

### The Authority of the Living Word, 1 Tim 3:16: New England's God: Billings's "Chester"; Scripture Is Absolute Truth; the "Mystery of Godliness"

#### C. THE AUTHORITY OF THE LIVING WORD:

1. In our central passage, 1 Timothy 3:14-16, we have studied the Authority of the Written Word in verse 14 where we noted the doctrine of inspiration.
2. We have given a great deal of attention to the Authority of the Spoken Word in verse 15 where we established that the divinely ordained institution of the local church is the "church of the living God, the column and foundation of truth."
3. In addition, we illustrated the power of the spoken word regarding the laws of divine establishment by the mayor of Ephesus's speech at the Great Theater in Acts 19:35-40.
4. It was in this passage that we examined the cult of Artemis and the worship of her idol in the famous temple of Artemis. Its foundation, colonnades, and embrasure formed what became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
5. We observed how the local church overwhelmed this temple by virtue of its foundation of Christ upon which doctrinal columns were built to support an embrasure of humility that consisted of an architrave of spiritual self-esteem, a frieze of spiritual autonomy, and a cornice of spiritual maturity.
6. The Christian church is as much an empty shell as the Temple of Artemis if it does not subscribe to the principle that Jesus Christ is the foundation. A fuzzy or false gospel disqualifies most mainline churches as effective participants in the Invisible War.
7. Because people who call themselves Christians are not saved at all they go through the motions of worship but their impact is no more effective than those who bowed to the idol of Artemis.
8. This leaves the onus on the small number of true believers who do have The Foundation. But when even these flag, waver, and retreat at the time when losing is not an option, then even the front-rankers are unable to hold the ground.
9. When the front rank is broken and its line is forced, then the client nation's freedom is lost. This is where we are historically, a far cry from our founding when both men and boys bought our freedom in engagements from Lexington to Yorktown.
10. The glory of their victories is the subject of William Billings's martial hymn, "Chester," our country's first, although unofficial, National Anthem. It's lyric adequately pays homage to those who subsequently fought in each of our nation's battles:

*Chester*  
(William Billings)



*Let tyrants shake their iron rod,  
And slav'ry clank her galling chains,  
We'll fear them not; we trust in God,  
New England's God for ever reigns.*

*When God inspired us for the fight,  
Their ranks were broke, their lines were forc'd,  
Their Ships were Shatter'd in our sight,  
Or swiftly driven from our Coast.*

*The Fee comes on with haughty Stride,  
Our troops advance with martial noise,  
Their Vet'rans flee before our Youth,  
And Gen'als yield to beardless boys.*

*What grateful Off'ring shall we bring,  
What shall we render to the Lord?  
Loud Hallelujahs let us Sing,  
And praise his name on ev'ry Chord.*

11. This lyric describes the heroism that purchased our freedom but lack of doctrine will bring it down.
12. Very soon we will see the Lord permit events to occur that will reap the whirlwind upon those who have suppressed even the mention of "New England's God" in the public square.
13. Verse 16 presents Christ as the living Word by quoting an early Christian creedal hymn that references events in the Incarnation that are the basis for the mystery doctrines of the Church Age:

**1 Timothy 3:16 -** 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 to glory. (NASB)**

1. This verse addresses the prevailing controversy that is addressed in our Lord's hearing before Pontius Pilate:

**John 18: 37b -** "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

**v. 38 -** Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"

2. From the biblical perspective, truth is an attribute of God, called veracity. God *is* truth and Scripture is the only source from which the human soul can come to know it.
3. Truth must be the foundation of a person's knowledge if he is not to be deceived by the propaganda of the devil's world.
4. The search for truth results in knowledge, but for knowledge to be truth it must have its origin in Scripture.
5. The biblical worldview provides the believer the ability to correctly analyze the events of the world around him.

6. I do not mean by this that the Bible addresses all the specific subjects that one might encounter on a daily basis. What I do mean is that if you are to accurately understand events they must be analyzed from a biblical worldview.
7. Truth found in Scripture provides the believer a viewpoint by which he can correctly analyze every circumstance and draw a correct conclusion about its validity. Is it true or is it false?
8. The Bible was written in stages. The Old Testament took over a millennium from the Moses' writing of the Pentateuch in 1441 to the Chronicles' completion in 400 B.C.
9. The New Testament was written over the course of half a century, from the Epistle of James in A.D. 45 to John's Revelation in A.D. 96.
10. Doctrine in the New Testament was thus withheld until the events of the Incarnation were completed. The Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the Revelation contain doctrines that up until their writings were a mystery.
11. In verse 16, Paul emphasizes the preeminent subject of this mystery which is the absolute truth of Jesus as the Christ.
12. The verse begins with the emphatic conjunction **καί, kai** followed by the adverb **ὁμολογουμένως, homologoumenōs**:

ὁμολογουμένως, *homologoumenōs*. This adverb, formed from the present passive participle of *homologeō*, introduces the hymn to the risen Christ at 1 Timothy 3:16; this mystery is the object of "the common faith" of the church. This adverb may have either a rhetorical or a legal meaning. In the former case, it means "incontestably, ineluctably" and describes an indubitable axiom or the conclusion of an unimpeachable argument; thus it is almost synonymous with "obviously." (p. 583)

But in the Stoic vocabulary, *homologoumenōs* means that which must be affirmed or confessed, that which must be agreed to, and refers to an agreement. Thus it is used by jurists for something that supports testimony, a fact that is universally recognized, is beyond dispute, "in everyone's opinion." This meaning of unanimous consent is the most widely attested. So we must translate 1 Timothy 3:16: "Yes, as all agree, great is the mystery of godliness." The initial *καὶ [kai]* is emphatic and thus reinforces the statement. It is not a coordinating conjunction but an adverb, frequently in the papyri having the sense of "really, truly, certainly."<sup>1</sup> (pp. 583-84)

13. We will translate the introduction to the verse, "Yes, as all are in agreement." This proclaims that what follows is a statement that can be accepted as absolute truth.
14. The truth upon which all are agreed is said to be "great," the nominative neuter singular of **μέγας, megas**, the neuter gender describing the doctrine of the mystery.
15. The verb "to be" follows: the present active indicative of **εἰμί, eimi** translated "is."

<sup>1</sup> Ceslas Spicq, "ὁμολογουμένως," in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, James D. Ernest, trans. and ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 2:583-84.

16. That which is great is said to be “the mystery,” τὸ μυστήριον, τὸ *mustērion*. This word is used in the New Testament, primarily by Paul, to describe Church Age doctrines that were unknown to the prophets of the Old Testament and, once revealed in the New, were indecipherable by unbelievers. Consequently, the mystery doctrines are only understood by Church Age believers through the filling and teaching ministries of the Holy Spirit.
17. These mystery doctrines are summarized by Paul in this passage by the use of the word εὐσέβεια, *eusebeia* which is translated “godliness.”
18. In the English translation we are left with a double enigma; first of all what is said to be great is a mystery and the mystery is defined as godliness.
19. So if the mystery is godliness then we must discover what godliness means. Broken down the word means (1) God, plus (2) the suffix -ly: like in appearance, manner, or nature; having the characteristics of, plus (3) the suffix -ness: state, condition, quality, or degree.
20. Therefore godliness is “a state or condition that has the nature and characteristics of God.” This would be a literal English translation. This is basically the definition in *Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary*.<sup>2</sup>
21. The more recent editions of English dictionaries define godliness as “devout, pious, and reverent.”
22. 22. But what does *eusebeia* mean? These English definitions are much too vague to give a clear picture of what the Greek term actually means.
23. To live a spiritual life that is “devout, pious, and reverent” demands knowledge of how these attitudes are expressed. To know this there must be a clear understanding of what *eusebeia* means. For this we consult an excerpt from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*:

εὐσέβεια [*eusebeia*]. **In the Greek World.** Instead of being a reverent attitude towards the gods and the orders protected by them, εὐσέβεια consists in the worship paid to the gods in cultic acts. Since one has to know how the gods are served aright, an element of knowledge enters into piety. The honouring of a god became worship of a god. But it should be denoted that εὐσέβεια does not just denote worship as such. An inner attitude is always expressed in the outward act. (p. 177)

<sup>2</sup> 2d ed. (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1962) 1:783.