

The Mystery of Godliness

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I rejoice in the privilege of presenting to the young and rising generation some basic concepts about the deepest and most profound doctrine of the gospel.

It is the first principle of revealed religion, the great cornerstone upon which all else rests, the foundation for all of the doctrines of salvation.

I shall speak of what the revealed word calls the mystery of godliness.

If our vision is blurred where this doctrine and these concepts are concerned, or, if knowingly or unknowingly we have fallen prey to any of the false sectarian notions that abound with reference to them, our progress toward eternal life will be slow indeed.

Comprehending the Mystery of Godliness

A mystery, so the dictionary says, is “something beyond human comprehension.” Defining the word from a theological standpoint, it says a mystery is “an article of faith beyond human comprehension, as the doctrine of the Trinity.”

How apt this illustration is! If there was ever something beyond human comprehension, it is the sectarian doctrine of the Trinity.

This doctrine defines God and the Godhead as a three-in-one spirit essence that fills the

immensity of space; it teaches that it and they are without body, parts, or passions; it acclaims that it and they are unknown, unknowable, and uncreated, and specifies, in the creeds, that unless we believe all these things we cannot be saved.

It is true that finite man cannot comprehend his Infinite Maker in the full sense of the word. We cannot tell how gods began to be or from whence existent matter came.

But we are duty-bound to learn all that God has revealed about himself and his everlasting gospel. If we are to gain eternal life we must come to know the Great God and his Only Begotten, whom he sent into the world. And this probationary estate is the appointed time to begin to know God, and to learn his laws, and thereby to start the process of becoming like him. If we do not so begin we shall never receive the promised reward.

Because God stands revealed or remains forever unknown, and because the things of God are known only by the power of the Spirit,

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perhaps we should redefine a mystery. In the gospel sense, a mystery is something beyond *carnal* comprehension.

The saints are in a position to comprehend all mysteries, to understand all doctrine, and eventually to know all things. These high levels of intelligence are reached only through faith and obedience and righteousness. A person who relies on the intellect alone and who does not keep the commandments can never, worlds without end, comprehend the mystery of godliness.

There is probably more ignorance and confusion as to the mystery of godliness than there is about any other doctrine. As set forth in the three creeds of Christendom—the Nicene, the Apostles', and the Athanasian, which God himself said were an abomination in his sight—and as defined in the articles of religion of the various denominations, this doctrine is a mass of confusion and a mountain of falsity.

Even in the Church, thanks to a lack of knowledge and to intellectuality and the worldly enticement to conform to the general beliefs of an apostate Christendom, there are those who have fallen prey to many false delusions about deity. By way of illustration let us note some of the problems.

Who and What Is God?

Is there a God? If so, who or what is he? Is he the laws and forces of nature? Or an image of mud or gold? Or is he Baal, the resurrected son of El to whom the Canaanites offered human sacrifices? Is he Allah or Buddha or the confusing and contradictory nothingness described in the creeds of Christendom?

Is there such a thing as the Trinity in which the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three gods, and, yet one god, a god who neither hears, nor speaks, nor appears, as did the one worshipped by the ancients?

Is God omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, or are these descriptive designations part of the legends of sectarianism?

Are there three gods or one? Why does Jesus say his Father is greater than he, and Paul say Jesus is equal with the Father? Why the great scriptural emphasis on proclaiming that three gods are one, and that the Lord our God is one Lord?

What of the mystery of our Lord's birth? Indeed, why should God even have a son? Is Jesus the Son of Man, or the Son of God, or is there a difference? Was it necessary to have a Savior and Redeemer, or is the Koran correct in teaching that God had no need for a son because Allah has but to speak and a thing is done?

By what power could Jesus atone for the sins of the world, or rise from death's dark tomb, or ascend physically into heaven? Is the atonement truly infinite and eternal, applying to all worlds and all created things?

Why does an angel say to John, "I am Alpha and Omega," and when John falls at his feet to worship him, say: "See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God" (Revelations 1:8, 19:10)?

Why does Jesus say: I am the Son of God, and I said such and such unto mine Only Begotten, when in fact the Only Begotten is the offspring, not of the Son, but of the Father?

Why does Christ say: I am the Father and the Son and I created man in mine own image—when in fact Christ is the Son and not the Father, and when man was created, not by the Son, but by the Father?

What relationship do we have with the Lord? Do we worship the Father and him only, or do we also worship the Son? Should we seek for some special relationship with Christ, or does the plan of salvation call for us to seek the Spirit and thereby gain a oneness with both the Father and the Son?

All these are but sample questions, questions that raise some of the issues relative to the mystery of godliness.

Understanding Through the Power of the Spirit

It is our friend Paul who tells us: “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” (1 Timothy 3:16).

We agree. But all these things are beyond carnal comprehension. God dwelling in the flesh! How can anyone understand such a pronouncement unless quickened by the power of the Spirit?

The revealed word to Joseph Smith announces that endless torment does not last forever, and that eternal damnation is of limited duration. In spite of the plain meaning of words, the divine word is that eternal punishment and endless punishment do in fact have an end.

“For, behold, the mystery of godliness, how great is it,” the Lord says, as he gives to these words a special scriptural definition. As he says, this is done so that the concepts involved “might work upon the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name’s glory” (D&C 19:6–12).

As it is with such a mystery as God dwelling in the flesh, or as eternal punishment having no reference to the duration, but rather to the kind of punishment, so it is with all else embraced within the designation the mystery of godliness.

The doctrine is what the doctrine is, and the concepts are what the concepts are. It is of no moment whatever that they spread confusion among uninspired worshippers at divers shrines, or among intellectuals whose interest in religion is purely academic and who rely on the power of the mind rather than the power of the Spirit for understanding.

Gospel truths are known and understood only by the power of the Spirit. Eternal life—which is to know God—is such an infinitely great reward that men must study, ponder, and

pray, with all their hearts, to gain the needed knowledge.

The Lord gives his truths line upon line and precept upon precept to those who believe and obey. Saving truths come by revelation to prophets, not by reason to false priests or doctors of debate, dissension, and divisiveness.

Let us, then, consider the mystery of godliness from the Lord’s standpoint, setting forth correct principles, which will enable all who are spiritually enlightened to keep themselves on the proper path.

Let us do so with courage and without fear, but in reverence and with an open mind. If we are contrite and receptive, if we truly desire truth, and if we are guided by the Spirit in our search, we shall come off triumphant. We shall embrace every true principle and shunt every false doctrine back into the enveloping darkness from whence it came.

Search Deeper and Deeper

As we walk the razor’s edge—the razor that divides truth from near truths, which sometimes have a pleasing attraction—let us be mindful of these words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: “The Savior has the words of eternal life. Nothing else can profit us. . . . I advise all to go on to perfection, and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness” (*Teachings*, p. 364).

Let us ponder these basic concepts:

1. God is the Supreme Being. He is the only supreme and independent being in whom all fulness and perfection dwells. He is the Creator, Preserver, and Upholder of the universe and all that in it is. He is without beginning of days or end of life, and by him all things are. He is the object of all proper worship and from him all good gifts flow. He presides over and governs all things and therefore has no equal. That there is and can be only one supreme being is axiomatic. There can be three equal beings who possess the same character, perfections, and attributes, but there is and can

be only one who is supreme, who is the head, and to whom all others are subject.

2. He is a holy man and has a body of flesh and bones. It is written: “No unclean thing can dwell . . . in his presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ” (Moses 6:57). That is, he is Ahman, and the name of his Only Begotten is Son Ahman.

And as it was with Jesus, the Son, who came forth in the resurrection with a glorified, immortal, resurrected body of flesh and bones, so it was with his Father before him. Joseph Smith said: “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!” (*Teachings*, p. 345). Truly, truly, it is written: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (D&C 130:22).

3. He is the Eternal Father, the Father of Spirits. God lives in the family unit and is the Father of Spirits, of spirit men and spirit women, hosts of whom are now being born as mortal beings. He is, “Our Father which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). We are his children, and we are governed by his laws and are subject to his chastisement, all of which caused Paul to say: “We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Hebrews 12:9).

4. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Let there be no mistake about this. God has all power; he is the Almighty. He knows all things, and there is nothing in all eternity, in universe upon universe, that he does not know. Joseph Smith so taught, and all our scriptures, ancient and modern, bear a concordant testimony. He is not a student god, and he is not progressing in knowledge or learning new truths. If he knows how to create and govern worlds without number, and all that on them is, what is there left for him to learn? Also, he is omnipresent, meaning that by the

power of his spirit he is in all things, and through all things, and round about all things.

5. What is the nature of God’s life? The name of the kind of life that God lives is eternal life. One of his names, speaking in the noun sense, is Eternal, and he simply uses that name to describe the kind of life he lives. Eternal life consists of two things: (1) life in the family unit and (2) having the fulness of the Father, which is all power in heaven and on earth. It is because God has eternal life that he became the Father of Spirits as well as the creator and governor of all things.

6. Whence came the plan of salvation? It is simply the laws and ordinances by obedience to which men may gain eternal life and thus become as God is and be gods in their own right. Joseph Smith said: “God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. . . . He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits” (*Teachings*, p. 354).

7. Who are Elohim and Jehovah? They are the Father and the Son. The Everlasting Elohim is the Great God by whom all things are; the Eternal Jehovah is his Firstborn in the spirit and his Only Begotten in the flesh. Jehovah is thus our Elder Brother, and as such was subject to the same plan of salvation, the plan given of Elohim for the salvation of all his children.

While yet in the premortal existence, Jehovah advanced and progressed until he became like unto God. Under the direction of the Father he became the Creator of worlds without number, and thus was himself the Lord Omnipotent.

8. Christ was chosen in the premortal existence as the Savior and Redeemer. After the Father had presented his plan of salvation to

all his spirit children, after it had been taught so that all understood that what Elohim proposed would enable his spirit children to gain eternal life, after all the hosts of heaven had been taught what they must do in connection with their coming mortal probation—after all this the Father of us all called a Grand Council. We were all present to hear his voice and to accept or reject the proposal he then made.

In that council he said: “Whom shall I send to be my Son, to work out the infinite and eternal atonement, to put into full operation all of the terms and conditions of my plan to save my children.” There were two volunteers—a conforming and obedient Jehovah and a rebellious and disobedient Lucifer.

The choice was made and the decree sent forth. The Father named his Beloved and Chosen One; he chose the Lord Jehovah who was the Creator of all things, and who was then the Lord Omnipotent. He would be the one born as the Lord Jesus Christ. And this Chosen One was then foreordained and acclaimed as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth.

9. Man was created and commanded to serve the Father. It is written: “He created man, male and female, after his own image and in his own likeness, created he them; And gave unto them commandments that they should love and serve him, the only living and true God, and that he should be the only being whom they should worship” (D&C 20:18–19).

Please let these words of scripture sink into your heart and do not be confused about them. In order to gain salvation, we worship the Father and him only. He created us, he provided the plan of salvation, he called Christ to be the Savior and Redeemer, and he is the one that we and Christ shall be like if we are true and faithful in all things. We shall refer hereafter to the sense in which we worship Christ.

10. Man fell, became mortal, and entered a probationary estate. Created in a paradisiacal state in which there was no disease nor sorrow

nor death—a state of innocence in which he could have no joy for he knew no misery, in which he could do no good, for he knew no sin—man, in conformity with the divine purpose, fell.

Temporal and spiritual death entered the world. Man became mortal. For the first time he could procreate and provide bodies for the spirits yet in the premortal existence. Truly, “Adam fell that men might be” (2 Nephi 2:22–25). We entered a probationary estate in which we are tried and tested to see if we will do all things whatsoever the Lord our God shall command us.

11. The Father provided a Savior and Redeemer. The eternal plan of salvation consists of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. The Father having created man in his own image, and Adam having fallen that mortal man might enter his probationary estate, it but remained for the Father to provide a Savior and Redeemer. This he did in the person of his Only Begotten.

Thus Christ came into the world to ransom men from the temporal and spiritual death brought about by the fall of Adam. Thus all men are redeemed from the temporal death through the resurrection. All became immortal. “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). And thus all men may be redeemed from spiritual death if they believe and obey, if they are true and faithful, if they keep the commandments.

12. Christ is the Mediator. Man in his fallen state is forever lost unless he rises from the Fall and regains the spiritual life that once was his. He must return to that God from whose presence he departed when he left the paradisiacal confines of Eden. Christ’s mission is to bring to pass this reunion. He mediates the cause of the children of men so they can once again be in harmony with their Maker.

“God our Saviour,” Paul tells us, “is willing to have all men to be saved.” In order to be saved, he says, they must “come unto the knowledge of the truth which is in Christ Jesus,

who is the Only Begotten Son of God.” He is the one who is “ordained to be a Mediator between God and man.”

Then our ancient apostolic friend makes this great declaration: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all” (JST, 1 Timothy 2:3–6).

Ponder this concept: There is one God, one Supreme Being, one above all who dwells in heaven. He appointed a man—Christ Jesus, Paul calls him—to be a mediator between the Father and his fallen children. And this mediator, though serving as a man when he atoned for the sins of the world, has now become as his Father and reigns with him in everlasting glory.

13. The gospel is the plan of reconciliation. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ it is within the power of fallen man to be reconciled with the Father. Christ’s ministry is one of reconciliation; as he is a mediator, so he is a reconciler. And we as his servants are appointed to labor in a like manner.

Paul tells us that God “hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” This doctrine is, he continues, “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,” on conditions of faith and repentance. And he “hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation,” making us, thus, “ambassadors for Christ,” and enabling us to say to all men: “We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

14. Christ is our advocate. We have an advocate, eternal in the heavens, one who knows our infirmities, our sufferings, and our sorrows, because he too was subject to the flesh, and suffered beyond our comprehension while he dwelt as a man. Indeed, he was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” and he bore “our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3–4).

These are his words as he now pleads our cause in the courts above: “Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life” (D&C 45:4–5).

15. Christ is the God of our Fathers. He is the God of Adam, and Enoch, and all of the saints who were before the flood. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and of all the holy prophets. As Jacob the Nephite said,

We knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.

Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. [Jacob 4:4–5]

Thus all of the ancient saints—all those from Adam to Noah, and from Noah to Abraham, and from Abraham to Moses, and from Moses to the coming of Jesus in the flesh—all of the truly faithful ones of old had the gospel. They were baptized and received the gift of the Holy Ghost; they were endowed with power from on high; they received the blessings of celestial marriage. The gospel is everlasting, and all men in all ages are saved by obedience to the same laws and the same ordinances.

16. Christ is the Promised Messiah. For 4,000 years—from Adam to John the son of Zacharias—all of the prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah, the Deliverer, the Holy One who would deliver his people, redeem the faithful, and ransom all men from death, hell, the devil, and endless torment. All of the ancient saints testified of a Christ who would come to bring to pass the immortality and

eternal life of man, even as we testify of a Risen Lord who has taken captivity captive and opened the gates of heaven to all who believe and obey.

17. The mystery of the birth of our Lord. To those with spiritual insight and understanding there is no mystery. The Lord Jehovah, the Firstborn spirit, Son of the Father, was born as the Lord Jesus. God was his Father and Mary was his mother. He was the Only Begotten in the flesh. From his Father, who is a holy man, he inherited the power of immortality, which is the power to live everlastingly; from his mother, a choice and chosen vessel of the lineage of David, he inherited the power of mortality, which is the power to die.

Thus, being dual in nature, he was able to lay down his life and to take it again. Thus he gave up the ghost at Golgotha, and three days later took up his partially embalmed and anointed body as it lay lifeless in an Arimathean's tomb.

18. Christ ministered among mortals. Though our Blessed Lord came into the world to die upon the cross for the sins of the world, though that was the chief intent and purpose of his mortal ministry, though his assigned ministry was to atone for the sins of the world—yet, while he was here, he restored the fulness of the gospel to the earth and taught its doctrines through all Judea and Galilee and beyond.

But, be it remembered, the gospel he taught originated with God his Father. "My doctrine is not mine," he said, "but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:16–17).

19. Christ worked out his own salvation. This is something of which uninspired men have no comprehension. Truly, he was the Lord Omnipotent before the world was; truly, he was like unto the Father in the premortal life; truly, he was the Son of God here on earth—and yet, with it all, as with all the spirit children of the same Father, he too was subject to all of the terms and conditions of the Father's plan.

He also was born on earth to undergo a mortal probation, to die, to rise again in immortal glory, to be judged according to his works, and to receive his place of infinite glory in the eternal kingdom of his Everlasting Father. How well Paul said:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

And being made perfect, he became the author [that is, the cause] of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. [Hebrews 5: 8–9]

20. Christ worshipped the Father. This also is something that is seemingly unknown in the sectarian world. Of course our Blessed Lord, the Lord Jesus himself, the one who is our Savior and Redeemer, of course he worshipped the Father. How else could he (not having received the fulness at the first, as John tells us) go from grace to grace until he received the fulness of the glory of the Father?

Why else would he say to Mary Magdalene as she bowed before him on the resurrection morning: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17)? Note it and note it well—Elohim is the God of Jehovah as truly and as fully as he is our God. And as Christ worshipped the Father, so must it be with us if we are to go where Christ is and be like him, according to the promises.

21. Christ—the Atoning One and the Crucified One. That which happened in Gethsemane and at Golgotha constitutes a mystery we cannot comprehend. We do not know how a God could bear the sins of all men on conditions of repentance. We cannot fathom the agony involved when Jesus, suffering both body and spirit, sweat great drops of blood from every pore. We only know that it was part of the plan of the Father and that our Lord drank to the full the cup that was his.

In Gethsemane, perhaps for three hours or more, and then again during the final three

hours on the cross of Calvary, in agony beyond comprehension or compare, Jesus worked out the infinite and eternal atonement. For our purposes it suffices to know that this ordeal, plus his rising in glorious immortality, has brought to pass the immortality of all men and made eternal life available to all the obedient.

22. Christ—the Resurrected One and the Ascended One. As the sun crowns the day and banishes the darkness of the night, so the resurrection crowns the Atonement and forever abolishes the death that otherwise would have been eternal. Out of the agonies of the one came the glory of the other.

Christ our Lord rose in glorious immortality, the firstfruits of them that sleep, and then, ascending to his Father, he received all power in heaven and on earth. And in a way incomprehensible to us, the effects of his resurrection shall pass upon us all, and we too shall have power, if true and faithful in all things, to ascend to heights beyond the stars.

Now, if time and circumstances permitted, we might continue our presentation and add another score or a hundred headings to those so far named—all shedding light upon that which is mysterious to the carnal mind.

Perhaps you should continue the inquiry, resolving such mysteries as the following:

How the Holy Ghost can be a personage of spirit and yet convey his gifts to millions of mortals at one and the same time.

What eternal covenant was made relative to man—by God the First, and God the Second, and God the Third—before the foundations of the earth.

How and in what manner we worship Christ when the revealed word decrees that we should worship and pray to the Father and to him only and to none other.

How and in what manner the Lord Jesus both worships the Father and is an equal to him.

What is meant by the numerous scriptures that say Christ is the Father as well as the Son.

Why angels sometimes speak in the first person as though they were Christ, and why Christ himself often speaks in the first person as though he were the Father.

Why our great goal in life should be to gain the Spirit of the Lord as our companion, and what results will flow from such an attained eventuality.

And so on and so on and so on.

The scriptures are in our hands. The door to investigation and research and learning is never closed. We are all expected to learn the same truths, live the same laws, and open the same door to the same mysteries.

For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory.

And to them will I reveal all mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old, and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom.

Yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know, and things to come will I show them, even the things of many generations.

And their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught.

For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man. [D&C 76:5–10]

Now this work in which we are engaged is true. And the doctrines which we proclaim are God's eternal truth. And as the Lord lives, they will endure in time and in eternity. He has placed us here in a mortal circumstance and commanded us to seek him and to strive to be

like him. He has given us an abundant amount of revealed truth in the holy scriptures. They are before us; they are available to each of us on the same basis. The prophet said that God has not revealed anything to Joseph that he will not reveal to the Twelve and to the least and last Saint as soon as he is able to bear it.

My prayer is that we, the rising and young generation in whose hands the future and destiny of the Church lies for the decades and ages

that are ahead before the second coming of the Son of Man, will take the challenge and search deeply and learn the mysteries of godliness and let them be the standard around which we rally and be the guide that directs our lives in all that we do. If this be our course, we will surely have peace and joy and happiness in this life, and be inheritors of eternal life in the world to come, which may God grant for all of us, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.