

The Mystery of Godliness

By RT Nusbaum

In 1 Timothy 3:16, notice the wording very carefully because everything in the Word of God has a purpose.

“Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the nations [or the heathen], believed on in the world and received up into glory.”

If you can understand what this scripture is saying, you will be well on your way to a victorious Christian life. Here are the elements of some tremendous controversies: thoughts that cannot be refuted, overwhelmed or overcome. The only problem with this is that there is a mystery involved. This is talking about the Mystery of godliness.

If you are a Christian you want to be godly, to be holy, and to live a godly life. It is in you based on the desires that Jesus put in you. They are actually His desires working in you rather than your own desires. You do not even have a desire to be right except through Him who is right. What you often end up with are leaders who genuinely desire their people to become godly. But they resort to creating methods and works by which their people can become godly. Some even bring their flock back under the law by making up lists and rules.

When someone comes to God and gets saved, they are usually asking themselves, “What am I supposed to do next?” What we do, in the church world, is to hand them a list and tell them that following the list is what they must do to be a Christian and live the Christian life. Then these new Christians set out to do that list, and they do quite well for a while, but usually what happens is that the list gets longer and harder to follow. If the denomination does not add to it wives, husbands, or friends will. These new Christians are being told that they are not holy unless they do all of those things that are on the list.

All of these schemes are motivated from a heart that wants to do right and help others, but we have left out the main element-- the Life that was given to us when we got saved. What we do is shove Jesus on a shelf somewhere and forget about Him. We pray to Him and Jesus becomes the object of our prayers, but that is all. Other than that, He is really a secondary thing in this whole Christian life. It is not right, but it is an accurate description of what most people do.

The Bible talks about this mystery of godliness that is open to all that want to see it and are born again. There is a mystery, but it is not simply being godly. A mystery is something that is hidden, that is not easily perceived by the eye or easily figured out. Why would God call it a mystery? Why not just say that there is darkness and bad behavior, and there is light and good behavior? Why not say that it is just a question of good and evil?

Some people think that if they have the knowledge of good and evil, they will be able to figure out how to please God. They will be able to figure out the steps. They will be able to come up with a good list. They will be like God; they will know good and evil. The fruit

from this tree may be good fruit, but it's from the wrong tree. God said not to eat of it! God is saying the same thing today; we are not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam that he could eat of all the trees in the garden, except that one.

The tree is not in itself good and evil, but it is the knowledge of good and evil. Once we have partaken of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we have this same knowledge. If you will remember, this tree has two kinds of fruit on it- good and evil. When we were sinners we ate the evil fruit. When we come to the Lord and are saved we begin to eat of the good fruit and reject the evil fruit on the tree. We think we have really improved because when we were sinners we had no taste for the good fruit. But we have not changed trees we have just changed the fruit we are eating. All the while we neglect to eat from the tree which God has always desired that we eat of.

This was the tree God pointed out to Adam and told him that it was called the tree of Life that was in the midst of the garden. (The tree in the Bible is always representing the cross, and the life in it represents Christ. When you read Peter's writings, he never says cross, he uses the word tree.)

If it were as clear as black and white or good and evil, then it would not be called a mystery. There is a mystery and if you do not know it then it is a mystery to you. But God does not want it to be a mystery to us. He is not hiding how to be godly from us. It is not His will that we work and slave and beat ourselves, getting under condemnation and falling so short of His glory, that He will have to beat us to a pulp. This is not the way He wants to have the mystery of godliness revealed to us. HE IS NOT LIKE THAT!

The cool thing is God's viewpoint. The Holy Spirit chose to inspire Paul to say specific words that now, almost two thousand years later, have been passed down to us so that now we read, "*and without controversy, great is this mystery of Godliness*" (1 Timothy 3:16). This thing is GREAT, and Paul begins to describe it for us. For those of us who know the mystery and see it, immediately within the next few words, it jumps out. "God was manifest in the flesh."

Here is a look into what the theological mind would say, Jesus came down and got into flesh. "God was manifest in the flesh." That is good theological thinking, but that is not the mystery of godliness. You cannot understand the mystery of godliness through the incarnation. So what is this scripture talking about? Who here in this scripture is God, and who is Jesus?

The flesh in this verse is Jesus "and the word was made flesh..." (John 1:14). Jesus is the Word, and God (the Father) was manifest in the flesh: Jesus. Jesus said that, "the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." (John 14:10). But why would Jesus say that? Jesus would have done right works, He would have healed, loved and ministered. Why didn't He say that He was doing the works, and that He was doing them for God? After all, He was Holy and the Son of God. Why all this gibberish about the Father? "The Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works... The words that I speak are not my own." In our natural way of thinking, for Jesus to explain how the Father does the works, and how the words that Jesus spoke were not His but the Father's, is completely unnecessary. We think that this is just a logistical

thing and we know that it was Jesus because being the Son of God makes Him God. Therefore, it really was Jesus.

It was not Jesus! He was the flesh. Jesus was the earthen vessel, and He said the He came down to this earth to manifest the Father, not Himself. Jesus came to be the flesh and God was in Him. Here is a scripture that might help our understanding. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself by Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:19)

"God was IN Christ reconciling the world unto Himself". Understanding the incarnation does not bring about the understanding of the mystery of godliness. If this verse was just talking about the incarnation, the Bible might be saying that Jesus was a good example and we are all supposed to copy His example.

Why couldn't we just copy it? Why don't you just copy Jesus right now? Couldn't God have said that He wants every one of us to copy Jesus from this day forward. If you do copy Jesus, you will have no more problems and no more sinful thoughts. GOOD LUCK! If it were just a matter of copying Jesus, why did He have to hang on the cross? God could just slap our hands and tell us to copy Jesus. What does the cross represent? What is it all about?

Jesus took you and me to Calvary. We had to die because we could not, and would not live according to the righteousness of God. Jesus took us to Calvary to crucify us, as Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ." Not that Jesus died for me just because He loved me so much. That is true, but it is much more than that. I AM DEAD. The old life that wants to assert itself, the life that wants to live godly (in the sense of good and evil) is dead.

God is trying to tell you that you will never get it right. Your mind is so full of the knowledge of good and evil that you will drive yourselves nuts trying to figure it out. The best thing that you can do is see WHY THE CROSS.

"Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness." God was manifest IN flesh. God manifested Himself IN Jesus. There is your example. It is an example of one IN another, and that is to be the example to us, that it is not to be us, but Christ is to be IN us. "Christ in you the hope of glory." That is the example. Not that you are to copy that example, but that you are to do it after the same pattern; allowing the Father to live through you. This is the way to godliness. You cannot be godly by yourself; you had better let Jesus live in you.

Just think of the word godly. It is not manly and it is not womanly. It is not even humanly, but it is godly. How do you act godly? I would think, through God. Being OF Him relates to your very BEING. Paul saw it as a mystery.

The Jews had the best religious system you could find; they had the religious system down. Most of the people of their day were doing all the religious things, but Jesus said that their whole system needed to be torn down, it needed to be plowed under. He was saying that we need to see HIM; the I AM, not the I do, or the I help. We need to see the I AM!

What does that mean to you?

When He becomes your LIFE, He becomes your BEING. Then He is WAY, TRUTH, and LIFE. He is Peace and Joy. He is all of those things. He becomes all of those things IN you. "Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh."

It is the only possible way. God was manifested in Jesus' flesh. Jesus was fine, He did not need to have God manifest through Him because He was God too, so why do it?

He was an example unto us, so that understanding it is not simply acting like Jesus. It has to be Jesus, and it is as if you are born again. But we skip the new birth; we leave that part off and forget it. We ignore the greatest thing that ever happened, being born again of incorruptible seed by the WORD of God which liveth forever. We set about to establish our own righteousness, which is by the law. That is what Paul said in Philippians chapter 3 and Romans chapter 10.

Righteousness is being in right standing with God. Keeping the list of good works does not put you in right standing with God. Only Christ can put you in right standing with God. Jesus does it, and He is the only one that can do it. Through the work that Jesus did two thousand years ago, you are in right standing with God, in Christ. But there is more.

While being justified by the finished work of the cross, and being made complete because we are in Christ; the same Jesus that you are in, wants to be in you, so that He can manifest in your flesh. This can be worked out on a practical basis in us through God being manifest in the flesh. It is a dual work, if you will.

Therefore, it is tremendously important to understand what it means to be in Christ, so that when you manifest something that is not Jesus, your stability never changes. Does He change? No! Does the cross change? No! Does the Truth change? No! Does the Bible, which says that you are complete in Him and accepted in the Beloved, change? No!

The only thing that changes is your actions. However, you refute that because in your mind you are thinking, and questioning, "How could I be godly when I am so yucky?" You are in Christ and are therefore complete in Him whether or not you ever do anything right. Nevertheless, you will start doing things right once you get settled that you are in Christ. Having been rooted in the truth, the truth begins to be rooted into you.

Once you get stable in Christ, then this mystery of godliness will begin to start happening in you, and you will begin to understand. Jesus said this all of the time, "I in you and you in Me."

It is not, "One for all and all for one," which would fit our theology of, "I am for God and God is for me. When I am not for God, Then God is not for me and He will kick me out."

The only thing that is keeping you on the "straight and narrow" is the fear that God is going to kick you out. Ironically, one of the few things that we think we know is that this glorifies God. We think that He is pleased with our understanding and our fear that He is going to drop is into hell at any moment.

This is not right! That is not the way God feels; that is not what He wants. God does not want you hanging around due to fear. You are not much of a son of God if you are only held by fear. I know a lot of people who got saved because of the fear of hell. Do not confuse the fear of the Lord with the fear of hell or the fear of destruction; it is not the same thing. That is not what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of the fear of the Lord.

If you do not know the difference, it would be wise for you to get to know the difference.

There are some church denominations that are using fear to keep themselves going. Once they have established the fear, every service has to have a call back to the altar in order to get their people saved again. When they leave church in fear and do something “wrong”, the church gets them back to the altar to repent of their wrong doings. It is the only way that some churches can keep them. The reason that some people go to church in the first place is to get “right,” because they fear that they will go to hell if they do not show up for church.

That is not God’s method. There is a mystery of godliness, and that mystery relates to Christ in you. In fact, *Colossians 1:26-27* says, “*Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints. To whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” See, Paul calls that a mystery. Isn’t it interesting that the word mystery and the thought of Christ in you keep coming up together?

The mystery of godliness is not about you being godly. The mystery of godliness is God being manifest in your mortal flesh. The mystery is about God, not you. It is not you being ‘for God’ nor is it about you being good. The mystery of godliness is Christ in you. If people would really hear this message, they would not be able to live for the devil, live in sin and say that they are still Christians.

The issue is not whether or not you are still a Christian. The issue is this: is that Christ in you? Is it Jesus doing that stuff? Many people have accepted a doctrine that says all you have to do is pray a little prayer to get saved. If you throw up a few short prayers every week and show up to Bible study once in a while, you have done enough. Is it enough? It is enough to soothe their conscience. This little truth did not change them, because it is not a change, it is an exchange.

GREAT is this mystery. Think about this: if it is so great a mystery, then how tragic would it be to miss it.

“God was manifest in the flesh, and justified in the spirit.” That is quite a statement! Talk about a loaded cannon. What does that mean, “justified in the spirit”? It means all kinds of stuff and it opens tremendous doors in areas of truth by just one little phrase. How can God become “justified in the spirit”? God is already just. He is the great judge.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Corinthians 5:14). We tend to think this says if Jesus died for all, then we do not have to die. It actually says, “If one died for all, then were all dead.” The difference is that Jesus went to

the cross and died for you so you do not have to die, as opposed to Jesus gathering you all up in Him, so that He can get rid of you. In essence Jesus is saying that He is dying and it is going to kill every one of you too. We are all dead because we all died with Him. Now the question comes to mind, "how can He live in you when you are living in you?"

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17) This is talking about the new creation being Christ, not you. Do you see that? If ONE died for all, then are all dead. "Therefore if any man be in Christ..." It is another life. It is a victorious life. What a great mystery it is. Without controversy, Paul says, this mystery is great.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, you see the word reconciliation. *"That God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." It makes sense, as if God Himself were beseeching you by us because of this mystery of godliness. We pray you, we beg you in Christ's stead, not in our stead. We are not representing ourselves. We are vessels, we are ambassadors, "Be ye reconciled to God, for [here it is] He hath made Him [Jesus], who knew no sin to be sin for us."* Great is this mystery. God was made manifest in the flesh and justified in the Spirit.

In our understanding, in order to be justified you would need to be unjustified first. Let me reword 2 Corinthians 5:21 to help you a little. He [Jesus], who knew no sin (would not need justification) was made sin. If He, who knew no sin, were made sin, then He would need to be justified. He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

In the Old Testament, once a year on the Day of Atonement, all of the sins Israel committed in the previous year were brought before God. This was a very solemn day, because if it did not work out that God atoned, or received their sacrifice, then they would be in sin from that day forward.

The process began when the high priest tried to find a perfect lamb. He would look among all the lambs until he finally found one that did not have a spot or blemish on it. But instead of throwing his arms around it because it was perfect and beautiful, the priest would lay his hands on its head and begin to quote the sins of the nation and impart those sins upon that lamb. Then, because it was without blemish itself, but by virtue of substitution, their sins were imparted to the lamb. The only way for this lamb to be justified is for it to have those sins punished by death.

As the lamb, Jesus bore out sins, and our very sin nature was taken into Him. Not that He sinned, but He bore our sin and was killed. Now if you are dead, you are dead. However, there is one difference, Jesus never sinned.

All through the Bible, from the very beginning to the very end, you can see scriptures that say things like, "In the day that you eat, you shall die. For the wages of sin is death. The soul that sinneth shall die." If you sin, you die. All those scriptures are showing that sin must be punished with death.

The Father evaluated the situation. He looked at Jesus... He had taken sin, death and punishment, and then by the determinate counsel of God, the Father raised Him from the dead. You can see why the Bible says, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit."

Jesus died as a substitute. He died as a Lamb that took upon Himself our sin. He put you and me away forever. Being three days and three nights in hell, He rose from the dead, and now desires for people to be born again.

"For it is not possible that the pains of death can be holden upon Him." (Acts 2:24). This is the sermon that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. He began to preach this sermon on the resurrection of Christ and talk of this tremendous thing that had just taken place because they finally began to understand the premise of Christianity.

The premise of Christianity has changed from that day to this. The basic premise of Christianity being taught now is not Christ and Him crucified. It is the premise of you receiving Jesus putting Him on a shelf and doing the best you can from then on. We get the Holy Spirit and all this stuff to help us be what we are not, because the thing that we are battling with is DEAD.

If you are wondering what the answer to this battle is, it is to see the mystery. If you do not see the mystery, you will do the best that you can do because you do have Jesus in you. His desires are always working in you. You will spend the rest of your life trying to be what you cannot be through any other means except through Christ. You cannot help trying because you have asked Jesus into your heart. While you will not let Jesus live His life through you, you cannot shut down His desires. So then, you end up continually running down to the altar and crying out to God. Where do you think that comes from? You are hurt because you know His desires but you do not live them. Is that what God wants? Is that Christianity? Is that the great witness to the world?

If I thought that was what it is all about, I would not be a Christian. If I really believed that, I would go have some fun in the world. However, I believe the scriptures. First and Second Corinthians talks about this life that we have in Christ. The Book of Romans is given to explaining it. Do you understand the Book of Ephesians? Most people don't. We read chapter six, which is about spiritual warfare and is after the fact of chapter one, which is all about being in Christ, but what about chapters two through five? What we do is jump over to chapter six and completely ignore these first five chapters. We do not even read the Book of Philippians in the context of being in Christ.

In the Book of Philippians, there was a fight between the women in the Church, and so Paul wrote that they needed to know Jesus. But the Book of Philippians is for you today. You need to have the Spirit of the Lamb. You need to have Christ formed in you.

In the Book of Galatians, Paul said that he was praying for them because they were trying to live by the law. Does he tell them to shape up and be good? No! Paul said that he was travailing till Christ be formed in them. Over and over, all through the New Testament, Paul is trying to teach *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27). He had it, when are we going to get it?

Moses went up into the mountain and spent 40 days and 40 nights in the presence of the Lord. He was looking at God; he was communicating with God; he was fellowshiping with God. It was Moses and God, not Christianity, not little beliefs or pet doctrines. Moses spent time with God and the result was, he glowed. Moses did not know that he was glowing, he just glowed because he was with God. For Israel, the result of Moses spending all of that time with God was the Ten Commandments.

Has anybody ever kept all of the Ten Commandments? Galatians just spells it out, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Galatians 3:21). No law can give you life, it can only dictate to the life that you already have, and the life you already have falls short of the glory of God. As we saw in Colossians, Christ in you is the glory of God.

But the law was given to bring you to a point where you can see that sin is a transgression of the law, and that it makes you come under guilt and condemnation because you try so hard. The desire wants to do good, and you keep failing so you finally fall down crying, "*Oh wretched man that I am, Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord...*" (Romans 7:24-25). *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I hope this will drive you to think that there might be another way. Your methods of trying to bring yourself into right standing with God do not work. It might work for awhile, and you will feel good, but you will fall short again and again until you realize that the type of Christianity that you have been living is nothing but a pattern of continuing to fail, going to God, then failing and going to God over and over again.

There is either something to this or there isn't. There come a point in your life that you finally confess that THIS IS THE TRUTH, and you are going to pursue this until God reveals it to you. This is not another truth that you are adding to your collection of truths.

Our problem is that we do not know the truth that makes us free. We do not know the Cross, and we do not know the resurrection. We have a theology of it, but it has no bearing in our lives. The cross is something that needs to be working in us every day. Paul said that he wanted to know the power of His resurrection. "*That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death*" (Philippians 3:10). Is this your prayer?

"That I may know Him."