

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

1 TIMOTHY 3:16: GOSPEL AND RESPONSE

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1 TIMOTHY 3:16: GOSPEL AND RESPONSE

When Paul wrote to Timothy to address the issues of false teaching and right living in the church, he had much practical instruction to give. From this perspective, the Pastoral Epistles generally and 1 Timothy specifically are a departure from Paul's more or less standard epistolary structure. In that structure, Paul normally begins the body of the letter with a doctrinal section which is followed by a hortatory section. However, in 1 Timothy this structure is absent. The body of the letter focuses on the one hand on the dangers of false teachers and on the other hand the proper roles and responsibility of those in the church. No explicit doctrinal section precedes these more practical matters. But, does that mean that Paul is not interested in doctrine in 1 Timothy? Such an extreme position cannot be sustained. After all, this would not be the only letter in which doctrinal considerations are present in the midst of a hortatory discourse (e.g., 1 Thess 4:13-18).

If that is the case, then what portion of 1 Timothy serves as the doctrinal section and how does it relate to the purpose of the epistle? The pivot point in Paul's letter, 1 Tim 3:14-16, serves as the doctrinal section that sets out Paul's theological foundation. Such a statement is not controversial; commentators are in agreement as to both the importance of these verses and their theological significance to the rest of the letter.¹ What is controversial is the meaning of these

¹ J. N. D Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: Timothy I & II, and Titus* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 86; I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 498; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Nachdr., WBC 46 (Nashville: Nelson, 2009), 214; Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, ECC (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 307.

verses, especially that of the Christ-hymn in the second half of verse 16. As the theological meat of the epistle, one's interpretation of it shapes one's interpretation of the whole letter. More specifically, one's interpretation of the *structure* of the Christ-hymn shapes one's interpretation of the whole letter. What is apparent to the reader is that Paul has chosen this hymn, and these verses of the hymn, to describe a certain emphasis of τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον.² One's view of how the verses of the hymn relate structurally informs the emphasis one sees in the mystery of godliness. Stated briefly, the three options for the structure of the Christ-hymn are (1) a single stanza of six lines,³ (2) two stanzas of three lines,⁴ and (3) three stanzas of two lines.⁵ This paper argues that 1 Tim 3:16b should be read as two stanzas of three lines each, a structure that emphasizes gospel and response because it most effectively communicates the theological foundation driving the practical instruction of 1 Timothy.⁶ Taken as a whole, the hymn is a redemptive-historical statement. The first stanza communicates the essential truth of the gospel and the second describes the world's response. This hymn describes the only way that Timothy and the Ephesian church can both watch their own life and doctrine and prevail against false teachers and dysfunctional church life.

² Quinn and Wacker [*Timothy*, 326] rightly point out that 1 Tim 3:16b is most likely only a fragment of the whole hymn, and Paul's choice of these verses indicate his particular emphasis here.

³ Alford and Barrett as described in Mounce [*Pastoral Epistles*, 216]. Also, Brice L. Martin, "1 Timothy 3:16: A New Perspective," *EQ* 85, no. 2 (2013): 105–20.

⁴ Most notably Marshall [*Pastoral Epistles*, 500-2] and Mounce [*Pastoral Epistles*, 216-7].

⁵ The majority of commentators, including Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*, JSNTSup 36 (Sheffield: JSOT Pr, 1990), 156; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of The Pastoral Epistles*, NTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1970), 137–9; Kelly, *Commentary*, 92; George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans ; Paternoster Press, 1992), 183.

⁶ Mounce [*Pastoral Epistles*, 216-7] argues this position and no doubt has τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον in his mind as the context that offers the gospel and response idea. This paper seeks to elaborate on Mounce's position by arguing that 1 Tim 3:14-16 is the theological center of the epistle that controls the gospel and response theme. For the view that the purpose of the Christ hymn is Christological only, see David J. MacLeod, "Christology in Six Lines: An Exposition of 1 Timothy 3:16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, no. 635 (2002): 334–48.

This paper first discusses the general context of 1 Tim 3:14-16 to provide a foundation. Then, it analyzes the structure of the passage itself for internal consistency as the early verses build up to the Christ-hymn. Finally, a detailed analysis of the first three lines of the Christ-hymn is performed to argue for their continuity and thus the thesis that the hymn is two stanzas of three lines.

The Context of 1 Tim 3:14-16

As mentioned above, 1 Timothy is primarily concerned with false teachers and right living in the church, both conduct and polity. That is why it is not surprising that a major theme throughout the letter is truth. Paul speaks of people coming “to the knowledge of the truth” as pleasing to God (2:4); Paul is a “teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” (2:7); in the passage under consideration, he calls the church “a pillar and buttress of the truth” (3:15); and he describes Christians as “those who believe and know the truth” (4:3), but non-Christians as those “who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth” (6:5). This truth is related to the “mystery of the faith” (3:9) and “mystery of godliness” (3:16), and all three of these concepts should be understood as the gospel.⁷

Paul’s stress on the gospel as truth is not a veiled polemic. He has the false teachers in Ephesus as his explicit target.⁸ The content of the teaching that these individuals propagated, as described by Paul, is generally focused on myths (1:4, 4:7), genealogies (1:4), Jewish law (1:7), speculation and knowledge (1:4, 6; 6:4, 20), material gain (6:5), and asceticism, including renouncing marriage and abstaining from certain foods (4:1-5). Paul characterizes the teaching as deceptive (4:1-3) and immoral (1:19, 20). While any specific discussion of the doctrinal points of

⁷ Kelly, *Commentary*, 88–9.

⁸ MacLeod, “Christology in Six Lines,” 334–5.

the false teaching is absent, it can be broadly categorized as a mix of Jewish and pagan influences.⁹ Even without doctrinal specifics, Paul's motivation for writing is clear; he desires that Timothy and the Ephesian church see the contrast between the truth, i.e. the gospel, and a lie, i.e. the false teaching. However, it is not merely right doctrine that preoccupies Paul's mind and the paragraphs of this epistle. Since a part of the false teaching included wrong practice, e.g. asceticism (4:1-5), Paul is also concerned about conduct in the church, both church polity (2:8-3:13) and right living (5:1-6:2). Thus, the whole epistle is concerned with the gospel and the response to it.

It is within Paul's focus on the truth and the Ephesian's response to it that 1 Tim 3:14-16 is found. Kelly calls this passage "the caesura," the pause between right practice and false teaching that provides the foundation for Paul's instructions.¹⁰ This pause is not discontinuous with the flow of the letter as a whole; it follows the earlier interjections of personal notes in 1:3 and 1:18.¹¹ At this pause, though, the heart of the letter is encountered. Paul reveals the doctrine, the lens through which the whole letter ought to be read, that offers the explicit contrast with the false teaching.¹² With this context in mind, an analysis of the structure and meaning of the passage itself can be performed.

⁹ This is evident from references to both Jewish law and a kind of Hellenistic dualism that leads to asceticism.

¹⁰ Kelly, *Commentary*, 86. Marshall [*Pastoral Epistles*, 497-8] also notes this passage's differences with the rest of the letter, which indicate a purposeful shift.

¹¹ Quinn and Wacker, *Timothy*, 307.

¹² Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 498; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 214.

The Structure and Meaning of 1 Tim 3:14-16

- 14 Ταῦτά σοι γράφω
 ἐλπίζων ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σὲ ἐν τάχει·
- 15 ἐὰν δὲ βραδύνω,
 ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι,
 ἣτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος,
 στῦλος καὶ ἐδραῖωμα τῆς ἀληθείας.
- 16 καὶ ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον·
 Ὃς
 ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί,
 ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι,
 ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις,
 ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν,
 ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ,
 ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ.

In the above logical progression, this passage is broken out into two sections. The first section, vv14-15, provides Paul's reason for the letter, and the second section, v16, provides Paul's doctrinal foundation for the instructions contained in the letter. In both sections, this theme of gospel and response is present. The following sections work through each part of the passage in turn, providing the immediate context for the Christ-hymn and its interpretation.

1 Timothy 3:14-15

This passage begins with what has been called “clumsy” syntax.¹³ The main line of thinking of vv14-15 is Ταῦτά σοι γράφω... ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι. Though Paul qualifies this statement with a concessive participial clause (ἐλπίζων ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σὲ ἐν τάχει) and the orphaned protasis of a conditional (ἐὰν δὲ βραδύνω) in between the main and ἵνα clauses, his point is that this letter is meant to inform Timothy, and the Ephesian church indirectly, how

¹³ Kelly, *Commentary*, 86.

members of the household of God should live.¹⁴ The intervening clauses lend a sense of urgency and importance to the instructions contained in the letter.¹⁵ Though Paul hopes to see Timothy in person, the likelihood of a visit anytime soon is decreased by the *ἐάν* clause. Knight notes that the *δὲ* sets up a contrast between Paul's hoping to see Timothy and his expecting that the visit will not happen *ἐν τάχει*.¹⁶ This achieves the effect of heightening the importance of the letter's content because Paul sees it as too important to wait for a later time.

What Paul cannot wait to instruct Timothy in is conduct *ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ*. This phrase can connote either the structure, such as the Temple of God, or the household, as in those who live in the structure. Since Paul uses architectural language later in the verse, the idea of a house is likely in view. On the other hand, Paul's use of the term elsewhere in 1 Timothy carries both meanings, and the relative clause further describes the *οἴκῳ* as the *ἐκκλησία*, which is more properly understood as a household. Thus, it is best to understand this phrase as carrying both meanings simultaneously with a slight emphasis on household.¹⁷

This nuance is valuable insofar as it offers evidence that *στῦλος καὶ ἐδραῖωμα τῆς ἀληθείας* modifies *ἐκκλησία*, which is related to *οἴκῳ* in this line of thinking, rather than Timothy.¹⁸ With this understanding, Paul's concern for gospel and response surfaces again. Paul is urgently concerned about the Ephesian church's conduct because the church is the "pillar and buttress of the truth." This truth is the gospel. Moreover, the church is not the church of Ephesus but the *ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος*. Paul's choice of words evokes OT imagery in which the living and true God is contrasted with dead and false idols. Looking ahead, Paul's potential allusion to

¹⁴ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 178–9.

¹⁵ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 506.

¹⁶ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 179.

¹⁷ So, Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 220. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 508; Kelly, *Commentary*, 87; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 180; Quinn and Wacker, *Timothy*, 310 agree with minor differences in the emphasis.

¹⁸ Kelly, *Commentary*, 88; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 510–1; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 222–4. Contra Quinn and Wacker, *Timothy*, 311.

the riot at Ephesus in v16 may indicate a sustained polemic against pagan teachings that have crept into the church.¹⁹ Whether this is an allusion or coincidence, Paul's emphasis on truth and thus the gospel is clear. However, it is not merely truth that matters to Paul. The things he writes to Timothy are practical in nature, and they are all meant to give details to the right conduct of the household of God. Thus, the Ephesian church's conduct is a daily response to the gospel.

1 Timothy 3:16

After making his case that the Ephesian's conduct is a response to the gospel message, the truth, he further clarifies what that truth is. He begins by asserting the certainty of the statement he is about to make. Knight comments that ὁμολογουμένως carries both a positive meaning, "agreement by all," and a negative meaning, "beyond question," and is coupled with an emphatic καὶ to drive home the point of affirmation.²⁰ That which is "beyond question" is also μέγα. Quinn and Wacker view this substantival adjective as "apocalyptic" and related to an "eschatological theophany."²¹ While this may be reading too much into the use of this same adjective in Titus 2:13, the verse as a whole does have an eschatological flavor. By speaking of "the mystery," Paul is bringing revelatory significance to the opening of this verse.²² The emphasis on what is revealed primes the reader for a redemptive-historical point to be made.²³ This point is the elaboration of τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον, which is equivalent to "the truth" found throughout the remainder of the letter. Note that "the mystery of godliness" is not merely truth. It is truth

¹⁹ Paul's phrase μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον may be a purposeful allusion to the Ephesian's chant during the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:28)—Μεγάλη ἡ Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων. So, Quinn and Wacker, *Timothy*, 317–8. Cf. Kelly, *Commentary*, 89.

²⁰ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 182.

²¹ Quinn and Wacker, *Timothy*, 317.

²² MacLeod, "Christology in Six Lines," 336; Martin, "New Perspective," 107.

²³ Kelly, *Commentary*, 88–9.

(μυστήριον) in the context of conduct (εὐσεβείας).²⁴ Thus, the idea of gospel and response is what Paul intends to elaborate in the Christ-hymn

This elaboration, the second half of verse 16, begins with a grammatical peculiarity. It begins with ὃς, but there is no antecedent. That this is a peculiarity is attested by the alternate readings of ὁ and θεὸς instead of ὃς found in some manuscripts.²⁵ Due to the stylized nature of the second half of the verse, it is not surprising that alternative readings exist. The effort to resolve the apparent issue of the masculine relative pronoun having no antecedent has led to two major interpretations: either it introduces the insertion of prepared material—whether hymn, creed, or other—or it is a mistake.²⁶ Marshall offers a third option, arguing that μυστήριον is actually referring to Χριστός, so the gender of the relative pronoun was attracted from neuter to masculine due to Christ being the implied subject of the Christ-hymn.²⁷ This idea is plausible, but it assumes continuity between the two halves of 3:16, which is not a given.²⁸ Marshall’s analysis also does not take into consideration that there are NT examples of the masculine relative pronoun following a noun in another gender without issue (e.g., Matt 28:19; John 6:9; Gal 4:19; Phil 2:15; Col 2:15, 19).²⁹ Moreover, the relative pronoun can function as a

²⁴ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 182; Martin, “New Perspective,” 106–7.

²⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London, New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 573–4.

²⁶ If a mistake, then the alternate readings have plausibility. The reading of ὁ is attested in D* as well as the Vulgate and Old Latin tradition. This reading attempts to resolve the lack of antecedent by correcting the relative pronoun’s gender to match μυστήριον. Metzger [*Commentary*, 574] points out that this alternate reading must be correcting ὃς rather than θεὸς as the underlying original because θεὸς already offers a resolution to the lack of antecedent. The reading of θεὸς is attested in κ³, A, C, D, K, L, P, Ψ, 81, 104, 630, 1241, 1505, 1739, 1881, the *Textus Receptus*, and certain Vulgate manuscripts. However, the earliest attestation of θεὸς is the eighth or ninth century, and can be understood as either an assumption that ὃς in the uncials should have been a *nomina sacra* for θεὸς or a corrector’s desire to give a definitive subject to the six verbs that follow [Metzger, *Commentary*, 574]. Since ὃς is both the *lectio difficilior* and the oldest reading (including as the underlying word corrected in D* and the Vulgate and Old Latin tradition), it is not likely to be a mistake, which is why Metzger gives the reading of ὃς an “A.”

²⁷ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 523.

²⁸ Quinn and Wacker, *Timothy*, 318.

²⁹ James H. Moulton, Wilbert F. Howard, and Nigel Turner, eds., *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. 3. Syntax* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1963), 312; Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 341.

grammatical marker for poetry.³⁰ Thus, Marshall's theory holds no water. Neither does the argument that ὅς is a mistake, for the witnesses attesting to ὅς are reliable and the alternate readings can be explained.³¹ Thus, there is ample evidence that 1 Tim 3:16b is stylized, and is most likely a hymn with a confessional or creedal flavor.³² With this in mind, a detailed analysis of the hymn can be conducted.

A Defense of a Two Stanza Solution

From a structural perspective, the most popular reading of 1 Tim 3:16b is that of three stanzas containing two lines each. This position points out the obvious parallelism between the worldly realm and spiritual realm, e.g. σαρκί/πνεύματι and ἀγγέλοις/ἔθνεσιν.³³ Moreover, Knight points out that the three couplets present (1) the work of Christ, (2) the proclamation of Christ's work, and (3) the acknowledgement of Christ's work within both the worldly and spiritual realms.³⁴ On the other hand, Mounce favors viewing the hymn as two stanzas that describe (1) the person and work of Christ and (2) the response to it. He also argues that the parallelism in the hymn can be seen in more than one way. The parallelism seen by the proponents of the three stanza solution is obvious, but lines 1 through 3 seem to develop a redemptive-historical theme and lines 1 and 4, 2 and 5, 3 and 6 seem to have parallel thoughts as well.³⁵ The crux of the interpretation, then, rests

³⁰ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 340–1. Indeed, Wallace notes that the relative pronoun is a standard introductory marker for Greek poetry, and that it does not require an antecedent. In response to Marshall's position, Wallace [*Greek Grammar*, 340] says, "To seek outside the hymn for an antecedent to ὅς, as some have done, is an unnecessary expedient, which, in fact, misreads the genre and misunderstands the force of 'the mystery of faith.'"

³¹ As discussed in footnote 26.

³² Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background*, 1st pbk. ed., SNTS monograph series 15 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15–7.

³³ Kelly, *Commentary*, 92; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 183.

³⁴ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 183.

³⁵ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 216.

on how one views the relationship between the first two lines. Specifically, one's interpretation of how σαρκί and πνεύματι are related.

Fowl believes that the proper understanding of σαρκί is that of the realm of the flesh. He argues that to view it as related to Christ's incarnation specifically confuses "a logical entailment for an explicit reference in the text. That is, Christ's appearance in the realm of the flesh presupposes that Christ had a human body, but the phrase itself simply situates Christ's appearance in the realm of the flesh."³⁶ However, Fowl also says that 1 Tim 3:16b is stylized and dense, "presenting its story of Christ in only eighteen words."³⁷ Having admitted this, Fowl does violence to his own argument when he rejects one meaning of σαρξ for another by appealing to a meaning of σαρξ not readily apparent. Ultimately, his point is valid in that every reader must interpret the word based on how it is used in the immediate context. This interpretation must take into consideration both the author and the source, though. The use of σαρξ here could very well fit into Paul's broader usage of the word, or it could be that Paul merely imported the word as it was found in the hymn, which would not be unprecedented.³⁸

Picking up on the stylized nature of the hymn, Knight argues that "the nearly identical format of each line should not be construed as requiring the same meaning... The form is a vehicle for the sense, and when the form will not convey the sense, i.e. in line 3, εν does not appear."³⁹ This argument that form need not convey sense can be used for contextual meaning as well. It is not a given that certain words within a reference will carry the same meaning as those words in the context of the body of an author's work. As a hymn of the church, σαρξ could carry any number of nuances based on, for example, John's or Jude's or Paul's usage. On the other

³⁶ Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 162.

³⁷ Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 155.

³⁸ Paul quotes Gen 2:24 in 1 Cor 6:16, which also uses "flesh" in a non-Pauline way.

³⁹ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 185.

hand, it is also not a given that Paul did not want the reader to understand his normal nuance of σαρκί. In light of this thought, a brief consideration of the possible usages and meanings of σαρκί is necessary.⁴⁰ From a NT perspective, three general categories of definition are possible. First, flesh can refer to the mortality of man as opposed to the immortality of the divine. Ridderbos calls this usage the “weak, transitory human state.”⁴¹ Second, it can refer to the human body in a general sense. Indeed, this usage even occurs in Paul’s writings when quoting another source (e.g., 1 Cor 6:16). Third, flesh can signify man’s state of rebellion against God. This usage by Paul can be seen in Rom 5:8. A further nuance of this option is that this rebellion can be seen not only as open rebellion but also as performing good works with bad motives (e.g. Phil 3:4-7).

On account of the juxtaposition with πνεύματι, a fourth option is viable. In this view, σαρκί can by metonymy represent the worldly realm as opposed to the spiritual realm.⁴² This usage applies the concept of the weak and transitory individual human nature to the aggregate human nature. It also implies a separation from the spiritual realm, which connotes rebellion.

In considering how σαρκί is to be understood in this passage based on the options above, the third option can be eliminated up front. Since the implied grammatical subject of ἐφανερώθη is Christ, it is untenable to view σαρκί in this way on account of the clear teaching of the deity of Christ in Paul; Christ cannot be in rebellion against God. Thus, σαρκί can mean the “weak, transitory human state,” the human body, or the worldly realm. To see σαρκί as merely the human body misses the antithesis with πνεύμα. When in parallel, these two terms ought to carry more meaning than this, so the second less is unlikely as well. Ridderbos notes that a better way to understand the parallelism is that “of the redemptive-historical nature: it qualifies the world and

⁴⁰ NIDNTTE, 260-2

⁴¹ Herman N Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 66.

⁴² Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 525.

the mode of existence before Christ as flesh, that is, as the creaturely in its weakness; on the other hand, the dispensation that has taken effect with Christ as that of the Spirit, i.e., of power, imperishableness and glory.”⁴³

While it may seem that a contrast of realms is preferable based on Ridderbos’ analysis, the redemptive-historical focus along with the once hidden but now revealed theme of this passage more specifically points to the incarnation as the event in view.⁴⁴ Ridderbos goes on to say that “It is Christ’s being revealed in the flesh...that is the specific significance of Christ’s life before the resurrection, and which is to be adored (cf. 1 Tim 3:16a).”⁴⁵ If this is true, then the hymn is not merely contrasting the fleshly realm from the spiritual realm, but rather developing a stylized narrative of redemptive history. The first line focuses on incarnation and the second line focuses on resurrection.⁴⁶ And if that is true, then to couple only the first two lines is to miss a key part of redemptive history. This is because ὄφθη ἀγγέλοις is best interpreted as Christ’s ascension/glorification. Thus, the first three lines form a coherent unit describing three key redemptive-historical events in the life of Christ, incarnation, resurrection, and ascension.⁴⁷

A brief treatment of the third line is useful here in order to affirm the interpretation that the third line advances the redemptive-historical line of thinking in the first two lines. *οραω* can be understood as “become visible, appear” when it is passive. It is “mostly of beings that make their appearance in a transcendent manner” and “almost always with the dative of the person to whom they appear” (BDAG, 719). This is the case for the risen Christ in Luke 24:34; Acts 9:17, 13:31, 26:16a; 1 Cor 15:5-8. Heb 9:28 does not follow this pattern, though, as it has the Second

⁴³ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 66.

⁴⁴ MacLeod, “Christology in Six Lines,” 339.

⁴⁵ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 66. Marshall [*Pastoral Epistles*, 524] concurs that the incarnation is the specific event in view in this line.

⁴⁶ MacLeod, “Christology in Six Lines,” 340–1.

⁴⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 217.

Coming in view. An alternative definition is “to experience a condition or event, experience, witness,” though the word is never used in the passive with this meaning. Thus, elsewhere ὄφθη has the sense of the appearance of the risen Christ. However, this does not resolve whether these appearances should be related to the resurrection, ascension, or second coming. In effect, angels saw the risen Christ at all three events. Knight notes that ὄφθη is always used in the NT to refer to resurrection appearances, though he does leave room for interpreting this occurrence as the ascension.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the immediate context of this verse seems to be building from incarnation to resurrection to ascension. Mounce argues that in light of such a progression this line should be interpreted as Christ’s “victorious ascent.”⁴⁹ Kelly claims that what it “is in fact stressing is the worship accorded by angelic powers to the ascending, glorified Christ.”⁵⁰ By viewing line 3 as the ascension, the continuity of the first three lines is maintained. This continuity is preferable to viewing only the first two lines as a unit because the three lines more completely describe the gospel in redemptive-historical language. Thus, the first half of the hymn proclaims the gospel, albeit in a dense and stylized way.

The last three lines are more straightforward, though. The subject of these lines, as well as the previous ones, is Christ. In lines 4 and 5, Christ is preached in the nations and believed on in the world. These lines concern the response to the doctrine of the first three lines.⁵¹ The person and work of Christ must be preached to the nations (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rom 10:11-15); it is the required response of those who were eye-witnesses.⁵² This is a strongly redemptive-historical outlook on the gospel and response theme, which is expected based on the priming

⁴⁸ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 185. Also, Hendriksen, *Pastoral Epistles*, 141.

⁴⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 229.

⁵⁰ Kelly, *Commentary*, 91. Marshall [*Pastoral Epistles*, 527] focuses on Christ’s Lordship, but still agrees that line 3 is looking at ascension rather than resurrection or Parousia.

⁵¹ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 527–8.

⁵² Kelly, *Commentary*, 91; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 186.

influence of the first half of this verse. The response to preaching is belief that comes about throughout the whole world.⁵³ Note also that the subject of ἐπιστεύθη is still Christ, so there is a further emphasis not merely on belief but belief in Christ, who is described in the first three lines of the hymn.⁵⁴ The last line of the hymn emphasizes the exaltation of Christ. Since line 3 is probably focused on Christ's ascension, it is more likely that this line has a sense of exaltation and glory rather than ascension.⁵⁵ It describes the result of believer's believing in him, namely his glorification. Thus, the second half of the hymn describes the response to the gospel.

The parallelism within the Christ-hymn hints at a complex relationship between all six lines. While any one structure may be defensible on its own, one must remember that Paul included this hymn at a critical juncture in the letter. The themes throughout the letter ought to inform any interpretation of the hymn and *vice versa*. Because Paul is primarily concerned about life and doctrine in the rest of the letter, an interpretation of the hymn that sees this theme is preferable to one that sees a new contribution to the letter's theme. The above analysis offers a credible gospel and response interpretation of the Christ-hymn, and so it is preferable to a merely Christologically focused interpretation.

Conclusion

When Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, he had many practical matters on his mind. False teachers in Ephesus were teaching bad doctrine and perverted practice. Due to the serious nature of the problem, Paul saw fit to send a letter to Timothy to warn against these false teachers and to provide instruction on proper conduct in the household of the living God. These practical

⁵³ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 230; MacLeod, "Christology in Six Lines," 344–5.

⁵⁴ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 528.

⁵⁵ Kelly, *Commentary*, 91–2; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 528–9; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 230. See also Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 186.

concerns were not divorced from theological concerns, though. The false teachers were propagating a lie, but Christians have the truth. The false teachers were teaching a distorted response to the gospel, but there is a proper response. Paul's overwhelming concern for gospel and response can be seen throughout the letter. In order to provide an explicit doctrinal position to defend his concerns for the truth and the Ephesian church's response to it, Paul quotes a hymn at the conceptual heart of the letter. While many commentators see this hymn as a Christological exposition, this interpretation misses the point. This hymn is the doctrinal basis for his concern about gospel and response. In that light, it is better interpreted as a two stanza quotation that focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ in the first stanza and the response of the world in the second. This reading lends continuity between the larger theme of the epistle and the theme of the theological heart of the letter.