

# The Trinity Delusion

An exposé of the doctrine of the Trinity

## 1 Timothy 3:16

"Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh." KJV

### The Trinitarian Claim

Trinitarians claim this verse identifies Jesus as "God" because it says "God was manifested in the flesh."

### The Claim vs. The Facts

The manuscript evidence, and the immediate context, shows the KJV reading was not authored by Paul.

### The Problems with the Claim

Modern translations do not read, "God" at 1 Timothy 3:16. Trinitarians make this particular claim by quoting only from the King James Version reading of this verse. Despite the fact that scholars agree that the KJV reading is a certain corruption, Trinitarians, even those who normally do not read the KJV, continue to cherry-pick this verse from the KJV.

When the Christological controversies were occurring in the fourth century, we do not see even one solitary person making a reference to the "God was manifested in the flesh" version of this verse as evidence for identifying Jesus as "God." This fact does itself undeniably demonstrate it was unknown to them. If indeed 1 Timothy 3:16 really said "God was manifest in the flesh," we can most definitely be sure this passage would have most been brought forward as "Exhibit A." Yet, not one soul mentions it even though this passage more than any other would have supported the teaching that the incarnate Christ was "God." But the facts remain as they are and it was never mentioned once in the myriads of documentation that exist illustrating what was argued in these debates. There is a good reason that no one in the fourth century church ever mentioned the passage. The word "God" did not appear in 1 Timothy 3:16 until much later. It first appears in patristic writings and manuscripts *after* Trinitarian dogma was developed and is an obvious later alteration. The oldest and best manuscripts do *not* have the word "God" (*theos*) in 1 Timothy 3:16 which is why modern Bible translations do not have the word "God" at 1 Timothy 3:16 either.

### 1. Contemporary Trinitarian Translation Scholars

Now because this verse is known to be a scribal error, contemporary Trinitarian Greek scholars, who have access to numerous manuscripts, have not been able to perpetuate this error any longer into English translations, despite the passions of some who desire the word "God" to appear in this verse at the expense of truth. Let us look at some of

the major translations of this passage and note how Trinitarian Greek scholars themselves acknowledged the scribal error:

**He** appeared in a body (NIV)

**He** who was manifested in the flesh (ASV)

**He** who was revealed in the flesh (NASB)

**Who** was manifested in the flesh (NAB)

**He** was manifested in the flesh (RSV)

**He** was revealed in flesh (NRSV)

**Which** was manifested in the flesh (Douey-Rheims)

**He** was revealed in the flesh (NET)

**He** was manifested in the flesh (ESV)

**Who** was manifested in the flesh (NAB)

Quite plainly, Trinitarian translation scholars are admitting this version of the verse is not authentic. One then wonders why Trinitarians so often continue to ignorantly, or dishonestly, appeal to it.

## 2. *Ho, Hos & Theos*

If we entertain all possibilities, the remote and the more certain, there are actually three possibilities in this text: *ho* ("which"), *hos* ("who"), and *theos* ("God/deity"). The first two are attested in early manuscripts. Thus one must look elsewhere to find which one is the one Paul originally wrote.

## 3. One Small Pen Stroke

We actually have a pretty likely idea how this corruption happened. Scribal copyists routinely used a contracted form of the Greek word for "God" called a "nomem sacrum" (pl. "nomina sacra") that was used at a very early date in Christian history for sacred names. The Greek word for "God" is *theos* written in the Greek alphabet as  $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ , or  $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ . The copyist abbreviations correspondingly took the form  $\theta\varsigma$ , or  $\Theta\varsigma$ , with an faint overscore line stroke over the abbreviation (see Figure 1). These strokes would often become quite faint in the copies. Now the Greek word for "who" is the word *hos* which is written in Greek as  $\omicron\varsigma$ , or  $\omicron\varsigma$ . Now notice the similarity between these two words  $\Theta\varsigma$ , and  $\omicron\varsigma$ , and also remember they were written by hand and would not be written so perfectly and distinctly as the typed letters on this page. With the exception of one penstroke, the Omicron (O) and Theta (Θ) are nearly identical. It would be very easy to make a mistake here when copying from one manuscript to another and if that is what happened then it would be excusable. But it would also be very easy for an overzealous scribe to suppose he was doing God a favor and execute a forgery here by changing the manuscript and the handwritten O (Omicron) into a Θ (Theta) with a stroke of his pen and thereby completely change the meaning of the verse. It would be also easy to change the word *ho* to *theos* by adding a stroke and an

"s." And it would be far more difficult to do it the other way around without getting caught (removing the stroke). There is also evidence that ink may have bled through the other side of the media and made it appear to a copyist to read ΘΣ because the bleeding ink added what appeared to be a line where ΟΣ had been written. Whether or not it was an honest copying mistake or a forgery, it is very likely that the error was produced in this manner.

Abbreviation	Stands for	Meaning
Θς	θεος	God
Ις	ιησους	Jesus
Χς	χριστος	Christ
Κς	κυριος	[the] Lord
Πηρ	πατηρ	father
Υς	υιος	son
Σηρ	σωτηρ	savior
Πνα	πνευμα	spirit
Στς	σταυρος	cross
<b>Standard Nomina Sacra</b>		

Figure 1

#### 4. The Manuscript Evidence

Manuscript	Common Name	Date	Text
B	Codex Vaticanus	ca. 300	Does not contain 1 Timothy
Aleph	Codex Sinaiticus	ca. 350	<b>who</b> was manifest in flesh
A	Codex Alexandrinus	ca. 450	<b>who</b> was manifest in flesh
C	Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus	ca. 450	<b>who</b> was manifest in flesh
D	Codex Claromontanus	ca. 550	<b>which</b> was manifest in flesh
	Peshitta Coptic Ethiopic Sahidic		<b>which</b> was manifest in flesh
	Gothic		<b>which</b> was manifest in flesh

## 5. Patristic Witness

Quotations of 1 Timothy 3:16 in the Fathers				
Author	Reference	Date	Evidence	Comments
Ante-Nicene Church	All Writings	70-325 A.D.	None	Not quoted by any writer before Nicea
Arian Controversy Church	All Writings	325 - 381 A.D.	None	Not quoted by any writer until late in the fourth century

## 6. The Internal Evidence

### a. The Greek Grammar

The internal evidence also reveals the truth of the matter. First, the passage does not say "in *the* flesh" with a definite article but simply "in flesh." The word *eusebias* translated as "godliness" is difficult to translate into English with a word that exacts the Greek intention. The word "godliness" is a justified translation of the word and it is about as good as we can do with the selection of English words we have available. However, it does tend to over translate the Greek scope of the word. This is a common problem when translating from one language to another. The Greek word does not precisely mean what the English word "godly" tends to convey but it means something like reverent piety in a worshipful sense. The Greek words for "God" and "godliness" which are *theos* and *eusebias* are **not** related word cognates as they are in English. This can also tend to be misleading to English readers who might errantly conclude the word "godliness" in this passage is intended to correlate with the word "God" in the KJV translation. However, in Greek the word *eusebias* and *theos* do not bear that correlation. Also, there were also no sentence ending periods in the Greek text. If the word "which" is the proper rendering, the passage actually says in the Greek, "great is the mystery of godliness which was manifested in flesh, justified in spirit..." However, if the word "God" is used we have an abrupt break in the flow of the sentence, "great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in flesh, justified in spirit..." The rendering which uses the word "who" or "which" is much smoother and natural. Not only so, it is typical Pauline style to compose run-on sentences.

### b. The Immediate Context and Pauline Thought

And there is yet more which reveals this verse was corrupted. Paul here is talking about the *mystery*. In 2 Timothy he says, "God who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time (2 Tim 1:8-9). This is nearly

identical to what he says in Romans, "Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the *mystery* of the times of the ages which was kept hidden" (Rom 16:25). And in Ephesians he says, "having made known to us the *mystery* of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the economy of the fullness of the times to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth" (Eph 1:9-10) and "to enlighten all as to the communion of the *mystery* which has been hidden from the ages who created all things in Christ Jesus" (3:9) and "this is a great *mystery* but I speak of Christ and the church" (5:32). Paul desires "to make known the *mystery* of the gospel" (6:19) which is he also calls "the *mystery* of Christ" (Colossians 4:3). The mystery of the ages is Christ himself revealed to us by God. He tells us in Colossians, "the glory of this *mystery*, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27; see 1 Cor 1:30; 2:7). God's *mystery* appeared in flesh and Christ is that fleshly manifestation of His mystery.

### *God was Justified in the Spirit?*

Another problem associated with the "God" rendering is that if we just keep reading it would then say that God was justified in the Spirit. It makes absolutely no sense to say God was justified in the Spirit, God was seen by angels, God was preached among the Gentiles, God was believed on in the world, and God was received into glory."

### c. Paul's Vocabulary Elsewhere

At Colossians 1:27 we read, "the glory of the mystery among the nations *which* is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The relative pronoun used here is the masculine relative pronoun *hos* which refers back to the neuter noun "mystery." This is nearly identical to 1 Timothy 3:16 which ends with the phrase "taken up in glory." Hence we can see that *hos* is the likely relative pronoun to be used at 1 Timothy 3:16.

### d. Constructio Ad Sensum

Trinitarians have sometimes insisted the gender of the pronoun in question necessitates in Greek grammar the "God" rendering. This is highly misleading. Pronouns do not always refer to the immediate antecedent but sometimes to the contextual antecedent.

## **Determining Factors**

- Trinitarians are appealing to a version of a text which is known to be a scribal error.
- Modern Trinitarian translation reflect that Trinitarian translation scholars admit this is a scribal error. Therefore, they do not translate this passage in a way that supports Trinitarian doctrine
- We have a pretty good idea that this error was accomplished by either (1) one additional stroke of a pen changing the Greek word from "who" to "God" or (2) by two additional strokes of a pen changing the Greek word from "which" to God, or (3) by ink bleeding through the media.
- This version of the verse cannot be found absolutely anywhere in early Christian writings before the Trinity was developed. Considering the fourth and fifth century men were having a crisis in the church concerning the nature of Christ and his

relationship to God, it is preposterous to claim this version of the verse is valid and they overlooked this passage.

- No early manuscripts contain this version of the verse. The corrupted version of this text appears only after the doctrine of the Trinity was developed in the fourth/fifth century.
- The Greek grammar and immediate context also indicates this rendering is wrong.

## Conclusion

So when we review all the evidence the solution is plain to see. The historical evidence indicates the word "God" was not there before the late fourth century at the earliest. The manuscript evidence indicates the word "God" was not in the original text. The grammar and the immediate context also indicate the KJV reading is not authentic. Christ is the mystery in question which is why the passage should read, "great is the mystery of godliness who/which was manifested in flesh, justified in spirit..." It "which" is correct it refers back the mystery; if "who" is correct it refers to Christ. Very obviously then the passage reads smoothly and makes total sense with the rest of Scripture by using either the word "who" or "which" which are attested in early manuscripts. The KJV reading is an obvious error or forgery.

Great is the mystery of godliness *which/who* was manifested in flesh."

### 1 Tim 3:16 KJV - Another old Trinitarian Corruption



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