



The Open Secret Of a Godly Life

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Scripture: [1 Timothy 3:14-16](#)

Series: [Jesus \(1/4\)](#)

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*Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:
He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world, taken up in glory. **1 Timothy 3:16***

Please open your Bible at 1 Timothy 3.

Each year, in the weeks leading up to Christmas, we focus our attention especially on the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is he? What has he done? And why does it matter? The whole Bible is about him, and he is always at the center any true Christian preaching.

This year, I want us to camp on just one verse: “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

Here we have six marvelous statements about our Lord Jesus Christ. They come in three pairs, and in each pair there is a contrast.

i. How we know Jesus

He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit... (1 Timothy 3:16)

We know God through Jesus, because he was manifested in the flesh. We know that Jesus is God, because he was vindicated by the Spirit. Here is the great truth of the deity and humanity of our Lord Jesus – manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit.

The second pair speak of

ii. How Jesus was made known

He was... seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations (1 Timothy 3:16).

The angels are as near as you can get to God, and the nations (literally, Gentiles) were as far as you could get from God. Through Jesus Christ, God brings those who are far away near.

The third pair relate to how Christ is received.

iii. How we relate to Jesus

He was... believed on in the world, taken up in glory (1 Timothy 3:16).

Notice the contrast between faith on earth, and glory in heaven. Here we walk by faith, but one day our faith will be turned to sight. We shall see the king in his beauty.

Here is a marvelous statement about our Lord Jesus Christ. It begins with Christ coming *to us* in the flesh. It ends with Christ ascending *for us* in glory.

These verses are set apart like you would for poetry. They have rhythm, and they have meter, and this has led scholars to suggest that these six statements formed an early Christian creed or perhaps even a hymn. Since the hymn begins with the birth of Christ, we might even say that this was one of the first Christmas carols.

The plan for these next three weeks is that we will look together at Jesus – born and raised, seen and proclaimed, believed on and glorified.

But today, I want us to focus on the introduction to these marvelous statements about the Lord Jesus Christ, because I want us to see how what we learn here about Jesus has immediate and practical relevance for every one of us. “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness...” I am going to focus on three words – *godliness*, *mystery*, and *Jesus*.

Godliness

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness... (1 Timothy 3:16)

What is godliness? The place to begin is Psalm 4:3 where we read: “But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself.”

To be *godly* means that you are God’s man, God’s woman. To be *godly* means that you love God, you live for God, and there is a likeness to God seen in you.

Godliness is what you were made for. God made you for himself. You are not your own. If you are godly, you know that you belong to him.

Not only did God make us *for* himself, he made us *like* himself. Adam and Eve were made in God’s image and likeness. What that means is that Adam was created to be God’s man, and Eve was created to be God’s woman.

But they did not choose godliness. Adam said, in effect: “I want to be my own man.” Eve said, in effect: “I want to be my own woman.” The image of God was marred, and so instead of being godly, they lived under the tyranny of self.

Instead of loving God, the man and the woman were hiding from God. He had been close to them and walking with them, but now they were far from him, separated by a great chasm of guilt and of shame.

The great question at the center of the Bible story is: How can godliness be restored? How can we become godly? How can we become the people God made us to be, the people God

calls us to be? How can you have a desire for God, a love for God, a genuine hunger and thirst for God?

God made you to reflect his glory, to fulfill his purpose, and to share his joy, but how can you get to a place where it could honestly be said of you that you are God's man, God's woman, and that a true reflection of what God is like is seen in you?

That question is at the heart of this chapter. 1 Timothy 3 is all about qualifications for Christian leaders:

An overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain (1 Timothy 3:2-8).

This is what a godly life looks like. But how is it possible? Is this just a dream, or is this a reality the Apostle Paul is telling us to pursue? Here, at the end of the chapter, Paul says, "This is how this godly life I have been describing is possible."

Mystery

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness... (1 Timothy 3:16)

The good news is that a mystery is not an unsolved puzzle that leaves you scratching your head. If that was the meaning, we would all be left in frustration: *Here is the godly life to which we are called. How are we to pursue it? Hmmm, that's a great mystery!* That would not be good news!

The word *mystery* is used more than 20 times in the New Testament – the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4, Col. 4:3), the mystery of God's will (Eph. 1:9), the mystery of the Jews (Rom. 11:25,26), the mystery of the Gentiles (Eph. 5:32), the mystery of the church (Eph. 5:32), the mystery of the resurrection, and the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19).

Here in 1 Timothy 3, we read about the mystery of the faith (3:9), and the mystery of godliness (3:16). In each of these cases, the word *mystery* has a very distinct meaning: *A secret God has revealed, though its full wonder is still to be made known.*

A secret God has revealed

The revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed... (Romans 16:25-26)

The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints (Colossians 1:26).

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

You stand by the graveside of a loved one. It all seems so bleak, so final. No one would ever guess from standing at a graveside that a bright morning is coming when your believing loved one will rise to a new and everlasting life, but God has revealed it!

God could have kept this secret, and then surprised us all on the last day. But he wants you to have the comfort of this hope in your sorrow now. So God reveals the secret, and he says, "Encourage one another with these words" (1 Thes. 4:18).

A mystery in the New Testament is a secret God has revealed, though its full wonder is still to be made known.

God has revealed the secret of the resurrection, but its full wonder is still to be made known. The resurrection is beyond what any of us can fully grasp. What will your resurrection body be like? What will it be like for body and soul to be joined into one perfect unity? What will it be like to be responsive to God in any and every situation?

So a mystery is a secret God has revealed though its full wonder is still to be made known. Now let's get back to our text this morning. "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness..." (3:16).

I called this message, *The Open Secret of a Godly Life*, so what is this secret of godliness that God has revealed, the full wonder of which is still to be made known? The answer is: Jesus.

Jesus

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness; he... (1 Timothy 3:16)

And then follow six glorious statements about the Lord Jesus Christ, the one person who has lived a truly godly life.

God has revealed that the life he has called you to live is possible through his Son, Jesus Christ! The secret of how to live a godly life does not lie in some technique, program or discipline.

The secret that God has revealed (though its full wonder is still to be made known) is that through Jesus Christ you can become the person God created you to be. Through Jesus, you can become God's man, God's woman. Through Jesus, you can pursue and live a godly life.

Now, of course, the question is: How? Jesus is the godly one. He is God's man. He has lived the life that God calls us to live.

Something Better

Receive Christ

How can the godliness that is in Jesus be in us? The answer to that question is *not* by us following his example. If the path to godliness was simply us following the example of Jesus, there would be no mystery in it. And none of us would be able to do it!

God has something better for us. This is the heart of the mystery, and the heart of the gospel. Paul spells it out in Colossians 1: "The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26, 27). This is the heart of the Christian life. This is what the Christian life looks like. It is much more than trying to live a good life. It is Christ in you!

It is spelled out again in Galatians 2: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Listen to how Jesus himself puts it, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit..." (John 15:5). The life is in Jesus, and if you are in Jesus (like branches are in a vine), then that life will be in you.

There is no hope of godliness without Jesus Christ. You may try to love God, but you will always love yourself more. But if the life of Christ is *in* you, a godly life is possible *for* you.

You may be saying, "Its too late for me. I can't change." But if the life of Christ is in you, then you will change.

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God... (John 1:11-12).

Hope in Christ

Now you may be saying, "I am a believer. I have received Christ, but the truth is – I don't feel very godly! I feel very far from the life God has called me to, and the life God has made me for." There is more in Christ than you have yet discovered.

Remember the definition of a mystery: A secret God has revealed, though its full wonder is still to be made known. Receiving Christ is like opening a gift and only knowing a small part of what it can do.

My mother will reach the age of 90 next month. She has never been drawn to technology, but last year she expressed an interest in having an iPad. She wanted to do email.

When the iPad was bought, I told her it could do more than email. "You can see pictures of your great grandchildren," I said.

Each time I have visited, we have discovered something new. "You can listen to Moody radio on your iPad!" Then I got real practical: "You can order your groceries on your iPad, and have them delivered to your door!"

There is more in Jesus Christ than any of us has yet discovered. You only know the smallest part of all there is in Christ Jesus. You have all eternity to discover all that is in him – more peace, more hope, more love, more comfort, more joy.

John speaks about this: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

God began a good work in you when you received the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will bring it to completion. When he does, you will see the full wonder of this mystery and a true likeness of Jesus Christ will be seen in you.

How great will be your joy when your soul is completely at peace and your body is completely whole! And you will be Christ's and he will be yours forever and ever.

Confess Christ

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness... (1 Timothy 3:16).

The great task, the great privilege, the great joy given to the church is to confess Jesus Christ. We are to confess Jesus Christ:

- *manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit,*
- *seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,*
- *believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*

Great indeed is this mystery! This is the greatest good news that this world has ever heard – that God has come to us in Jesus Christ, and we can have godliness in him. We are to receive Jesus. We are to hope in Jesus. We are to confess Jesus.

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