

# Truth for Today

*The Bible Explained*

---

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 3 June 2018

**No.:** T1044

**Speaker:** Mr. George Stevens

---

## Proclamation of the Faith (1 Timothy 3:15-16): Great is the mystery of godliness

The subject of today's talk prompted the following verses where a few of the characteristics of eternal life may be seen as godliness:

*Christ Jesus is eternal life;  
A life that honours God.  
In us 'tis based on precious blood  
Shed under judgment's rod.  
Accessed by faith and faith alone  
No man of works can boast.  
'Tis God alone who gives the pow'r;  
Pow'r through the Holy Ghost.*

*It is a force for good on earth  
And gains the praise of heaven.  
It is a life of righteousness -  
Cleansed from all taint of leaven.  
It shares a nature that's divine!  
A nature that is pure!  
It bears the fruit of perfect grace  
And trials can endure.*

*'Tis seen in faithfulness and truth.  
'Tis seen in earnest prayer.  
'Tis seen in modesty and works  
And in burdens we share.  
'Tis seen in an obedient heart -  
Dependent on the Lord.  
'Tis seen in meditation on  
God's treasured, holy word.*

© GE Stevens

In 1 Timothy 3:16 we read: *"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."*

Have you ever used the word "mega" to express the excellency or immensity of a thing? Well the Greek for "great" in 1 Timothy 3:16 is "megas". The Apostle Paul uses the word to describe the greatness of "the mystery of godliness". Here the word mystery doesn't mean something completely strange or hidden, but rather a truth that has been divinely revealed to those who trust in God. An example of this is found in Colossians 1:26: *"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints..."* In this case, the truth of the church had been hidden previously but was now revealed in the teaching of Paul.

So what is this revealed "godliness"? It is the quality of a life devoted to God and used to glorify God. It is expressed in virtues that belong to God being found in a person. That same one walks in communion with God, seeking and doing His will. The resulting good works are credited to God. Hence, God Himself, is glorified.

The Lord Jesus Christ fully expressed God in His life here. His life is the perfect example of godliness. Unlike other men, He could say to His Father, *"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"* (John 17:4). When we examine aspects of His godliness later, we shall see that it is both excellent and immense.

So having briefly defined "godliness" we will go on to consider:

- The basis of it;
- The requirement of faith to fuel it;
- The provision of God to promote it;
- The moral qualities that characterise it;
- The guarantee that accompanies it;
- The fruit that flows from it; and
- A simple outline of it as seen in the life of Christ (which will be revealed in greater detail in future talks).

### The basis of godliness

The basis on which godliness is built is the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see God active before His birth in the prophecies of the Old Testament predicting His life, His sufferings and His glory. We again see God active around the time of His birth. Do you remember the various angels that appeared to Mary (Luke 1:26-28), Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25) and the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20)? They all bore witness in some way to the miraculously conceived Son of God. For example, the message to the shepherds identified Jesus as a Saviour, Christ the Lord (see Luke 2:11). No wonder He was also called "*Immanuel*" which means, "*God with us*" (see Matthew 1:23). He was indeed God manifest in the flesh! (See 1 Timothy 3:16)

An early indication of His godliness is seen in Luke 2:46-47 where we read: "*And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.*" This testimony classes Him among those mentioned in Malachi 3:16, namely, those who feared the LORD and spoke often one to another - thinking upon His name. He was only twelve years of age and yet the religious teachers were amazed at His knowledge and understanding of the things of God (see Luke 2:41-50). The fear of the LORD is the beginning of both knowledge and understanding! (See Proverbs 9:10).

We see His godliness in the way He cared for the sheep of Israel, bearing their griefs and carrying their sorrows as He taught and preached the Kingdom of God. We find God glorified as He healed the blind, the lame, the deaf and those with leprosy. Not only these; but some who were dead were given life proving He was the Son of God (Romans 1:4).

His blameless life glorified God as did His ministry and prayer. To do God's will was His determined purpose (John 4:34). The wonder of God's person was His focus. So much so that He manifested God the Father in all He did and declared Him in all He said. In fact, He could say the works He did were the Father's works and the words He spoke were the Father's words (John 14:10).

### The requirement of faith to fuel godliness

However, none of these things could be classed as laying the foundation for **our** godliness. Jesus' precious blood alone is that which cleanses us from sin. It is His sacrifice at the cross which is the means of our salvation and reconciliation. Romans 4:25 shows us that Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. **Faith** accepts Christ as the Son of God who took the judgment for our sin at the cross before rising to life from among the dead on the third day. It is through faith in Christ and His work we are made righteous in the sight of God. Therefore, the Person, death and resurrection of Christ form the basis for Christians to live godly lives. It is by grace that we are saved, not of works (lest anyone should boast, see Ephesians 2:8-9). This salvation (and all linked with it) is the gift of God (see Romans 6:23). Faith is the fuel that not only kick-starts godliness, but also sustains it. "*The just shall live by faith!*" (See Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38)

### The provision of God to promote godliness

In 2 Peter 1:3-4 we read that it is **God's divine power** that has given to us all the things that relate to life and godliness: "*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*"

God provides us with all the things which promote godliness!

But what are these things that enable us to live godly lives? Well, we have time to list some of the important ones:

1. **God has given us His Spirit by whom we are sealed.** This sealing shows that we belong to God and we are secure as a result. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live sanctified lives. Additionally, He is the Guarantee of our future blessing;
2. **We have been given a new nature through new birth.** We are the children of God and, as such, we are partakers of the divine nature. We have a nature within that cannot sin;
3. **We have the word of God available to us.** This is stamped with God's authority and is the basis for guidance in godly decisions and conduct. This is particularly seen in the Person of Christ who is eternal life. His own life is the perfect example of godliness. Read Psalm 16 which was written in the Spirit of Christ and you will find many attributes of the godly man; and finally, for now
4. **We have the fact that the throne of grace is open to us.** We, as Christians, are able to approach God in prayer in order to find the grace and mercy we need in order to maintain our lives of devotion here. Time forbids us to go on to name and explain the many aspects of salvation like regeneration, justification and reconciliation.

### The moral qualities that characterise godliness

We next consider the moral qualities that characterise a life of godliness. First, it has the quality of submission to God because it requires a believer to live and move with God. This means he must ever have the reverential awe of God's Person and an earnest desire to know and do God's will. Godliness itself requires that the Lord is brought into every detail of our lives. These are lives which are characterised by an intimate relationship with Him. Hence, the moral qualities of God ought to be seen in the godly Christian. These include:

- Holiness;
- Righteousness;
- Goodness;
- Mercy;
- Love;
- Grace; and
- Faithfulness.

**Holiness** requires the absence of sin. It is that which marks the presence of God. In Isaiah 6 the King is addressed by the seraphim as the thrice holy God. 1 Peter 1:15-16 clearly shows that this quality of holiness should mark the Christian. Young's Literal Translation states: *"But according as He who did call you is holy, ye also, become holy in all behaviour, because it hath been written, 'Become ye holy, because I am holy.'"* Holiness is linked to sanctification - being set apart to God for His pleasure, His presence, His purposes and His precious possession.

**The righteousness of God** shows that He is both pure and just. It is the practical expression of holiness. The believer has the righteousness of God imputed to him through the death and resurrection of Christ; but has to be righteous in practice also. For this reason, we are exhorted to be *"servants of righteousness"* (Romans 6:18). The Lord Jesus is Himself called *"Jesus Christ the righteous"* in 1 John 2:1.

**Goodness** is linked with both personal integrity and beneficence while **mercy** is thinking compassionately of the needs of others, whether in spiritual or practical ways. The Lord Jesus had compassion on the multitudes because they were like sheep without a shepherd. On the other hand, he was morally perfect and could not condone sin.

**Love** in the life of a Christian is that divine love which always seeks the best for the good of its object. It may bring with it comfort, encouragement or correction. The Lord Jesus loved in this way and God the Father chastens His children in love.

**Grace** is simply showing favour to others despite their condition. It is not prejudicial. It is "love in action" where someone with a particular need is targeted for blessing. It is through the grace of God that sinners may be saved.

**Faithfulness** is the quality of God that links love and truth. It shows that He is absolutely reliable in His purposes, promises, attitudes, relationships and acts. We can depend on Him! So as godly Christians, others should be able to depend upon our honesty and our resolve also.

As we have briefly considered these things we can see that they tend to overlap one another showing a unity of character in a person. It is the same with the fruit of the Spirit that grows with godliness. The fruit is one but has various aspects, namely, *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"* (see Galatians 5:22-23).

### The guarantee that accompanies godliness

The godly believer is one who gives diligence to his calling and makes his election sure (2 Peter 1:10-11). If his life is consistent then **he is guaranteed** an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The illustration of a sailing ship is often used here. An inconsistent Christian may be likened to a bedraggled ship simply limping towards the harbour without any cries of joy or praise being heard, whereas, the pious Christian may be likened to a ship sailing in all its splendour towards harbour and be received gloriously. So it was with Christ. He was received by heaven gloriously. Which of these will mark our future experience?

Now godliness rests upon a certain basis, hence the Apostle writes of *"the mystery [or the secret] of godliness"* (1 Timothy 3:16). Piety is a beautiful flower which has its roots hidden beneath the soil, and those roots are its "mystery." *"Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness"* - and there follows that remarkable passage which summarises in a few crisp sentences the great facts connected with the manifestation of God in Christ. The passage begins with *"God manifested in the flesh"* and ends with His *"being received up into glory"* as a man. Here are found the secret roots of all true godliness. There is no godliness but that which springs from faith in God so revealed.

### **The fruit that flows from godliness**

So what fruits flow from godliness in a believer in a practical sense? We have examples of these in the first epistle Paul wrote to Timothy. There we find: prayerful men and women with modest deportment.

In an article entitled "Godliness", FB Hole reveals that Godliness is revealed in:

- The men lifting up holy hands in prayer;
- The women being modest in deportment and clothing;
- The sound-mindedness, vigilance and self-restraint of the overseers and deacons;
- Those who have faith that characterises their labour, conduct, love and purity; and
- The "widows indeed" who had continued in good works, brought up children, lodged strangers, shown hospitality to the saints and relieved the afflicted.

He goes on to mention the practical qualities of Christian servants and masters and of rich men who, trusting in the living God, use their wealth to his glory. 1 Timothy 4 outlines the necessities that further promote godliness, namely, giving attendance to reading of, and meditating upon, the inspired scriptures, encouraging fellow believers and knowing and obeying Christian teaching. To these are added brotherly love and patience. If such things abound in us then our lives will be fruitful for God and He will be glorified. What a challenge!

### **A simple outline of godliness as seen in the life of Christ**

Having examined "godliness" in some detail, we now turn to briefly consider 1 Timothy 3:16 as aspects of it will be dealt with in more detail in following talks. We have already seen that the word "mystery" refers to a secret revealed to people of faith at a particular time. This secret relates to the time of grace in which we live - the age of the church. We have seen that "godliness" is the quality of a life devoted to God and used to glorify Him. This quality of life is fully seen in the Person and life of Christ Himself. He is the Source and Pattern of godliness. Why do we say that? Because He is God manifest in the flesh! He is God who became man in order to reveal the Eternal to mankind in a complete way. *"The Word [who was God] became flesh"* (see John 1:14) and is the complete expression of the nature and will of God (see Hebrews 1:1-4). How great is the wonder of the love of God that allowed His Son to come to earth in this way.

We then read that the same one *"was justified in Spirit"* (1 Timothy 3:16). Though human, He was righteous in the absolute sense. His whole life here was characterised by the Spirit of God. As the commentator, William Kelly, wrote: "He felt, spoke [and] acted uniformly in the Spirit."

Next, He is said to have *"appeared to angels"* (1 Timothy 3:16). We immediately reason that God had not been seen in this way until the incarnation of Christ. As a Man, God was seen by these spirit beings. In fact angels ministered to Him in His manhood.

Furthermore, *"He was preached among Gentiles"* (1 Timothy 3:16). We know that He was preached among the Jews to whom He originally came; but this clause shows that the testimony widened out to the Gentiles. So instead of immediately setting up His kingdom on earth at His first coming, He sent His disciples out to proclaim His name worldwide.

The result was He *"was believed on in [the] world"* (1 Timothy 3:16). We see this [partially fulfilled] in the church, but in an age to come the Everlasting Gospel will reach all people. This will be prior to the kingdom being set up for a thousand years upon earth. In that glorious day, all saved peoples, nations and languages shall joyfully serve Him.

Finally, Christ “*was received up in glory*” or “*received up gloriously*” (1 Timothy 3:16). “God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name so that, at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (see Philippians 2:9-10). Remember His prayer in John 17:1-26 where He asked the Father “*to glorify [Him] with the glory that He had with Him before the world was*” (John 17:5). This prayer was answered positively. He now has that glory and that not only as the Son of God but also as a man. This is God’s answer to all His suffering here. His life of godliness prompts the question: Are we, as so-called “Christians”, living godly lives, or are we merely players upon the corrupt stage of Christendom?

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.