

"And Without Controversy ..."

"... great is the mystery of godliness; He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16).

"And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness ..." The word "and" links together what is about to follow with that which has preceded it: the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Appearing here in Paul's letter to Timothy is the word "mystery." This word occurs often in Paul's letters, perhaps most frequently in his epistles to Ephesus and Colossae (Eph. 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; Col., 1:26; et al). The word "takes a cue" from the "mysteries" of the heathen world which religions had their mysteries which only their initiated ones were entitled to know: The religion of Christ also has its mysteries -- to which Paul herein refers. Our use of the word differs from its meaning in Paul's day. Now it alludes to something incomprehensible, then it referred to something which was once concealed but had been revealed. Paul speaks of the mystery of the union of husband and wife and the mystery of lawlessness (Eph. 5:32; 2 Thess. 2:7). In the verse of our text Paul wrote of the "mystery of godliness" and because he has joined verse sixteen with verse fifteen we understand his reference by this "mystery of godliness" is somehow connected to the existence and foundation of the church. "He who was manifested in the flesh" has obvious reference to Christ's advent upon earth, taking upon Himself a physical body which God prepared for Him (Heb. 10:5). John, in his gospel, spoke first of the eternal nature of Jesus when he said: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God;" then he wrote of the earthly sojourn of Christ: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:1; 14). In Philippians Paul wrote that Christ was "made in the likeness of man" (Phil. 2:7). To His advent to earth the Hebrews writer refers when He spoke "in the days of his flesh" (Heb. 5:7).

"Justified in the spirit." Translators differ as to whether "spirit" in this text is a reference to the Holy Spirit or Jesus' spirit. The KJV views this a reference to the "Holy Spirit" translating the phrase "justified in the Spirit." The ASV regards this a reference to Christ's spirit, thus that version reads: "justified the in spirit." Likely it is the Holy Spirit of which Paul writes. Christ was justified, vindicated (not justified in that He was forgiven of wrong doing for He "did no sin;" rather was vindicated in that His claims were established, 1 Pet. 1:22). The Holy Spirit bore witness of His Sonship when He was baptized. The Holy Spirit bore witness to His claims of deity through the miracles He wrought. But, it is equally possible that Christ being justified in the spirit is a reference to His resurrection.

"Seen of angels." Angelic beings were constant attendants to Jesus while He was here on earth. They announced He would be born to Mary; sang when He was born, strengthened Him when He was tempted; comforted Him in His agony in the garden, witnessed His resurrection and were present when He ascended on high (Lk. 1:26-28; 2:9f; Mt. 4:11; Lk. 22:43; 24:4ff; Acts 1:10)!

"Preached among the nations." The mystery of Christ was intended to be preached to all men and it was (Mt. 28:18; Col. 1:23)! Gentiles who had formerly been separate from Him were no longer strangers and foreigners when they obeyed His word (Eph. 2:19). And, not only was He preached among the nations, but that message was successful for He was *"believed on in the world."*

"Received up into glory." He had humbled Himself that He might be the means by which man could be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 2:5-11)! What joy was His as His work of sacrifice was done and He ascended back to His Father with whom He had been before the world was! The seer of Revelation recorded the words of the heavenly hosts who sang, *"Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory and blessing"* (Rev. 5:12). He now sits at the right hand of God on high; henceforth expecting till all His enemies are put under His feet!

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