

The Mystery of Godliness
I Timothy 3:16

Introduction:

- I. The Apostle Paul liked to use the word “mystery.” He uses it 20 times in his letters.
 - a. Mysteries are popular in our day as well (Hardy Boys, Whodunit, etc.).
 - b. However, we have a different view of mysteries than Paul did. It has to do with the way words change meanings over time.
 - i. Paul used it to refer to a secret that God had at one time, but has revealed it to mankind through Christ.
 - ii. This really comes to light in Christ and the Holy Spirit, because in the Old Testament, “God” is the only one. In the New Testament, we have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not only does God show himself, but he has revealed his fatherhood to us through Christ.
 1. The Israelites never thought of God as their father. He was their savior, their army commander, the one who anointed their king, but he was not their father. Only in Christ do we have that relationship with him (Galatians 4:6).
- II. “Confessedly” – This is translated in the KJV as “Without controversy.” A more idiomatic way of saying this is, “You have to admit that the mystery of godliness is a big deal.” Let’s discuss why.

Discussion:

- I. Manifested in the Flesh
 - a. John 1:14
 - i. Do you remember how Paul viewed mystery? Jesus was not “revealed” in the Old Testament. Granted, we may read the Old Testament and see hints of Jesus, as in the prophecies, but we never see him or hear from him as we do in the New Testament.
 - ii. He was revealed, or manifested in the flesh, and dwelled among us.
 - b. I Peter 1:20
 - i. He was foreknown, preordained, but only lately manifested. Romans 1:2 also discusses this, as Christ was foreordained by the prophets of the Old Testament. His “revealing” is for our benefit. It is through Christ we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and we have through him the father-child relationship with God that we enjoy.
 - c. I John 3:5, 8
 - i. He knew no sin, but his revealing was to take away our sins.
- II. Justified in the Spirit
 - a. Romans 3:4
 - i. Paul does not want God to be falsely accused of evil or deceit. “May God be righteous, and every man a liar.”
 - b. I Corinthians 6:11

- i. Paul also says here that we have been washed, and our sins forgiven, and so we have been justified by the Spirit of God through Jesus Christ.
 - c. Matthew 3:16-17
 - i. Remember when he was baptized that the Spirit descended as a dove, and the voice came from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.”
- III. Seen of Angels
 - a. Luke 2:13-14
 - i. From the beginning, the mission of Jesus was known and ordained by God. When the angels appeared to the shepherds to tell them of Jesus’ birth, they broke out in a song of celebration.
 - b. Luke 24:4
 - i. When the apostles came back to see the empty tomb of Jesus, two angels stood there, and told them that the Christ had risen from the dead.
 - c. I Peter 1:12
 - i. This was something that they had wanted to know from the beginning of time. They are curious to see how God will save his people. How great is the mystery of godliness!
- IV. Preached among the Gentiles
 - a. Romans 16:25-26
 - i. In his doxology that ends the book of Romans, Paul mentions several similar things to what he says in I Timothy 3.
 - 1. Jesus was kept secret until he was revealed to the nations so that they may have the “obedience of faith.”
 - b. Colossians 1:6-23
 - i. We discussed this passage last week, how it is through Christ that the Gentiles have been reconciled to God.
- V. Believed on in the World
 - a. II Thessalonians 1:10
 - i. I don’t know if you have noticed, but each of these descriptions of Christ that we have discussed are in a sort of chronological order. He became flesh, was affirmed by the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, and was believed in the world.
 - ii. Many people like to see the church as a “plan-b” arrangement, where Christ came to set up an earthly kingdom, failed, and set up the church instead. What Paul is telling us is similar to what Julius Caesar said about himself: “I came, I saw, I conquered.” Jesus came according to the plan, acted according to the plan, and conquered Satan according to the plan. Everything happened *as planned*, not as a result of failure.
- VI. Received up into Glory
 - a. Mark 16:19
 - i. After he finished speaking to the disciples, he ascended into heaven.
 - b. Acts 1:2-11
 - i. This tells us the same thing as Mark does.

Conclusion:

- I. Sometimes people like to ask who Christ is and what he did. I think this passage tells it plainly.
 - a. He became a man and dwelled among us.
 - b. He was affirmed by God and the Spirit as the beloved son.
 - c. He was seen by angels at his birth and resurrection.
 - d. He was preached throughout the world to every creature.
 - e. He was believed on in the world, and has made more impact on the world than any other man in history.
 - f. He was received up into glory to sit at the right hand of God.
- II. The work of Christ has a huge bearing on our salvation:
 - a. Since he became a man, he could be the author of our salvation (Hebrews 4:15-5:9).
 - b. Since he was the son of God, he was the foreordained plan by which we are reconciled to God.
 - c. Since he became the savior of mankind, the angels are fascinated with him and his work.
 - d. The gospel preached is that man may be reconciled to God through him.
 - e. Faith leads one to commit his or her life to God, turning away from sin, and calling on the name of the Lord in baptism (Acts 16:22).
 - f. His resurrection allows us to look forward to the resurrection we will have if we are in Christ, if we repent of our sins, are baptized into Christ, and live faithfully to the covenant we make with Christ at baptism (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- III. However, this mystery of godliness is only great for those who will accept it.
 - a. Would you turn away from your sins, commit your life to do God's will, and be baptized into Christ to wash away your sins? Why wait? Come, and do so now, as we stand and sing.