

1 Timothy 3:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness (καὶ ὄμοιογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον, kai homologoumenōs mega estin to tēs eusebeias mystērion)—'by common confession, great is the mystery of godliness.' Homologoumenōs means confessedly, admittedly, universally acknowledged. *Mystērion* is mystery—revealed truth. What follows is likely an early Christian hymn or confession about Christ:

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—This sixfold confession celebrates Christ's incarnation (manifest in flesh), vindication (justified in Spirit—His resurrection), angelic witness, global proclamation, worldwide faith, and ascension. *Phaneroō* (manifest) means revealed, made visible. *Dikaioō* (justified) means vindicated, declared righteous.

The 'mystery of godliness' is Christ Himself—God incarnate. This poetic confession summarizes the gospel: divine Son took flesh, died, rose vindicated by the Spirit, was witnessed by angels, proclaimed to nations, believed worldwide, and ascended in glory. This is Christianity's heart—not abstract philosophy but historical Person and events.

Historical Context

Early Christian worship included hymns and confessions summarizing core beliefs (Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:15-20). This may be a liturgical piece the Ephesian church sang or recited. The sixfold structure (possibly originally three couplets in Greek) presents Christ's story from incarnation to ascension—the gospel in poetic form. These confessions served both worship and teaching, embedding theology in memorable forms.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why is Christ Himself called 'the mystery of godliness'—how does He reveal godly living?
2. How does this sixfold confession summarize the entire gospel story?
3. What role do hymns and confessions play in teaching and reinforcing core Christian beliefs?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ὄμολογουμένως μέγα ἔστιν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας
And without controversy great is G3588 G3588 of godliness
G2532 G3672 G3173 G2076 G2150

μυστήριον· Θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἐν
the mystery God was manifest in the flesh justified in
G3466 G2316 G5319 G1722 G4561 G1344 G1722

πνεύματι ὥφθη ἀγγέλοις ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν
the Spirit seen of angels preached in the Gentiles
G4151 G3700 G32 G2784 G1722 G1484

ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ ἀνελήφθη ἐν δόξῃ
believed on in the world received up in glory
G4100 G1722 G2889 G353 G1722 G1391

Additional Cross-References

John 1:14 (Glory): And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Hebrews 1:3 (Glory): Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Mark 16:19 (References God): So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

Romans 16:25 (Parallel theme): Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

Luke 24:4 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

Colossians 1:23 (Faith): If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was

preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

1 Peter 1:12 (Spirit): Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

1 Peter 3:22 (References God): Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

1 John 1:2 (Parallel theme): (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

Isaiah 9:6 (References God): For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

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