

1 Timothy 3:16

- A. (1TI 3:16) And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, received up into glory.
1. Paul declares the essence of Christian religion which sets it apart from all other religious systems or philosophies: God became man by an act of His will.
 2. All false systems ultimately teach that *man becomes God* through an act of his will.
 - a. That proposition was used as an appeal to spiritually alive sinless man. **GEN 3:5.**
 - b. How much more does it appeal to sinful man who refuses to concede his own spiritual death and depravity?
 - c. The proposition of the sinful creature attaining unto divinity is more in accord with the *mystery of iniquity*. **2TH 2:3-7.**
 3. The *mystery of godliness* is that God became a man to redeem men and return to glory as the exalted God-man, our Mediator. **1TI 2:5-6 c/w HEB 9:11-12, 15, 24; 12:24.**
 4. This incontrovertible mystery is the great truth that the church is to uphold. **1TI 3:15.**
 - a. It is not the *church of the dead Jesus*, a hero-worshipping cult like Islam. False religions are built on dead sinners but true religion is built on the sinless, resurrected and living Son of God.
 - b. It is not the *church of dead and dumb idols*, as were the pagan “churches.” **1CO 12:2 c/w ACT 19:37.**
 - c. It is the *church of the living God*, Who suffered death as a man but rose again to ascend on high as the living God-man, Christ Jesus.
 - d. It is a false church that would claim to be a church of the living God while denying the deity of Jesus Christ Who is the Living God.
 - e. It is a foolish church of the living God that uses a “bible” which casts doubt on the virgin birth, sinless life, or bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ (critical doctrinal supports of the deity of Jesus Christ) or which alters verses that declare the deity of Jesus Christ. Many modern bibles fail miserably in this area.
 5. This *mystery of godliness* contrasts the *mysteries of the Gentiles* which were devilish (**1CO 10:20**) and would be more aptly described as the *mystery of ungodliness*.
 - a. The mystery religions of the Gentiles were shrouded in secrecy, darkness and esoteric duplicity, all of which well accorded with their immorality. **EPH 5:11-12.**
 - b. The *mystery of godliness* does not need nor desire darkness to cover its actual message or practice. **ACT 26:26; 2CO 1:13; 4:1-2.**
 - (1) Beware the religion that covers its internal contradictions with claims of inscrutability or buries them under a mountain of double-speak or academia.
 - (2) “Corruption in doctrine works best when it is unfettered by any explicit statement of that doctrine. Error loves ambiguities. It does not desire to state its position clearly, either because it has no distinct position to state, or if stated, it would stand convicted of iniquities in the eyes of all honest and God fearing men.” (Martin L. Wagner, *Freemasonry: An Interpretation*)
 - (3) Gospel hope is declared by *plain speech*. **2CO 3:12.**
 - c. godliness: The quality of being godly; devout observance of the laws of God; piety.
 - d. The *mystery of godliness* stands in contrast to the *form of godliness* (**2TI 3:5**) in that it is not a hypocritical show but a practical godliness. **TIT 2:11-12.**
- B. mystery: A religious truth known only from divine revelation; usually a doctrine of the faith involving difficulties which human reason is incapable of solving.
- C. The full revelation of the great plan of God that He Himself should become a man to redeem

sinner from among all nations according to His own electing purpose and grace was reserved unto the days of Christ's apostles. **MAT 13:16-17; ROM 16:25-26.**

1. It was especially revealed to Paul. **EPH 3:3-9.**
2. It is not that the mystery of God in saving men through Christ and His righteousness was in no way revealed in the O.T., for it was (though obscured). **JOH 5:39; ROM 3:21.**
 - a. The problem was that the law eclipsed the light of the gospel so that all that could be seen was a shadow of Christ. **HEB 10:1.**
 - b. Further, the law covenant serves as a veil over men's hearts who cling to its "do and live" righteousness. **2CO 3:12-14 c/w ROM 10:4.**

D. Paul highlights six things which are cardinal points of the mystery of godliness.

1. "God was manifest in the flesh."
 - a. Jesus Christ is the Eternal Word incarnate. **JOH 1:1-3, 14.**
 - b. This is a glorious affirmation of the deity of Christ.
 - c. The deity of Messiah was prophesied in the Old Testament (contrary to the theory that N.T. Christians concocted Christ's deity for self-serving purposes). **ISA 7:14 c/w MAT 1:23; ISA 9:6; MIC 5:2.**
 - d. The word "God" is deleted from **1TI 3:16** in the RSV, NASB, NIV, NWT, LB and replaced with the pronoun "he" that has no clear antecedent.
2. He was "justified in the Spirit."
 - a. justify: To show (a person or action) to be just or in the right; to prove or maintain the righteousness or innocence of; to vindicate.
 - b. The Spirit attested to Him being the Son of God and therefore God. **MAT 3:16-17 c/w JOH 5:17-18.**
 - c. The Spirit attested to His sinlessness by raising Him from the dead. **ROM 8:11; 1PE 3:18.**
 - d. The Spirit attested to His ascension to David's throne in heaven, thus confirming Him as Messiah. **ACT 2:30-33.**
 - e. The Spirit continues to vindicate Christ through the Scriptures which declare Him, the events of history which confirm Him, and in the lives of those who love Him.
3. He was "seen of angels."
 - a. Angels worshipped Him at birth. **LUK 2:13.**
 - b. Angels ministered unto Him in His temptation. **MAT 4:11.**
 - c. Angels ministered unto Him in His agony. **LUK 22:42-43.**
 - d. Angels confirmed His resurrection. **LUK 24:4-5.**
 - e. Angels witnessed Him ascending to heaven to appoint them as ministers to the saints. **ACT 1:10-11; HEB 1:13-14.**
4. He was "preached unto the Gentiles."
 - a. John the Baptist preached about Him. **LUK 3:14-16.**
 - b. The Galileans encountered Him. **MAT 4:12-16.**
 - c. The Canaanite woman had heard of Him. **MAT 15:21-28.**
 - d. The Roman centurion had heard of Him. **MAT 8:5-10.**
 - e. Before long the Gentile world heard of Him. **COL 1:23.**
 - f. This is a notable aspect of the *mystery of godliness*: that the Gentiles should have the salvation of the Jews. **EPH 2:13-14.**
5. He was "believed on in the world."
 - a. He was by and large rejected by His own people. **JOH 1:11.**
 - b. Yet there were those who received Him (**JOH 1:12**) and some believed on Him in weakness. **JOH 12:42.**
 - c. A Roman soldier believed on Him at His death. **MAT 27:54.**

6. He was “received up into glory.”
 - a. glory: A state of exaltation and splendour. In one's glory: in one's highest state of magnificence or prosperity.
 - b. By virtue of His triumph over death, Christ has been highly exalted.
ACT 2:33; PHIL 2:8-9.
 - c. Contrary to C.I. Scofield's footnotes, Christ has entered His glory.
HEB 2:9; 1PE 1:21.

E. Great indeed is the *mystery of godliness*.

1. It is not *without controversy* in the sense that there has not been controversy about the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. It is *without controversy* in the sense that God provides such a preponderance of evidence of eyewitnesses and gospel facts to an unbelieving world that their rejection of Christ leaves them “...without excuse” (**ROM 1:20**).