**The Mystery of Godliness.**

W. Kelly.

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"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God (or, He who, R.V.) was manifested in flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into (in) glory" ([1 Tim. 3:16](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Tim.+3.16&t=DBY)).

That which introduces "the mystery of godliness" is well worth considering. The apostle had spoken of the church in a practical manner. He is not unfolding its heavenly relationship nor entering into particulars as to the presence of the Holy Ghost dwelling there; but he speaks of it as the "house of God." And it is the only house of God that is now recognised on earth. The church is the assembly of a living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. The church is never called the truth: Christ is the truth; but the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The church is that assembly which has the truth, as it were, inscribed upon it, and presents it on a firm basis as well as in a distinct manner. The church, at any rate, is responsible to present the truth of God stably and impressively before man. The world has not got the truth — on the contrary is under the power of error; and error as to God is of all things deadly for the soul. The heathen never had the truth. Even the Jews, although they had the law, could not be truly said to have the truth, which goes altogether beyond the law. For this is the expression on God's part of man's duty to God as well as to his neighbour. The truth is the revelation of what God is, and of what man is, as indeed of every other subject-matter of which it speaks. It is not like the law a claim of what ought to be, but a declaration of what is.

Christ is the One Who brought and was the truth: "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ;" and that, in express contrast with "the law" which "was given by Moses" ([John 1:17](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+1.17&t=DBY)). Now when the people, who were entrusted with the law, so fell away from it as to lose their position before God, and did so flagrantly and finally, not only by idolatry, but by the rejection of their own Messiah, then it was that God was pleased to bring truth in the person of the Lord Jesus into the world, as He subsequently set up His monument of it inscribed so to speak livingly. This is the church here below. It was not to be a question merely of so many individuals, but of the assembly, the body of men in the world who possessed the truth from God in the Lord Jesus on Whom they believed, and witnessed it practically through the Holy Spirit Who made them to be God's habitation, His house on earth. So it is declared here.

There is no other representative body that He owns, as "the truth" from God save the Word personal and written; but the truth of and from God is not only for the life that now is but for eternity. Christ, being the Word, the Son, was exactly the suited person to declare God the Father, Whom none saw at any time ([John 1:18](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+1.18&t=DBY)). He was Himself God, the Eternal, the Only-begotten Son. None but He Who was God and in the beginning with God, through Whom all things were made, was competent, as being the way, the truth, and the life, to reveal the truth. But the Lord having been rejected, and thus accomplishing redemption on the cross, sent down the Holy Ghost from heaven, in order that there might be here below the assembly of believers united to Him in one body. "For in (or by) one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and were all made to drink into one Spirit" ([1 Cor. 12:13](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Cor.+12.13&t=DBY)).

Life, it is of moment to note, never unites, but the Holy Spirit of God, the baptism of the Spirit present on earth. There was life for all saints before; they were born of the Spirit. Some of them were Jews, and some of them were Gentiles; but as yet there was no union in a single body. The Gentile remained of the nations, and the Israelite was kept apart as such. But Christ is our peace, Who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments in ordinances, that He might create in Himself of the twain one new man (making peace), and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross. Thus the rejected and crucified Messiah became the effectual sacrifice for sins; and those who believed in Him had redemption in Him as well as life eternal. Thereon the Holy Spirit was given from above to unite in one body all the redeemed who had in Christ the truth, — to unite them in every place (separated necessarily from all others who remained Jews or Gentiles in the refusal of Christ), yet them also called to testify grace, as Israel of old to represent God's law.

But we are also Christians individually; and therefore are we called, each one, to be a witness of practical grace, and to suffer with Christ and for His name. For grace and truth came by Jesus Christ; and the attempt of any Christians to present the truth without grace can only end in total failure, — pride, self-righteousness oppression, and every evil way. Nothing but grace and truth will God acknowledge in the Christian; and this we have in Christ. Let us see to it, not only in faith but in our ways. And the Spirit is life because of righteousness — a Spirit of power and love and a sound mind. He it is Who is also called the truth ([1 John 5:7](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+5.7&t=DBY)), having made it known to us in power. If it were not that He is given for the Lord's sake, He would have left us long ago. But the Holy Ghost came down, not in honour of the Christian or the church, but in virtue of Christ and His redemption. Therefore the Holy Ghost abides for ever; and He it is that makes the church to be Christ's body and God's house, as we read here. He is that divine Person Who, when Christ was glorified, came down and dwells there. Thus it is no mere figure, as of old with the Jewish temple, but a great reality, God's habitation in the Spirit. And here it is used practically; here, not Timothy alone in his place, but each one in his own, has to know by the written word how he ought to behave himself in that holy place. For the church, thus founded and formed, furnished and characterised, is the pillar and support of the truth, presenting and maintaining the means by which the truth is held up before the world.

Having stated this plainly, the apostle next gives us to know what in very deed the truth is, and why it is called "the mystery of godliness." The truth inscribed as a whole consists of that great mystery. It goes far beyond the accomplishment of Old Testament prophecy. "Mystery" does not in scripture mean something inexplicable or unintelligible, but that which could not be understood without God's revelation in the N.T. The O.T. scriptures properly speaking do not contain mysteries, though alluding to them (as in [Deut. 29:29](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deut.+29.29&t=DBY)). It is in the New Testament from its first part to its last, where we hear of mystery — so much so, that those who are ministers of grace now are called stewards of the mysteries of God ([1 Cor. 4:1](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Cor.+4.1&t=DBY)). Some people have long been disposed to make mysteries of the sacraments: but such is never the meaning of the word in scripture. It was a spurious force put upon it when the truth got perverted, and men turned to fables. Mysteries are New Testament revelations — truths which God in the Old Testament reserved to Himself, but which are now revealed in the New Testament. So in this chapter, ver. 9, the apostle speaks of the mystery of faith, — "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." What God has revealed through His own Son by the Spirit is for faith now to receive. The test is not the past but the present call of God.

The Old Testament in general treats of a state of things when people would see and know what God says and does: so it was of old, and so it will be in the glorious days to come. Far beyond is the case now. As Christians we are called to believe and confess what we do not see and can not know by our mind merely, but what God has revealed by His Spirit ([1 Cor. 2:6-12](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Cor.+2.6-12&t=DBY)). It is therefore called "the mystery of the faith." But here is another remarkable expression. It is called " the mystery of godliness:" "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness." How is it then that the Spirit of God calls the truth the mystery (*i.e.*secret) of godliness (*i.e.*practical piety)? "The faith" and "godliness" are thus bound up indissolubly with "the mystery" here revealed. There is nothing so practical as the truth of Christ; and all practice which flows not from it is vain. The law demanded, but gave not power any more than life. Christ is the life as well as the truth; and the Holy Spirit honours faith in Him risen with power.

Again, the mystery is no longer "hid in God;" it is divulged. You must always bear this in mind when you read about the mystery, that it is now revealed and nothing left in the dark. The secret is set forth in the light of God, and the simplest Christian is expected to receive it. So Christ said to His disciples, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." All other mysteries of God are given to be known in a similar way. Can words more completely dissipate the prevalent idea that mystery means something incomprehensible, which piety dares not to pry into — at least while here on earth in time? By the Lord and the Spirit acting through the apostles in the N.T. the mysteries of God are given for us to receive and understand and enjoy them.

Further, what more indispensable for practice? For we may observe that being here called "the mystery of godliness," it is inseparable from true proper christian piety. How can truth be "the mystery of godliness?" You can easily understand the mystery of the "faith;" but why is it called the mystery of "godliness?" Because the Holy Ghost will not allow that "godliness" or christian piety can be without the truth, nor that the truth can be received in the love of it without producing godliness. The truth implies living Godward.

I am aware that unconverted men can read and admire the Bible, and have done so. But the Bible is addressed to the conscience, and to the heart also when the conscience is reached and purged. It is not addressed to the mere understanding; and whenever it is thus intellectually taken up by men, the issue is that such men become heterodox, or infidels. How is this? For the simple and sufficient reason that the understanding as a matter of course judges God's word; whereas God gives His word to judge man thoroughly, as he is indeed a sinner, none righteous, none that understands, none that seeks after God. Hence God gives the word to convict of sin, and to establish His own authority, which always exercises, as it ought, a moral judgment over the soul. This therefore raises the question, in the person who reads it, as to his own practical state of ruin through sin; and there is no greater calamity for a man than to read the Bible without that effect.

The absence of this is the reason why in our day what is very absurdly called "higher criticism" is the fashion. Unconverted men presume to judge the Bible in the vanity of mind and learning: hence they turn out, not real critics, but blasphemers of God's word. Ignorant of the mystery of the faith, what real intelligence of a spiritual kind? For God is always God in light as in love and authority, where the truth is received, and man is put in his own true place of dependence and subjection. This never was so until Christ came (for the O.T. saints had promise, which left much in the dark); and this is exactly what Christ did, and always does when the truth is received by faith. God has His own absolute authority over the soul, and he who receives the truth is subject to God.

Now the only way in which a person is brought into subjection is by receiving Christ, because it is Christ Who makes God known to the soul. If we know the only true God and His sent One, this is life eternal; if we do not, we shall find ourselves lost. But when we receive Christ and His redemption (and we needed it deeply), we know ourselves justified and saved, as well as brought into the certainty of the presence of God. When people are vague and hesitating, it is quite plain that, darkened by tradition, the law, or some other means, they have received the truth in a manner feeble indeed. The effect of the truth is that we walk in the light as God is in the light. How can He be uncertain? His word is the word of One Who, knowing all, communicates the truth to produce the certainty in our minds which is due to His communication.

Hence therefore "confessedly great is the mystery of godliness." And surely it is a wonderful fact that the truth taught of God should produce godliness as by grace its simple and unfailing effect. Wherever Christ is received in faith, godliness follows; and, further, as there is no truth anywhere else, so also no real godliness.

Clearly then the question is, what the mystery of godliness, the truth inscribed on the church, is. Can any other subject be of greater importance? Now, in a most striking verse, we have the answer set before us. The truth is presented here as Christ from beginning to end; and Christ in a way peculiar to N.T. revelation as a whole. There is nothing more explicit than this. It is not a body of doctrines, still less is it an exposition of Christian duty. He is the truth: the essence of all Christianity is that all doctrine and all duty is embodied in a person, and that person is the Saviour. What is there that a simple soul can understand better than a person? Even a child can believe in Christ, can find Him life, and can feel His love. Christ then is the blessed truth according to (or after) godliness. Indeed it is stronger than this: it — He — is the secret of godliness; Christ First and Last, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End; a great mystery or secret, but a secret now revealed of God with consequences commensurate for souls that believe, and for those that believe not. For God is not mocked.

And what, coming to details, is the first view as it were that is afforded us? What is this first presentation of Christ in the verse? "God (or, He Who) was manifested in flesh." It is not as we find in the Prophets, mighty God, Father of the age to come, God revealed with fire before Him. The God of the Old Testament was God in the exercise of power and judgment; God bringing His reward with Him, and dealing with men according to their works. But in a wholly different aspect is He shown here. God was manifested in flesh, in human nature. If ever there was a mode of manifestation in the universe where we should not have expected Him Who is true God, it was "in flesh." The flesh had been busy from of old in pleasing itself, in rebelling against God, in yielding to evil lusts, and, from the flood at least, in religious abominations. Who could or would have looked for Him manifested in flesh or human nature?

No more solemn history than man's: even Satan or his angels never practised anything like the evil that man does habitually. One single sin, and angels lost their place — lost all for ever. But man, oh, how active and pertinacious, and how futile in evil! How audacious and provoking against God! Again how ready to seduce his fellows into moral evil! and with what love of proselytising into error and falsehood! Such is man: yet God bears with him. How astonishing the long-suffering of God with the race! Now this was the nature in which God was to be manifested. It was not in angelic nature; nor was it to be simply in divine nature. The mystery of godliness was thus to be far deeper and larger; yet is it ineffably sweet and intimate to us. The foundation of it is the Son of God incarnate; and not merely this, but manifested here below in flesh, albeit the Holy One of God, in Whom was no sin (not merely He never sinned). Never was any one manifested like the Lord Jesus Christ: in obedience, dependence, devotedness, humility, patience, righteousness, holiness, zeal but self-abasement, majesty yet love, unswerving truthfulness, beyond measure. It was He that was manifested in flesh. He was the Word, He was God, He was the Son; and if none had seen God at any time, He was now manifested in flesh, and He declared God the invisible perfectly, that man might know Him. Man wanted it, oh! how badly; God's people had the deepest reason to feel their lack. Never had there been seen the like before; never will there be the like again. For at His appearing He will be displayed in the exercise of judgment: how different was His first coming! For the first time in the ages and generations was He thus manifested when the world was old in falsehood and iniquity.

In the Revised Version they do not say ''God," but "He Who." It matters practically but little, though one would not say there is not a shade of difference. If we take the reading "He Who was manifested," there is but one person that can answer to it, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. It could not be either the Father, nor yet the Holy Spirit of God. Without dogmatising, we may say that the best authenticated reading is ὅς, that is, "He Who" (*cf.* [John 1:1-3](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+1.1-3&t=DBY)). If it be so taken, the person of the Son is implied; whereas if we read "God," this would look at the Godhead as such. But as the Son was God, and Christ the image of the invisible God, it is substantially true, no matter how it be taken, whether as in the Authorised or as in the Revised form. Here certainly is predicated a manifestation such as was meant for faith at this time; and as it was "in flesh," so also in this world when most evil, and flesh utterly corrupt (save in the Holy One of God). So that reason judging morally would conclude that God had nothing to do but to execute His most solemn sentence, if He sent thus His only-begotten Son.

But here is a sight altogether new and unexpected. He came in pure grace. The Jews who had the prophets had no such expectation. They looked to the great King to set up His kingdom in Zion. This is what is largely and often proclaimed in the Old Testament. But as it predicted also His rejection even by the Jews, the Lord was to introduce in the first instance a kingdom of the heavens, which was altogether a mystery to them. For He is ascended on high, and sits on the Father's throne, not yet on His own throne ([Rev. 3:21](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Rev.+3.21&t=DBY)).

Accordingly the Lord's position is a most peculiar one. Rejected by the Jews, crucified by the Gentiles, He bore all shame and suffering and is seated, risen and glorified, at the right hand of God, till His enemies be made His footstool, when He will appear in glory to their confusion and take His world-kingdom ([Rev. 11:15](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Rev.+11.15&t=DBY)). There He is waiting, to take His place by and by on His own throne; and when He does come, the Jews will be broken down before Him, made to say by the Holy Spirit, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah." And in that day all nations will follow the Jews. "God (as [Ps. 67](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ps.+67&t=DBY) says) will bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him." Compare [Ps. 68:26-32](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ps.+68.26-32&t=DBY). When the time comes to bless the world, Israel will be redeemed from the enemy's hand and gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. The Stone the builders refused they will recognise as become the head of the corner; and they will take a place on earth as God's son, even His firstborn, at the head of all peoples of the earth. Nor can there be universal blessing for the earth until that day.

God is now calling out of the world to Christ in heaven. And the reason is plain. His Son, the Saviour and Head, is there. Christ is the centre of all God's dealings; and as Christ rejected on earth is exalted on high as the heavenly centre, God is now forming a heavenly people, the body of that glorious Head. The Christian is therefore by calling a heavenly man ([1 Cor. 15:48](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Cor.+15.48&t=DBY)), and is unfaithful to the will of God and his relation to Christ, if he value and sink into an earthly man. But flesh likes to be important here below, to be busy in the world. Man counts it hard now to forego ease and honour, wealth and power. Yet according to the N.T. the pursuit of such objects is altogether foreign and opposed to Christianity. "God forbid (wrote the apostle) that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I am crucified unto the world" ([Gal. 6:14](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Gal.+6.14&t=DBY)). How can a Christian, who appreciates Christ and the gospel — who enters into God's mind about him — seek to be on common terms with that world which cast out his Master, the Lord of all?

The only becoming path therefore for a Christian now is to walk consistently as one with Christ above. Now we know that He walked entirely apart from the world, and declared that we are not of it as He was not. And how did Christ appear to the world when here? Was He not despised and hated? Did He not prepare His disciples to expect the like? "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before [it hated] you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" ([John 15:18](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+15.18&t=DBY), [19](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+15.19&t=DBY)). A heavenly man must be content to be as His Master, persecuted for righteousness' as well as for Christ's sake. Consequently this is grace, as the apostle Peter says, if one for conscience toward God endure griefs, suffering wrongfully. "If, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is grace with God" ([1 Peter 2:19](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+2.19&t=DBY), [20](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+2.20&t=DBY)). When the time comes for the display of Christ's glory, then all that are His shall appear with Him in glory. Meanwhile, having died and risen with Christ, we are exhorted to seek and mind the things above where He sits, not the things on the earth; for our life is hid with Him in God.

Evidently all turns on the mystery of godliness, or the mystery of faith, as we read also. It is bound up with Him Who was manifested in flesh and received up in glory. The New Testament presents mystery from its first book to the last. But it is given to the believer to know these secrets; for all is now revealed. The believer is inexcusable for misunderstanding the word. The Lord's way of giving us to understand the truth is when the eye and the heart are fixed on Himself. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body will be light." The grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ gives light as well as life; and as God has now revealed through the Spirit what of old was hidden, so the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

Of course we do not enter into all in a moment, but we do get the indispensable and all-important sum and substance even so by the faith of Christ. In receiving Him there is a divine capacity created in every believer; and when he submits to God's righteousness in Christ's redemption, the Spirit of God is given to him. I do not mean the new birth, but the gift of the Spirit. This gift is far more than being born anew. New birth or awakening is in order that one may have Christ's redemption, even the remission of sins. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. We are brought to God through Christ once suffering for sins, Just for unjust. When begotten by the word of truth, we look out of ourselves and find rest for our conscience in Christ's work on the cross; and thereon we receive the Holy Spirit. First we are born of water and the Spirit, as we read in [John 3:5](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.5&t=DBY); and when we have heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise; and not before ([Eph. 1:13](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Eph.+1.13&t=DBY)).

It is the more important to urge this now, because if we have the unction from the Holy One ([1 John 2:20](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+2.20&t=DBY)), we cannot deny that grace has imparted to us spiritual power to understand the word. If the Holy Spirit given to us does not carry with it such power, what does? Do you think all the learning in the world could enable a soul to understand one truth of scripture? It never did and it never will. Learning of course has its use if you are not proud of it; and a chief use of it, I believe with John Berridge, is as a stone to throw at a dog. Thereby one may confound the mischievous pretensions of such as know not the truth. Truth the Holy Spirit alone can communicate in the written word. There we must take the place of children, nay, become fools, in order to become wise. A learned man naturally does not like to stoop so low, and therefore is slow to learn of God. Satisfied with his external lore and ignorant of every good giving and every perfect gift coming down from the Father of lights, he can only as a blind guide lead the blind into a ditch. Truth it is that stands for ever, and this the Holy Ghost shows us in Christ through the word of God.

More particularly here is "the mystery of faith" — "the mystery of godliness," which the apostle brings before us. The foundation of it all is "He Who" was manifested in flesh. Before the Son of God was sent from heaven, born of woman, born under law, no such manifestation was possible. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of an Only-begotten with a Father) full of grace and truth ([John 1:14](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+1.14&t=DBY)). He was thus also mediator unique of God and men, Christ Jesus a man, man as truly as any, but altogether different from any even in respect of the nature He derived from His mother. God prepared Him a body ([Heb. 10:5](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Heb.+10.5&t=DBY)). "The holy thing that shall be born shall be called Son of God."

Adam's was not a holy nature, but innocent at best. Innocence is easily lost: the first sin destroys it; and so it was with Adam and Eve. Jehovah judged where ever sin showed — it was not allowed before Him. But Christ was the Holy One. Not only He did not sin, but in Him was no sin; He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners. He repelled all evil and was absolutely uncontaminated by sin. That was a state of humanity altogether peculiar and proper to the Son of God. All was perfection; but if anything here below specially marked our Lord, it was His obedience. "Lo! I am come to do Thy will, O God." There was never a man but needed pardon before, never a man who, if God had been strict to mark iniquities, could have escaped judgment. He was woman's Seed come to be bruised indeed, but to bruise Satan and to save the believer. And here the wondrous intervention on God's part came to light, "He Who was manifested in flesh." And what was manifested? A divine person: and that divine person "the Son." We have not to go up to heaven to find what God is, Who is best and only known aright by the manifestation in flesh of His Son, the Lord Jesus.

There are hasty souls who fancy that the manifestation in flesh only means that Christ was a man. But the true wonder is Who He was that became man. It would be devoid of force or even sense to speak of Moses, Elijah, or of Julius Caesar or any other man, as manifested in the flesh. For there was no other way for any mortal man to be manifested. But for Him it is not so, for the Son of God might have come as He pleased. Here is the marvellous fact that He came in flesh. He Who made all things, and without Whom was not anything made that has been made, — He was manifested in flesh, Who could command all glory. But the Creator God is the Redeemer God. And one of the most momentous objects of this Epistle is to identify the God, Who created all things and is now the Preserver of all, with the Saviour. God is the Saviour God. And He deigned to be manifested in flesh. None other was He than the Son of God, but the Son of God "man" in this world.

The next fact stated as to Him in the mystery of godliness is "justified in Spirit." But when was that? In the Holy Ghost Christ walked and testified all through the days of His flesh. The very demons bore witness to Him with abject terror. But man reviled Him with impunity and shamelessly. When was He irrefutably justified? They called Him a winebibber, a Samaritan. They said, He had a demon. There was no end to the wickedness that was spoken of the Lord Jesus. How then did His justification come? When He was raised from the dead. This was the standing justification of Him Whom man crucified. If lawless hands slew the Lord of glory, God raised Him up, having loosed the pains of death: such was His answer to man. And this seems to be what is referred to in the words, ''justified in Spirit." In the first Epistle to Peter He is said to be "quickened in Spirit," being in contrast with "put to death in flesh" ([1 Peter 3:18](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+3.18&t=DBY)). The quickening in Spirit expresses the divine power in which He rose. This fell to the province of the apostle Peter; as the apostle Paul is the great witness in bringing out, not only life and resurrection but, justification. No doubt justification has a different sense as applied to the Lord Jesus compared with any other person; for every other man is a sinner. Still there is a common point in all; and justification in every case means that the person is proved or pronounced righteous — here inherently so. Man had spoken contumeliously against Him, and none more so than the religious people of the day. The scribes, Pharisees, and the chief priests were educated enough, but the worst of the Lord's adversaries when He walked the earth. Surely that is a very instructive fact. Consequently it became God to mark His sense of what Christ was. And He was "justified in Spirit." The same Spirit of God, Who had led "Jehovah's righteous Servant" in all His course of unswerving obedience and love during His life, now justified Him against the world that treated Him as the worst of malefactors. How true the prediction Christ cited from their law, "They hated Me without a cause!"

And what follows? What is the next part of the mystery of godliness? "He was seen of angels." It is a notable fact. No doubt angels saw Him throughout every step of His path here below. But on earth Christ was the light of men, not of angels. So the angels proclaimed at His birth: the good pleasure of God, His complacency, was in men, not in the celestial beings who are here spoken of. His Son became man, not an angel. Therefore are men, though not without redemption, associated with Christ, as angels are not, in those glorious counsels of God for gathering together all things heavenly and earthly under Christ's headship, and displaying the result before all the universe.

He is "seen of angels" after He went to heaven. There is no doubt that angels ministered to Him first and last here below, as the heavenly host praised God at His birth. They are now sent forth to minister to those who are to be heirs of salvation (Heb. 1).

But it is not the attendant angels who are spoken of here. Our Lord, after being justified in Spirit, is presented next where the angels are what we may call indigenous inhabitants, and where men have no natural place. Earth is given to the children of men, but heaven is filled with myriads of angels; there too is the risen Lord gone. He has passed out of this world and entered on a condition suited to heaven, where He is "seen of angels." Men who had the far nearer interest no longer see Him, angels do. This was a fact outside the expectation of Israel as to the Messiah. They ought to have known that the Son of man would come with the clouds of heaven, and be invested with everlasting dominion over all peoples, nations, and languages. But there was no intimation that the Lord would be rejected by the Jew while the church was being formed in union with Him on earth. Besides, and in order to this, the Lord has a body now, just as much as when upon earth. Thus the resurrection and ascension are capital truths of Christianity. ''Seen of angels" falls in with His seat on high, where we know Him no longer according to flesh. When He comes to reign over the earth, of which the prophets chiefly speak to Israel, "every eye shall see Him."

Is there not anything going on meanwhile with regard to the world? There is a very admirable work of God. "Preached amongst Gentiles." Never could be conceived a fact more repulsive to the Jews as they were. Even Peter was exceedingly astonished, although the Lord before He left the earth had prepared them all for it. The communications in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are plain enough to all now. Yet Peter did all he could to avoid going; and afterwards he behaved ill about it at Antioch. Here then we find that instead of the Lord Jesus, Jehovah of hosts, reigning in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before the ancients gloriously (which was what Isaiah and the other prophets taught to look for), He was "preached amongst Gentiles." It was a new and unexpected work "till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" ([Rom. 11:25](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Rom.+11.25&t=DBY)), while blindness in part is happened to Israel (for there is ever a remnant). It is Christianity, flowing from Christ as now made known in the mystery of godliness, "preached amongst Gentiles." Can anything be of deeper interest and moment to us who are not Jews but Gentiles? For God now makes such as we are His express object of appeal. The rejected but glorified Christ is now preached "among Gentiles." How great is our debt to His grace revealed in the mystery of godliness! Nor have we heard in vain. We have received Christ and are already brought into relationship with God Himself; for there is no other way.

And "this mystery" the apostle explains to the saints in Rome, who in time to come would forget it, and become wise in their own conceits, and fancy Israel hopelessly abandoned, that the Gentile might take his place for ever in a kingdom that shall not be destroyed. Vain delusion! Romish corruption! — corruption soon to end in the fall of "Babylon the great." True Christianity, the result of Christ "preached among Gentiles," is witness of His coming again in judgment of all enemies and evil, Whose dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away.

Notice how the next statement is beautifully in place, as indeed all are. They are in regular sequence, so that you could not put one of them out of its place without damaging the order of the truth. Hence, after saying that He was preached among Gentiles, there follows, "believed on in the world." Nor can any assertion be more accurate. It is not the reign of the Messiah in Palestine or "King over all the earth"; still less does it mean that there is going to be a reign of the gospel, though there is the gospel of the reign. The Lord will come to reign by-and-by in power and glory, as none can mistake when His day arrives. He is now occupied with His heavenly work. Soon He will ask and have the nations for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. And He will inaugurate His kingdom by ruling them, rebellious as they are, with a rod of iron, and dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel. It is His kingdom over the earth; and that is the truth, and a truth that earthly men indeed like not, because they prefer something pleasant for themselves, instead of suffering with Christ now and reigning with Him in that day. But the first duty of the Christian now is to follow Him as He walked, and not to be above his Master, but to be perfected as He.

Our prime business is unequivocally to accept His rejection here, the very reverse of seeking earthly ease or glory. The Corinthians saints got a severe rebuke from the apostle ([1 Cor. 4](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Cor.+4&t=DBY)), when that error began in their midst. "Already ye are filled, already ye are become rich, ye have reigned without us." They were taking their ease, reigning as kings without us, said he. "And I would that ye reigned, that we also might reign with you," that is, at Christ's appearing. Instead of that, God set forth the apostles, not in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day, but last of all, as they were first in spiritual power and authority, as men doomed to death, a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. Ponder vers.10-13; see how in [1 Cor. 11:1](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Cor.+11.1&t=DBY) he exhorts the saints to be his imitators, even as he also was of Christ. Christendom alas! has followed the erring Corinthians, not the blessed apostle. Nor need any doubt that the Christian is strengthened so as to endure with joy the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, as also of the gospel. Read Col. 1, 2.

Certainly in these sufferings the apostle rejoiced and set the pattern for all who would be faithful. Glory now to suffer with Christ. It is the snare of the enemy, that we should court or allow the world. We are set in express contrast with Gentiles who know not God and seek present honour; whereas our true object of hope is the coming of the Lord Jesus, for Whom we wait. Christ's work makes us meet for glory. The very gospel says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." And those who believe will in due time join the Lord on high, conformed to His image: not some choice saints, but every one of them. Beware of the newfangled idea of superior Christians, who alone are to be caught up. Such preachers always give themselves credit for that superiority. When the Lord comes, He will translate the entire church, His body. In His body there are differing members, some "more feeble," as the apostle says ([1 Cor. 12](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Cor.+12&t=DBY)), some "less honourable." But the grace of God tempers the body together, giving more abundant honour to that part which lacked, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. In the face of such a principle, how sad to indulge in reveries so fantastical, which leave room for personal vanity and slighting of one's betters! There is not the least room for doubt that "they that are Christ's" will be translated to meet the Lord at His coming. Such is the positive teaching in [1 Cor. 15:23](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Cor.+15.23&t=DBY), and such is the plain force of [1 Thess. 4:14](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Thess.+4.14&t=DBY), [16](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Thess+4.16&t=DBY), [17](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Thess+4.17&t=DBY). Nor does any other scripture qualify either. There is no ground for such a delusion in all the Bible.

Lastly comes the clause "received up into (rather, in) glory." It marks Christ's permanent condition on high — received up in glory. There He abides: why is that last? It seems arranged in this order, to present a contrast between Christ and what "demons" or deceiving spirits were to do in latter times, as says the next chapter. Christ ''received up in glory" puts shame on the efforts of men that give heed to evil spirits at work in the hypocrisy of legend-mongers that despise marriage, and cry up abstinence from meats which God created to be received with thankfulness by those that believe and know the truth.

You may ask for any other instance in the word of God of a special departure from order. Take the first chapter of the Revelation, vers. 4, 5. Every one knows that the usual order is, as we find in the apostolic commission ([Matt. 28:19](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matt.+28.19&t=DBY)), Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But in the benediction or prayer of [2 Cor. 13:14](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Cor.+13.14&t=DBY) the apostle for good reason begins with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In[Rev. 1:4](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Rev.+1.4&t=DBY), [5](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Rev+1.5&t=DBY), with equally good reason the order is reversed, and the Lord Jesus is given the last place. "John to the seven churches which are in Asia. Grace be unto you and peace from Him which is and which was and which is to come." Next we have "and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne." Lastly, we have "and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." This again is clearly a departure from putting the Lord in the second place. But the reason is not far to seek. The Lord Jesus is presented in His earthly glories only; and so as to be followed immediately by a parenthetical strain of praise from the saints; and then by the testimony of His coming judgment of the earth. This would have been frustrated if "the seven Spirits" had occupied the third place. In every instance contextual grounds account for the special order.

So it is here. Christ "received up in glory" would historically have followed His being justified in Spirit; but had it been put in there, contrast would have failed with the power of Satan in helping on departure from the faith. For "believed on in the world" would then stand against that departure. But the true contrast being found in "received up in glory" explains the order required. In Him thus regarded is the delivering object. These seducing spirits, these false-teaching demons, energise men who are the instruments of leading away from the faith, fair spoken but false and hypocritically undermining the truth. Religious lies and pious frauds are but the worse work of the enemy. In this case they deny the creation rights of God through the pretension of superior sanctity.

But Christ "received up in glory" refuted them. Those that gave heed to the evil spirits were misled through the hypocrisy of men speaking lies, branded in their own conscience, forbidding, etc. And this sense is right; because demons have not a conscience to be thus cauterised, whereas their lying agents have. Otherwise one must, if adopting the ordinary version, identify the liars and the spirits, as is beyond doubt found elsewhere in the N.T. account of demoniacal possession.

How singular that the claim of holiness superior to that of the gospel should go with and depend upon despising the creatures of God, and therefore impeaching His glory as creator and sustainer of all! But so it was: the early germ of Gnosticism led later on to the bolder speculation of Manicheism, that is, the imaginative impiety of an evil God of creation and a good One of the N.T. Hence the dream of matter as essentially evil, of food (animal at least) as immoral, of marriage as degrading to the spiritual. Hence the denial of all lawful use of the law and contempt of the O.T. and of the elders who obtained witness of pleasing God. "He Who was manifested in flesh . . . . received up in glory" dissipates the entire system as a lie of Satan. As there is but one God, so but one Mediator of God and men, a man Christ Jesus, yet never more manifestly God than when He deigned to become man to glorify God and save men. And He Who came down in love, to a depth unfathomable as a ransom for all, is the same Who was justified in spirit by resurrection; He received up in glory is as truly man as when He was born or when He died. Thus the Creator God is the Saviour God, and the Man that suffered on the cross is the glorified Man on high. And the believer called to have part with Him now will be conformed to His image at His coming. To disdain what God sanctioned from the beginning, and what He gave for man's use since the deluge, is to prove oneself His enemy and Satan's slave; and all the worse, if one claim also a sanctity superior to Christ and the gospel of Christ.

So it is with all schemes of higher life, absolute sanctification, or perfection in the flesh. They are not of God but of the enemy; they offend against the gospel, and destroy real holiness. The fuller, the full truth of God, now enjoyed in the church, is meant to deepen reverence for God's authority in the world as well as in the earthly relations of this life; which Satan seeks first to dissolve under the pretence of higher principles, in order later to overthrow Christ's person as well as the church, all real privilege, and the truth itself.

For, as this scripture remarkably illustrates, it is in Christ's person that the truth is centred; it is He that no less secures all godliness; not alone as come down in love, but as glorified in God's righteousness. It is the One Who counted it not robbery, no object to be seized, to be on equality with God, but emptied Himself and took on Himself the form of a bondman and was made in likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, yea death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him. Thus the personal glory of Christ, the Son of God, gave occasion to His moral glory when incarnate, going down to the uttermost in love, obedience, and suffering for sin to God's glory at all cost. Now He has heavenly and indeed universal glory conferred on Him by God as Man "received up in glory." It is the exercise of a new righteousness, God's righteousness as His answer to Christ's infinite sufferings; as it is also the ground of blessing and glory for all that believe on Him.

So in [John 13:31](http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+13.31&t=DBY) the Lord Himself says, when Judas went out to betray Him, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God also shall glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him.

And such is the scope of this wonderful summary, as we have already seen, in perfect accord with the other scriptures just referred to, each of which has its own special object and character in harmony with the design of the book in which it occurs. For such is the invariable stamp and proof of divine inspiration. Some have called it the apostle's creed; others have conjectured that he has here incorporated a formulary more or less generally so used. But such guesses are as unfounded as unnecessary. It is a requisite and essential part of this epistle to Timothy and of no other; it expresses the writer's special line of doctrine, and of no other apostle, though it also display the inspiring power of the Holy Spirit, as every and all scripture does.

W. K.