

# 1 Timothy

## I. Introduction

A. **1 Timothy 3:16-4:5** . . . By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. [4:1] But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, [2] by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, [3] men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. [4] For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; [5] for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

B. As has been stated over the past several weeks, the primary focus of the first three chapters of **1 Timothy** is on promoting and protecting the spiritual health of the church. For example:

1. Timothy was to correct those teaching strange doctrines and the misuse of myths and genealogies, he was to stop the false teachers who were misrepresenting the law, and he was to promote teaching whose goal is love from a pure heart, and good conscience, and a sincere faith.
2. He was to encourage prayer for all men in general, and specifically for kings and everyone else in authority – so that the Christians could lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.
3. Timothy was to exhort the men to pray from the basis of a godly life. And he was to exhort the women to conduct themselves in the church and in the home in a godly manner.
4. Then Paul gave Timothy qualifications for elders, pastors, deacons, and deaconesses. This too was for the protection and promotion of church's spiritual health. And this theme brings us to **vs 16**.

## C. Pray

## II. The mystery of godliness and the falling away from godliness

A. [16] By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness:

1. In consideration of the context leading up to these words and what follows in chapter 4, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul is using

this early Christian hymn to remind us of the basis or foundation upon which Christians are able to live a godly life. And this basis is the living Christ.

2. However, based on a larger reading of God's word, we know that the mystery of godliness is not only that Christ is alive and at the right hand of God, but also that He indwells us, empowering and enabling us to live a godly life. And though His presence and work within us is unseen (*a mystery*), it is as real and powerful as His resurrection.
  3. Jesus spoke about dwelling within us in **John 14:23**, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."
  4. Paul spoke about this mystery in **Colossians 1:25-27**, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, [26] that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, [27] to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
  5. And further on in **Colossians 2:1-3**, Paul says, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, [2] that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, [3] **in whom are hidden** all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
- B. **[16b]** He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.
1. **He (God) who was revealed in the flesh (as Jesus):** This first phrase acknowledges the incarnation, that is, God with us in the form of Jesus Christ.
  2. **Was vindicated in the Spirit:** The Greek word for 'vindicated' can also mean 'justified.' In other words, **either** Jesus was proven or confirmed to be perfectly holy or perfectly sinless by how He lived, **or** He was proven or confirmed to be perfectly holy or perfectly sinless by the Holy Spirit who took Jesus' place after He ascended into heaven.

3. **Seen by angels:** Angels are able to give proof of the resurrection because an angel rolled away the stone from the opening of the tomb, and one or two angels spoke to the women who came to anoint Jesus body on Sunday morning.
4. **Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world:**
  - a. Jesus commanded the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world in **Matthew 28:18–20**, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
  - b. Paul affirmed that the gospel was both proclaimed and believed on in the world in **Romans 16:25–27**, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, [26] but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, **has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith**; [27] to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.”
5. **Taken up in glory.** Mark concludes his gospel by stating that Jesus was not only taken up into the clouds, but that He also was taken into glory. **Mark 16:19**, “So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.”
6. To summarize **vs 16:** the mystery of godliness is the living Christ, as proven by His incarnation, His perfection, His angels, the spread of His gospel, the growth of His church, and His ascension into heaven.
  - a. And because the living Christ lives within us, we are able, by His empowerment and enablement, to live a godly life – if we will do the things God requires of us in order to live a godly life.
  - b. However, not every Christian, though empowered and enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit will use that empowerment and enablement do what God requires. Some will return to some of their old, sinful, worldly, and fleshly ways, and in doing so, will fall away from their original faith in God and commitment to live a Christ-like life.

- c. Therefore, it is important for us to realize that **1 Timothy 4:1-3** is written to Christians about Christians, or to the church about the church.
  - d. Yet what Paul writes here is not unique to him. Jesus said some of these same things before He returned to His Father.
- C. [4:1] But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons . . .
- 1. **But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith . . .**
    - a. We don't know when or how the Holy Spirit talked to Paul about the future of the church. But before Paul wrote these words, Jesus prophesied about the future of the world and the church on several occasions. In addition, Peter warned believers of what is to come in some similar ways to Jesus and Paul. Therefore, before continuing on with what Paul says in these verses, we will consider Jesus' and Peter's words on this topic.
    - b. **Matthew 24:3-13**, As [Jesus] was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us . . . what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" [4] And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. [5] For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. [6] You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. [8] But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. [9] Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. [10] At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. [11] Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. [12] Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved."
    - c. **2 Peter 3:13-15,17-18**, "But according to [Jesus'] promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. [14] Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,

[15] and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you. [17] You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, [18] but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

- d. These two portions of scripture, along with Paul’s words here in **1 Timothy 4**, are a warning to us Christians that times are coming that will sorely challenge our trust in God, our commitment to Christianity, and our desire to live a godly life.
    - (1) If we heed these warnings, then like all wise people who receive a warning about a coming disaster, we will prepare in advance in order to remain faithful to God, to God’s word, and to godly living when the hard times arrive.
    - (2) But sadly, it appears some Christians will not heed these warnings, and will not prepare in advance, which is why some will fall away from the faith when these prophesied times arrive.
  - e. Now bear in mind, those that fall away will not be falling away from attending church or listening to sermons or going to Bible studies. In fact, as far as these things go, they will look like any other Christian – and may even look better.
    - (1) But they will be living in a self-protection, self-preservation mode of living, hoping to keep life as good as it was – as opposed to suffering with the godly.
    - (2) And being committed to this mindset and mode of living, they will be willing to follow any leader or teacher who will offer them help and hope in preserving the lifestyle they enjoyed before the hard times came.
2. Therefore, **vs 1** says, they will **pay attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons**,
- a. In other words, they will pay attention to teaching and writings that may sound Christian, but have been devised by the devil and spread by his cohorts to lead believers astray from trust in God to trust in self, from obedience to God to self-rule, and from godly living to self-serving living.
  - b. It is in such situations as this that we need 1 Timothy 1-3 in order to know what a godly leader is, what godly teaching is, and how to discern the difference between the godly and the ungodly,

the true and the false, the Spirit led and Spirit filled and the self-lead and self-filled.

- c. The point is, if we are not seeking **right now** to prepare for the end times and the devil's deceptions that will accompany those times, then given the weakness of our humanity, we ought not expect to remain faithful to God in those days – whenever they may come.
3. [2] **by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,**
  - a. Not only will the devil and his cohorts be active in leading Christians astray in those days, there will be teachers and church leaders who, **with NO pang of conscience**, will eagerly step up and take advantage of the situation by teaching what they have to teach in order to gain a following.
  - b. And given the unpreparedness of some Christians, they will gain a following.
4. [3] **men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods** which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.
  - a. The ascetic lifestyle, because of its rigid rules and severe limitations on what a person can and cannot do, seems highly religious – so much so that it is hard for the unlearned or unwise to discern the difference between being an ascetic because that is the way you express your godliness, and being an ascetic because that is what godly people do.
  - b. To say this with a different example, there is a great difference between reading your Bible because you hunger and thirst for righteousness, and reading your Bible because that is what Christians do. The one is the result of godliness, the other a show of godliness.
  - c. Those who follow asceticism or read their Bible because that is what Christians do are easily lead astray, because they will follow anyone who appears or sounds godly even if they aren't. And the saddest part of all is, they can't tell the difference.

### III. Conclusion

- A. These words are a warning to us. May we heed the warning and take the required action to be prepared for what is to come, or maybe, what has already come.