' renounce Christ & live!"
6. Polycarp looked him in the eye & said, "80 & 6 years have I served Him & never has He denied me. How then can I blaspheme my King & Savior? Come—Do what you will."

B. Today

1. There's good **reason** Pastor Polycarp & hundreds of thousands of other Christians went to their deaths in the first 3 Centuries of the Church rather than deny Christ.
2. It would have been **so easy** to just say the words that would deliver them from the sword, flames, or the wild animals that tore them to shreds in the theaters as entertainment for the crowds.
3. Though some did chickened out, many more could **not** speak words that would hurt the heart of the One Who meant more to them than life itself.
4. Today, we're going to see what compelled them to become martyrs.

II. TEXT

A. 3:14-15

¹⁴ These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; ¹⁵ but if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

1. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus while he went to Macedonia to visit the churches there.
 - a. It was his intention to meet up w/Tim back in Ephesus as soon as possible.
 - b. Not knowing when that would be, & concerned it would take longer than he planned, Paul sent this letter reminding Tim of what to do & **how** to do it.
2. His description of the church here is enlightening.
 - a. He calls it the **household of God**; meaning **family**.
 - 1) The church isn't a business or corporation.
 - 2) It's the family of God.
 - b. It's also the **pillar & ground of truth**.
 - 1) It's solid & secure; unshakeable & certain.
 - 2) Truth **isn't peripheral** to the Church's calling; it's **CORE**.
3. It's crucial & urgent we make this crystal today – **especially to the youth**
 - a. Because the current cultural climate has **given up** on the idea of **True Truth**.
 - b. In this post-modern era, truth is **whatever works**.
 - c. It's **personal preference**; & at most, **decided by majority vote**.
 - d. That's why opinion polls are so in vogue today.
 - e. Many decide on what to think by wetting their finger & sticking it up in the air to find out what the majority thinks.
4. The Church's mission is to be the **standard-bearer** for Truth.
 - a. Because God is real – there **IS** an unchanging, absolute Truth if anyone believes it or not.
 - b. The Church must not only believe it, we're called to be an unflinching witness of it.
5. This is where Christians so often get into **trouble** today.
 - a. As we stand **for** truth, **opponents** of truth accuse us of being **intolerant**.
 - b. They say if we hold to absolute truth we're not **respectful** of other people's ideas.
 - c. **Nothing** could be further from **The Truth**.
 - d. Let me explain: **BECAUSE** we cleave to True Truth, we're **called** to be respectful of others. Even those we don't agree with.
 - e. Let me take it even further: **BECAUSE** we cleave to True Truth, we're called to **LOVE** others; all

- others; even those who accuse us of being intolerant!
6. As is so often the case, the world is just wrong on this score.
 - a. Tolerance is **NOT** the chief virtue of civic behavior; **Love** is!
 - b. Being politically correct means being tolerant.
 - c. But Christians are called to **something much higher**; a love that honors & respects others, even when we disagree.
 7. The Christian way is better **on every level**.
 - a. We hold to an unchanging, abiding, invariable truth that calls us to a higher & better way than the world.
 - b. And that world, because it **rejects** truth, sows the seeds of its own destruction.
 - c. Because truth is real, so is **error**. And falsehood, by its nature, can't last.
 - d. So whatever is built on falsehood is doomed.
 8. Now here's the thing: It's neither good nor loving for Christians to let deceit go on when we know it can only bring harm.
 - a. We must refute & resist it.
 - b. But we must do so in a respectful & loving manner.
 9. What would you think of a doctor who got back the tests results for a patient that showed they had a fatal but treatable disease -
 - a. But instead of telling the patient for fear of upsetting them, sent them home saying everything was fine?
 - b. We'd call that immoral & grossly negligent.
 10. The Church is God's Stand-bearer of Truth to a world that doesn't **want** to, but **needs** to hear & see it.
- B. V. 16
- ¹⁶ And without controversy [there's no debate about this] great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.
1. Most likely this was a **hymn** of the early church.
 2. Last week we saw how they learned— by repetition & memorization.
 - a. One of the ways they did that was by **song**.
 - b. This is something we're well familiar with.
 - c. You might have a hard time memorizing just words but make them into **lyrics**, & all of a sudden they're easy to remember.
 3. This hymn captured the basics of the Faith. It's a bit like the chorus we sing, **Lord, We lift Your Name On High**.

*You came from heaven to earth – to show the way.
 From the earth to the cross - my debt to pay.
 From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky,
 Lord I lift Your name on high.*
 4. Having just reminded Tim that the Church was God's Standard-bearer for Truth, he follows it up w/The Truth which must have first place **The Gospel!**
 5. Remember, Paul left Tim in Ephesus to straighten things out. He must remember that preaching & teaching the Gospel has **highest priority**.
 6. Paul knew the importance of going back to the **basics** – especially when the Church started to drift as Ephesus was.
 - a. **Vince Lombardi**, the Hall of Fame coach of the Green Bay Packers, was notorious for his emphasis on the **fundamentals** of the football.
 - b. His teams won because they could block, tackle, & execute basic plays better than anyone.
 - c. After a game the Packer's lost because they'd failed in the basics, Lombardi held up a pigskin & said, "Gentlemen, this is a football!"
 7. That's what Paul does here w/Timothy. "This is the Gospel. – Never forget it, Never fumble this. Hang on to it w/all you've got!"
 8. Here it is God became human. He accomplished & announced salvation. Then He returned to heaven's throne.
 9. Recognize the great difference between Christianity & all other religions & philosophies.
 - a. They are all a program of performance; describing what **people must do** to be approved by God.

- b. The focus of Christianity is on what **God** has done.
 - c. That's why the message is called **good news** = the Gospel.
 - d. The mantra of **Religion** is what you have to do to keep from ticking God off.
 - 1) If you want to go to heaven jump through these hoops.
 - e. **Philosophy** is just the ideas of some wise-guys who had enough time to stare off into space or into the depths of their bellybuttons.
 - 1) But their insights all carry the same basic theme; the good life is comprised of **what you do**.
 - f. The **Gospel** is totally different because it's **not** about what you have to do;
 - 1) It's about what God's done for you.
 - 2) Salvation is a gift He wants to give, not a **reward** you have to **work for** or a **prize** to **win**.
10. Have you receive that gift of salvation thru faith in Christ?
- a. Answering that determines the tone, tenor, temperature of your worship.
 - b. If your relationship w/God is based on what you do,
 - 1) Your worship will be flat & w/o joy because you have little to celebrate.
 - a) You'll either be consumed w/guilt that you're not doing better
 - b) Or you'll think God owes you because you've been good.
 - 2) Either way there'll be no inclination to **worship**.
 - c. But if you own the fact that your relationship w/God, your inclusion in His grace & your confidence of Heaven, is all & only about what God has done **for you**, no one could stop your worship!
 - 1) Even if they lashed you to a pole in the arena, piled dried wood around you & set it alight.
 - 2) Polycarp was willing to be burned for Christ because he was already aflame with devotion to Him.
 - 3) It's said that from the huge crowd of unbelievers who came to watch his execution, **dozens** ended up coming to faith in Christ because of what they witnessed in him.
- C. 4:1-3
- 1. The Church is the standard-bearer for truth in the world.
 - 2. If she falters or neglects her calling, no one else will pick it up.
 - 3. Paul warns that while the Church must always contend w/error, the end times will see that conflict reach a climax.
- ¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,
- 1. The term, "**latter times**" means the **end of the end**, the **last days**.
 - 2. Both the OT prophets & Jesus described the last days as times of massive deception.
 - 3. It's of no surprise the lost would latch on to goofiness. What's distressing is this warning that **Christians** would fall away. Look at how he states it...
- in latter times some will depart from the faith
- 4. Are **born-again** or just church members?
 - a. **Genuine** followers of Jesus or Christians **in name only**?
 - b. Paul doesn't say they depart **from faith**, it's **THE** faith; that Gospel he'd just articulated in v. 16.
 - c. In the last days the Truth the Church is called to be the bastion of will come under a full-scale attack by deceit that will see **some** drawn away **from** truth **into** error.
 - d. This error isn't **minor**. It isn't **incidental** & w/o consequence.
 - e. This is falsehood that eats at the **heart** of the Gospel.
 - f. And it isn't something they just dabble in; they **give themselves over to** it; it takes over.
 - g. The word translated as "**giving heed to**" was used of a ship pulling into port.
 - h. These people turn away from truth & **pull into deceit** Taught by demons.
5. There's 2 sources of inspiration for teachers of spiritual things.
- a. One source is the **Holy Spirit**, working thru the Scriptures.
 - b. The other source is also spiritual; but not the **Holy Spirit** – it's **unholy spirits**.
 - 1) They may be confident & bold, but their inspiration is demonic.
 - 2) 1st John warns us to test the spirits because not every spirit comes from God.
6. The devil is clever. The first thing the Bible says about him is that' he's **subtle**.
- a. He's not going to show up at your door in a red jumpsuit, forked tongue & pitchfork, surrounded by a bunch of leering demons saying, "Good afternoon. I'm Satan & these are demons. We'd like to lead a

Bible study, Can we come in?"

- b. "Just believe this & go to hell where you can waterski on the Lake of Fire forever."
- c. No one's gonna' go for that, so he comes in a more appealing form.
 - 1) A couple clean-cut handsome young men on bicycles, wearing crisp white shirts & nametags.
 - 2) A well-dressed family making the rounds of your street on Saturday morning w/magazines called *Watchtower*.
 - 3) A slick TV program w/interesting music & people telling about their latest vision from God.
 - 4) The section at the local bookstore titled, ***Spirituality***.
 - a) They ought to just label it what it really is ***Demonic!***
 - b) Put a tag there identifying it for what it really is "Deceiving doctrines inspired by demons"
 - c) Buy this book – Learn how to go to hell.
7. Be careful what you read, watch, & listen to because there're liars out who aim directly at destroying you.
8. Though demons are behind error, ***they inspire human agents*** to be their spokesmen² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared w/a hot iron,
2. ***Most*** false teachers are ***hypocritical liars***
 - a. They KNOW what they're saying is bogus but teach it anyway.
 - b. They're able to do so because their conscience no longer works.
 - c. There was a time when it warned them off where their lust pushed them.
 - d. But they rationalized their sin one too many times & now their conscience is mute.
3. These false teachers are hypocrites because while they tell their listeners to do one thing, they do the opposite.
 - a. They preach honesty, but lie.
 - b. They promote purity, but are grossly immoral.
 - c. They require sacrificial giving, but only take 7 live in palatial homes on the cliff overlooking the beach.
4. Paul now warns us about what the end times, demonically-inspired false teachers will preach -³ forbidding to marry, ***and commanding*** to abstain from foods which God created to be received w/thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
5. As far as I know, no cult or false teacher is ***currently*** calling people to remain single.
 - a. The Roman Catholic Church prohibits priests from marrying, but I don't think that's what Paul refers to here.
 - b. He says this is something that will become a popular false teaching in the end times & celibacy has been a requirement for priests for hundreds of years.
 - c. This will be ***something new***. And it's something to be on the lookout for.
6. Whatever ***reason*** is given for this goofy idea, it remains just that Goofy.
 - a. While God calls certain people to be single, the ***vast majority*** are to be married.
 - b. By linking marriage to food here, it's a clue Paul means marriage in its fullest sense; including the physical intimacy of a husband & wife.
7. We're back to that old idea taken from ancient Greek philosophy that the physical world was evil & to be avoided as much as possible.
 - a. Anything enjoyable or pleasurable was deemed sinful.
 - b. Even in Paul's day, false teachers told Christians if they wanted to please God they had to abstain from sex & ***only*** eat the most bland foods.
 - c. This teaching had infiltrated the church at Corinth so Paul wrote telling husbands & wives NOT to listen to it. They needed to keep their physical intimacy a regular part of their life together.
8. We know from Romans that the eating of meat had become a big deal in the church.
 - a. Some ate, others didn't.
 - b. That would have been fine if it had been that simple; but it had turned into a major brouhaha.
 - c. The vegetarians called the meat-eaters sloppy sinners-
 - d. And those who enjoyed a double-double monster style called the vegetarians uptight legalists.
9. Paul told them both to stop judging each other in these ***issues of conscience***.
 - a. The proper way for all was for ***each*** to live by the dictates of their own conscience but not to put those standards on others.

- b. While everyone must obey those things the Word of God makes clear, in things that aren't clear we must live by our conscience – ***not someone else's' conscience***.
- 10. False teachers miss this & make ***their*** beliefs ***binding on all***.
- 11. We must be careful to only say what the Bible says. Where it's silent, so must we be.
- 12. Do you see the issue here? It's about the ***conscience***.
 - a. The demon-inspired false teachers have ***no conscience*** because they silenced it.
 - b. We need to be ***sensitive*** to our conscience, letting it steer our choices.
- 13. Paul goes on -
- D. Vs. 4-5

⁴ For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received w/thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

- 1. Far from the physical creation being evil, God CREATED the world & all that is in it.
 - a. And when he created He declared it, "Good!"
 - b. When he created humans, He made man first then said, "That's ***not good*** for this one to be alone."
 - c. ***The fix was woman***. It wasn't fishing, wood-working, a beagle. It was a woman.
 - d. God puts them together & says – "That's ***VERY*** good!"
 - e. Then God gave them a command to be fruitful & multiply.
 - f. SEX was & is God's idea. He's the One who gave us the capacity for such incredible pleasure.
 - g. The only boundary He confines it to is marriage.
- 2. Food is ***also*** God's idea!
 - a. Genesis speaks of the incredible diversity God gave in man's diet.
 - b. In ch. 2 we're told the plants are our vegetable garden. In ch. 9 meats included as table-fare.
 - c. Put 'em together & you have a burger – ***The perfect food!***
- 3. So listen up you married couples.
 - a. Go out soon to some restaurant, order up some ribs, or a nice juicy steak, some beans, a nice salad.
 - b. Then go home & have dessert.
- 4. But here's the way you can maximize your enjoyment of all of it – ***Pray over it all***.

⁴ For every creature of God *is* good, (your wife, your husband, & that cow that gave you that steak) and nothing is to be refused if it is received w/thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Love God

- 1. God gave these things to us to be enjoyed, & really the only ones who ***can*** enjoy them ***are*** believers;
 - a. In fellowship w/God --
 - b. Because we understand them as gifts from His hand to ***be*** enjoyed.
- 2. We keep them in the right perspective & don't let them become neither ***more nor less*** than God intends them to be.
- 3. We do that by prayer w/thanksgiving, reckoning them as the evidences of God's love.
- 4. Satan & the demons ***don't want us*** to enjoy God's love in this wonderful way.
- 5. So they inspire false teachers to tell us lies about God & His good gifts.
 - a. These false teachers take something being abused & say it's ***bad***; Forbidden – off limits.
 - b. This lie doesn't always need a false teacher to speak it.
 - c. Sometimes we think it ourselves.
 - d. We think "I'll be a good Christian when I stop _____."
- 6. ***Remember*** what we saw in v. 16 = Christianity is all about Jesus.
 - a. It's all about God's love for you, & your love as an echo back to Him.
 - b. It's love that holds you to Jesus, not pious works of devotion.
- 7. I tell you the truth - If you have a problem w/something that's messing up your life, whether it's sex, food, alcohol, whatever -- the root of it all is a ***theological*** problem.
- 8. You don't ***really believe*** in the love of Christ. ***That's*** your problem.
- 9. If you believed Jesus loved you & surrendered yourself totally up to that, you'd love Him back w/a love that obeys.
- 10. At the bottom of every moral, ethical, sinful problem is ***nothing*** that can be redeemed by rules & regulations.
- 11. A demonically-inspired, legalistic teacher w/a list of rules won't keep you from sin.
 - a. You may avoid one sin, but you'll just pick up another.

- b. And if you did stop them all, you'd just become arrogant & self-righteous like the devil.
- 12. Your goal is not to focus on your sin & obey man-made rules to keep away from it.
- 14. Your goal is to love Jesus, & if you love Jesus, you'll turn your back on sin.
 - a. Your desires will change. Your heart will change. Your motives will change.
 - b. Your nature will be transformed & redeemed & made new.
 - c. Your appetites will change. **You** will change.