

Mystery of Godliness

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1Timothy 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, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

When we hear or read the word “godliness,” we almost automatically think of God-like-ness, or exhibiting the traits of God, or we think of some moral or spiritual purity. The Greek word here (eusebeia) can be understood as piety, or devotedness. Now, we can identify with this concept when it relates to someone that we would call sincerely religious, or someone who had really given their life to God. We may talk about them being godly, having godliness, or being devoted to God. But, do we ever think about this term in relation to something besides a human? For instance, do we ever think of this term as it relates to God Himself? Do we ever ask, “what does God do that is God-like? What does God do that shows Godliness, and what does He do that shows devotion to something (especially if we take the definition of devotion as “zeal or strong attachment or love for something?” I bring this out because if we look closely at Paul’s 6 features of the mystery of godliness, he does not write about the inner working of the Spirit of God upon the souls, lives, and behavior of humans who are born again. He doesn’t write about the manifestation of pure, righteous, love-filled behavior of saints of God. Rather, he lists 6 things that are preeminently about the Lord Jesus Christ. For that reason, I believe that we are pointed away from human God-likeness; or human holiness; we are pointed to the 6 mysterious things about God being God relative to the great transaction by which He came with salvation to human-kind. So, let’s look at these mysteries and wonder at the great wisdom and mystery of Godliness exhibited by the Lord of Glory among mankind.

I. First Mystery of Godliness: God Was Manifest In the Flesh

- ❖ The most amazing mystery in the annals of God is Him being revealed in the flesh (**John 1:14** “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”)
 - Appearing in the frame or house made for His creatures (**Gen. 2:7** “And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground....”)
 - The Eternal One in a body that could die (**Heb. 2:9** “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the **suffering of death....**”)
 - The Self-Sufficient, All Sufficient in a form that needed care and maintenance (**Luke 2:7** “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and

wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger....”- also **Mat. 4:11** Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.)

- ❖ We cannot explain why this route was chosen by the Lord as the way He would reveal the fullness of Himself to mankind (**Romans 11:33** “... how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”)
- ❖ We can’t explain the mystery of the one-time blending of God with human presented to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ
- ❖ This is the only record in the history of the world when we see a composite entity-both human and divine

II. Second Mystery of Godliness: Justified in the Spirit

- ❖ From the standpoint of the nature and condition of humanity (total depravity; **Romans 3:10-12**) what might be the most mysterious thing about the total account of Jesus Christ as “God With Us?”
 - How about being born as flesh but being totally innocent? This was the work of the Spirit, and in it He justified (or, as the Greek, “to render just or innocent”) Jesus Christ, “God manifest in the flesh.”
 - **Mat 1:20** But while he (Joseph) thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; **for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.**
- ❖ Other instances where Christ was justified in the Spirit:
 - At Baptism: **Mat. 3:16-17** And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw **the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: 17** And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am **well pleased.**
 - In raising Christ from the dead: (**1Peter 3:18**) For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but **quickenened by the Spirit:**

III. Third Mystery of Godliness: Seen of Angels

- ❖ What element in this is about the mystery of godliness?
 - We need to remember that angels were in a habit of seeing all the workings of God; yet this amazing piece caused them to “gaze with wide open eyes at something remarkable” (so the Greek for “seen” here = optanomai optomai)
 - They knew about God blending oxygen and hydrogen to make water;

- They knew about God blending oxygen, nitrogen, and CO2 to make an atmosphere for creatures to live in
- They knew and probably understood about God getting just the right size of nuclear fusion action going on the sun to make sure that it gives heat and light for the length of time He intends for the earth to survive.
- So, they understood the creative power of God, the great force that God is, they even understood a great many things about the workings of God and His creation.
- But the stuff of God **becoming flesh** and being **justified in the Spirit** as a God-man; the stuff about **His great zeal for righteousness**; the **great devotion to His elect** that led to this amazing thing of how the Lord blended deity with humanity to provide Himself a sacrifice suitable for purging His people's sins; **this was all a mystery to them.**

IV. Fourth Mystery of Godliness: Preached Unto The Gentiles

- ❖ Almost all scripture and beliefs of the Jews suggested that the Gentiles would be blessed because the Jews were blessed by God. But, that Christ would be preached to the Gentiles was a great mystery. The Gentiles appear from biblical history to be reject races of men. They in fact were reject races of men. And so, it remains a mystery that God With Us should be preached to reject societies.
 - A mystery, because God is both justified and righteous to leave reject societies to their own destruction
 - A mystery, because God reached out to a class of humans which had rejected every semblance of who He is
 - A mystery, because God extended mercy and grace (through preaching Christ to them) to a society of humans who had corrupted themselves to a point that appeared to be beyond hope of mercy or grace

V. Fifth Mystery of Godliness: Believed On In The World

- ❖ The mystery here is that anything about God, especially a message that God came to us in the flesh to make a way for our salvation) could possibly be believed by a visibly practically reprobate society ("the world" refers to the Gentiles)
 - This mystery of godliness is somewhat understandable for those who know what the new birth does, yet even for us it is something of a mystery, because as Jesus put it in **John 3:8** when illustrating how the Holy Spirit brought a person to belief and salvation, "The wind bloweth where it listeth,

and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” In other words, it is a mystery.

VI. Sixth Mystery of Godliness: Received Up Into Glory

- ❖ The visible ascension of Jesus Christ back into heaven as our Great High Priest, as the Son of Man and the Son of God is a mystery. Primary mysteries surrounding this are:
 - He was only a spirit before His incarnation and occupied heaven in that form; but now He is both spirit and body in heaven (He possesses the only solid body in heaven right now).
 - He left heaven as the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity; He went back and was received up into glory as the corporeal representative of both God and man
 - The glory He now receives is greater than before He descended to earth
 - His adherence to God’s will (godliness) demanded and achieved this

READ POEM

The Mystery of Godliness

The start of a mystery unfolded right here
In this small town in Israel when tax time was near,
They filled up the hotels, they sat at the tables,
Late arrivals were forced to stay in the stables.

A couple from Nazareth came late to the town,
They boarded with cattle and soon settled down,
But in that plain setting they rented from a stranger,
Our God came amongst us and was laid in a manger.

This mystery of godliness was a glorious sight,
And an angel announced it to shepherds that night,
But the world carried on with never a thought,
While the mystery of ages to the world had been brought.

The Spirit of God had governed this birth,
And angels looked on as Christ came to earth,
With wide eyes they witnessed this remarkable thing,
And of His great glory could not help but sing.

From youth to full manhood, our Lord grew in time
And gave Himself willingly, for your sins and mine
That message was preached to the world of Gentiles,
And believed by His people across all those miles.

He was received into glory, as He exited earth,
Our High Priest in heaven, angels praising His worth,
We will praise Him more fully when we all get there,
Christ Jesus our Savior, His glory we'll share!

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