

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## What is the Truth of the Gospel? Justified in the Spirit

*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. (1 Timothy 3:16)*

Linguistic scholars suggest that Paul here is quoting, either from a first century hymn or a first century confession of faith. The source is not material to the teaching, for Paul affirms the teaching by its inclusion in his letter to Timothy. After the introductory statement, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness," the passage contains six brief and profound assertions regarding this now-revealed mystery.

1. God was manifest in the flesh. (Incarnation)
2. God (Incarnate) was justified in the Spirit.
3. God (Incarnate) was seen of angels.
4. God (Incarnate) was preached unto the Gentiles.
5. God (Incarnate) was believed on in the world.
6. God (Incarnate) was received up into glory.

As the passage stands, there are three pairs of antithetic thoughts: (1) (a) the flesh and (b) the spirit of Christ, (2) (a) angels and (b) Gentiles—the two extremes of the rational creation, (3) (a) the world and (b) glory.<sup>1</sup>

From our perspective, "Justified" may refer to the making of an unjust person into a just person, or it may refer to the declaration that a just person is in fact just, vindication. Since Jesus was never a sinner, we may eliminate the first thought and focus on the second. Not only did Jesus manifest Himself in human flesh, but He also, both in His flesh, and in His Spirit, vindicate His claims of deity and of a sinless existence in that flesh.

His spotlessly righteous life must be so, and it must be validated by God, not merely by man, if He is to fulfill the role of Job's "Daysman," and lay His hand on both God and man.

We are often inclined in our Bible study to see an irreconcilable dichotomy between "flesh" and "spirit" as Scripture, especially the New Testament, uses those terms. "Flesh" often refers to our fallen humanity, or nature. "Spirit" just as often refers to our regenerate person. We exist as one person or

being, but we exist with two opposite and combatting natures. (Galatians 5:17 as an example) Notice in this whole context, beginning with Verse sixteen and continuing through Verse 25, that our King James translators capitalize the word, "Spirit," though Paul is referring to our personal, internal conflict. I wouldn't make an argument based on upper or lower case alone, but neither would I dismiss the wisdom of the translators. Suggestion; apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit, we would have no conflict. Our pervasive depravity would govern every aspect of our conduct. However, in the new birth, when the Holy Spirit writes God's law on our hearts and in our minds, He permanently resides in us and sets up the conflict of which Paul writes in that passage. The Holy Spirit does not come and go on a whim. He permanently resides in us so that we are amazingly and forever changed by Him. Our manifestation of that change varies, depending on how we deal with the conflict, as Paul observes in Galatians 5:19-21 regarding the works of the flesh, and in Galatians 5:22-23 concerning the fruit of the Spirit. Paul concludes this lesson with an exhortation.

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25)*

Our living out the fruit of the Spirit is not the result of an irresistible divine decree, but the synergy of the indwelling Holy Spirit convicting and teaching us to so walk. Notice Paul's exhortation, "...**let us** also walk."

So what does Paul intend by "...justified in the Spirit"? Is he referring to Jesus' human spirit? Or is he referring to Jesus' Spirit as God Incarnate? By their choice of capitalizing the word, the King James translators indicate their belief that the word refers in some way to God, either Jesus' divine nature/Spirit or to the Holy Spirit as His abiding companion during the Incarnation. While we should take note of the case (capital or lower case) of words in the King James Bible, that point alone should not frame our interpretation. For example, few, if any, commentaries would deny that "spirit" as used in Joel 2:28 refers to the Holy Spirit, though the translators use lower case. In Acts 2:17 (Peter quote this verse), the translators use the upper case, clearly indicating their belief, regardless of

<sup>1</sup> Newport J.D. White, "The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus", in *The Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume IV: Commentary*, 119 (New York: George H. Doran Company).

case in the Joel passage, that the Holy Spirit was intended.

The vindication takes place ἐν πνεύματι. Rom. 1:4 serves as the best commentary on this compact statement (see the commentaries on Romans by Cranfield, Murray, and Ridderbos, ad loc.). In Rom. 1:4 the πνεῦμα would appear to be the Holy Spirit. There, too, a vindication or demonstration is in view (“declared to be the Son of God with power”) and the means of the declaration is “by resurrection from the dead.” Likewise Rom. 8:11 speaks of “the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead.” If these are true parallels, then here Paul is speaking of the vindication of Jesus by the Holy Spirit through his resurrection. The next use of πνεῦμα in the PE (4:1, without qualification, as here) refers to the Holy Spirit (see also Tit. 3:5; 2 Tim. 1:14; probably 1:7) and not the human spirit (as indicated by ὑμῶν in 2 Tim. 4:22), and there is no indication of shift in meaning, which favors that same identification here.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from the challenge of Greek references, this citation provides excellent documentation that favors the “Holy Spirit” interpretation for Paul’s words, “...justified in the Spirit.” Especially compelling are the arguments for this interpretation based on 1 Timothy 4:1, the next verse in Paul’s letter to Timothy where “Spirit” clearly refers to the Holy Spirit, and the introduction of Romans 8:11, Paul’s reference to the Holy Spirit’s role in raising Jesus from the dead. Both Romans 1:4 and Romans 8:11 provide strong evidence regarding the Holy Spirit’s active involvement in Jesus’ Incarnate life and work, particularly in our study theme. By Jesus’ literal, physical, bodily resurrection, the Holy Spirit declared Him to be “...the Son of God with power...” thus “vindicating” Him, or declaring Him to be that Just One who should come.

As we ponder the amazing compaction of thought in this single verse, it becomes increasingly clear that Paul intended to cover every aspect of the Incarnation, from Jesus being born in Bethlehem as a baby, to His resurrection and ascension back to glory with the Father. Any concept of “truth,” what the Lord’s faithful church is to believe, support, and steadfastly safeguard for all generations till the Second Coming, must include this all-encompassing view of the Incarnation. And any claim to “truth” that diminishes or compromises this view of Incarnation must be decisively rejected as departure from truth, not affirmation of it.

One of the first errors to challenge the first generation of Christianity was the various forms of

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PE Pastoral Epistles

<sup>2</sup> George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles : A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 184-85 (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992).

ancient Gnosticism, particularly Docetic Gnosticism that rejected the whole concept of God-Incarnate. No matter how convincing the gnostic teachers could make their claims, they fell short of this truth, and thus demonstrated the depth of their error.

Occasionally aberrant views of Jesus’ atonement surface and attempt to build a case for their validity based on the false premise that “Sinful men could not have anything to do with our salvation.” That statement is a non-issue. Those of us who believe in the Biblical teachings regarding God’s grace have consistently rejected this absurdity. When Jesus stated,

*As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

(John 10:15, KJV 1900)

*Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:17–18, KJV 1900)*

He categorically affirmed that His death would be on His terms, not attributable to Roman crucifixion or Jewish flogging. A study of the normal death process from Roman crucifixion will demonstrate indisputably that Jesus did not die in the expected way from crucifixion. He “gave up the ghost,” His life; it was not taken from Him by the Romans. His death was no less of His own doing than was His resurrection. Hebrews 9:15 affirms a bedrock truth regarding our redemption, the eternal settlement of our sin debt. It could only occur “...by means of death...” Jesus didn’t die in Gethsemane. Jesus didn’t die during the three hours of darkness at Calvary. He died after that time of darkness, and it was in that death, chosen and enacted by Himself alone, that He secured our release from sin.

Paul will further affirm this truth that Jesus’ literal, physical, bodily resurrection affirmed His victory over sin.

*Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:25, KJV 1900)*

This verse affirms two essential truths. Jesus died, not for anything He did that deserved death, but for us, for our sins. Secondly, he arose from the dead, in that very act declaring both His deity, His essential God-hood, and our justification, the legal and righteous verdict of heaven’s court, “Not guilty.” Often human courts rule “Not guilty by reason of...” At the moment of Jesus’ resurrection, heaven’s court ruled regarding the sins of all for whom He died, “Not guilty by reason of Jesus’ once-for-all-time offering of Himself.” End of story. Praise God!

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor