

“Pay Attention to the Words of the Song:” 1 Timothy 3:16

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*Abstract*

Songs, hymns, and creeds are occasionally inserted into Scripture by the author as a sub-genre to emphasize some aspect of the message. This study focuses on the Christ hymn found in 1 Timothy 3:14-16. Some interpreters take such songs and interpret them as an independent Christological statement, but this approach seems to miss the author’s intentions for the words of the song. This article attempts to analyze the 6 lines of the majestic song to determine the meaning of its words and phrases that speak specifically to the historical context in Ephesus at the time of the writing.

*Key Words:*

commissive language, stanzas, dative, genitive, parallelism

*Introduction*

When the Spirit-inspired apostle Paul selected an existent hymn<sup>1</sup> or composed a song or poetic, credal statement to insert in the text of one of his epistles, he must have believed this artistic piece of literature with its distinct lyrics, assonance, and commissive language<sup>2</sup> would contribute significantly to the thrust of his written communication supplementing his normal narrative prose style. One of his best-known songs is the Christ hymn<sup>3</sup> of Philippians 2:6-11, which elaborated his message to the believers in Philippi appealing to them to emulate the love and humility of Christ so that they would preserve unity among the believers and maintain a dynamic gospel witness in their pagan environment. He considered that the poetic form and content of the hymn were the most effective ways to convey his intentions.

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There is another song Paul<sup>4</sup> employed, found in 1 Timothy 3:16, which can be properly understood only by carefully examining its content within the literary and historical context of the epistle. To isolate the content of the song from the historical context of the first recipients, examining its lyrics and poetic form as an abstract Christological statement, is to miss Paul’s purpose for the song in this ad hoc epistle.<sup>5</sup> Jeannine Brown observes, “Meaning is always contextually situated.”<sup>6</sup> As the hymn is studied, one must look to see if there are direct references in the song to the historical context described in the epistle. This essay will attempt to discover the meaning of the Christ hymn and its relevance for the church in Ephesus.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Text*<sup>8</sup>

The complete thought unit leading up to and including the song reads:

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the<sup>9</sup> pillar and foundation of the truth. Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:

He<sup>10</sup> appeared in a body,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,  
was believed on in the world,  
was taken up in glory.<sup>11</sup>  
(1 Timothy 3:14-16 NIV)

### *The Historical Context of the Epistle*

An essential consideration for understanding the song is an examination of the church’s historical context in Ephesus with special attention given to the false teachers.<sup>12</sup> The heterodox instruction<sup>13</sup> that was destroying the faith of some and blemishing the public witness of the gospel was being propagated by insiders, Ephesian elders, who had defected from the faith, a fact prophesied earlier by Paul (Acts 20:29-30). It is generally assumed that the false teachers were

converted Jews<sup>14</sup> who were syncretizing Christian doctrine, Hellenistic Judaism, Mosaic Law, Greek dualism and asceticism, local magic,<sup>15</sup> and materialism<sup>16</sup>—a strange amalgamation of beliefs and practices that seems to be self-contradictory in some cases when blended together. Paul described their doctrine as “falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20) which was spreading like “gangrene” (2 Tim. 2:17). Clearly, all the features of their teaching cannot be explained from a traditional Jewish perspective. And certain aspects of their distortions had manifest themselves previously in other regions of the Mediterranean which Paul confronted in his epistles to Corinth,<sup>17</sup> Colosse,<sup>18</sup> and Ephesus.<sup>19</sup>

Like “savage wolves” (Acts 20:29), these men were destroying the faith of some who were disciples of a ministry Paul himself led and expanded during his three years of residence in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). And while Paul was building up the Ephesian church, he strategically sent missional ambassadors to declare the gospel to “all the Jews and Gentiles who lived in the province of Asia” (19:10). Now, years later when revisiting the city, Paul was confronted with the poisonous influence of false teachers who were not only “distorting the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (20:31), but also these opponents practiced and condoned lifestyles that undermined the gospel witness before a vast pagan audience in the city and region.<sup>20</sup>

Paul was so provoked by the presence and destructive content of these teachers that he commissioned Timothy to remain in Ephesus. Timothy was to serve as his apostolic representative, silence their teachings while countering it with a powerful proclamation of the truth of the gospel, appoint godly leaders to pastor and safeguard the churches,<sup>21</sup> set an example for all the saints to follow, and instruct the believers in how they were to conduct themselves in the church of the living God, while at home and at work in the marketplace.<sup>22</sup> Leaving Timothy in Ephesus and moving onward to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3), Paul remained deeply concerned over the situation in the Ephesian churches. His irritation is evident as he writes Timothy leaving out his normal greeting section in the letter to immediately address the critical concerns at hand.

While Paul did not elaborate explicitly regarding the identity<sup>23</sup> of the opponents nor expose all the errors of their teachings and immoral conduct, there is enough information in his exhortations to Timothy to summarize the general content of their attractive deception (2 Tim. 4:3). Having “wandered from” and “rejected” the truth (1 Tim. 1:6; 6:10, 21; 1:19), “abandoned the faith” (4:1), and “been robbed of the truth” (6:5), Paul’s opponents were following deceiving spirits and embracing concepts taught by demons (4:1).<sup>24</sup> Their calloused hearts and seared

consciences allowed them to confidently proclaim false doctrine as hypocritical liars (4:2; 1:7; 6:4). Based on what Paul prophesied earlier, the false teachers were bent on "drawing away disciples after them." They did not hesitate to "distort the truth" to gain a following (Acts 20:30). Apparently, they were successful in their efforts which depleted the church of Christ's faithful followers.

To establish their preeminence among church leaders, they pursued "endless genealogies" (1 Tim. 1:4), which exalted and defended their status as authentic, historical leaders in the community.<sup>25</sup> Andrew E. Hill observes, "The purpose of genealogies generally is to ... legitimize an individual or familial claim to some position of leadership or service."<sup>26</sup> Paul provided no details on their genealogical explorations, but there seem to be two possible reasons for this ceaseless investigation depending on their ethnic identity. The false teachers may have been Hellenistic Christian Jews,<sup>27</sup> whose families had lived in the diaspora for decades. After coming to faith in Christ, they had wandered from Paul's gospel and determined to impose Mosaic Law and Jewish cultural practices on the Christian community.<sup>28</sup> Their distance, in terms of time and geography from Israel and from orthodox Jewish teaching, resulted in their ineptitude in explaining the content of and purpose for the Law. As self-professed teachers, they were trying to fabricate a familial connection with one of the tribes of Israel based on genealogical records to secure their status as qualified instructors of the Law.

On the other hand, the false teachers may have been Hellenistic Gentiles<sup>29</sup> who converted to Christianity but then succumbed to the teachings of Judaizers, which then led to their mélange of Greek dualism, Christian doctrine, Mosaic Law, and local mysticism.<sup>30</sup> For example, the name of one of the opponents, Hymenaeus, has never been documented as a Jew.<sup>31</sup> They were influenced by a Jewish, ethnic, exclusivism and became extremists, zealous for their new, blended faith. Even though they were Gentiles, they investigated genealogies in the Pentateuch<sup>32</sup> to unearth mythical connections between themselves and the people of Israel.<sup>33</sup> In either case, whether the opponents were Jews or Gentiles, they were attempting to elevate their status as legitimate teachers and broaden their influence in these churches founded by Paul.

In contrast to their fanciful heritage that supposedly qualified them for spiritual leadership, Paul presented himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command and will of God (1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1), appointed to the service of Christ by the Lord himself (1 Tim. 1:12).<sup>34</sup> As the worst of all sinners, a confession that stood in radical contrast to the self-proclaimed

righteousness of the opponents, Paul experienced an abundant outpouring of grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus the Lord (1:15, 14, 2). He was entrusted with the “glorious gospel” (1:11), which he offered to all who would believe in Christ (1:16). Paul’s Christian identity was based on his membership in the spiritual family of God, “God’s household” (3:15), where the Sovereign King was his “Father” and where relationships and conduct with others were governed by “love” springing from a “pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5).

What were the major tenets<sup>35</sup> of the false teachers, and could their erroneous emphases have influenced Paul in the selection of the Christ hymn? There were Jewish components to their faith system, but the propagators lacked expertise in their understanding of the Mosaic Law.<sup>36</sup> While they wanted to be teachers of the law, “they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1:7). In emphasizing law, they appear to have minimized the redemptive role of Christ in “uprighting” people before God. Paul declared that the law (νόμος), which the opponents stressed, was good and that there was a place for the law in the Christian faith if it was used lawfully (νομίμως)<sup>37</sup> (1:8; 2 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 7:12, 16).

Paul believed the law glorified God as holy, the Creator, Savior, and Judge (1:1, 17; 2:10; 4:3; 2 Tim. 4:1). The law revealed God as the living God (ὁ θεός ζῶν), present and working among his people (1 Tim. 3:15). The law compelled his people to offer the Lord all their worship, love, loyalty, and obedience. The law declared the truth that God provided grace, mercy, peace, and forgiveness, but this reconciliation came through faith in God and his provision of salvation, not through the keeping of the law (1:2, 16; 3:15; 6:17) or maintaining a Jewish cultural identity. For Paul, the law recorded the history of God establishing his covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whom he unilaterally delivered from bondage in Egypt. The purpose for the nation was that they might know God experientially and worship Him; bear witness in word and deed to the nations of the holiness and supremacy of their God, YHWH; and be a conduit of blessing as they ushered the Savior of all people into the world (Gen 3:15; 12:3; Isa 9:6; Gal 3:8; Eph 2:17).

Paul asserted that the law established boundaries intended to restrain God’s people from conforming to the sinful ways of the pagan nations. These divinely ordained limits set his people apart in terms of their faith, worship, and moral conduct. But their repeated transgressions of God’s law made it abundantly apparent that “unregenerate people [did] not have the ability to do

what is good . . . the power of sin [was] stronger than the law.”<sup>38</sup> The law was powerless to upright God’s people morally and enable them to obey him. “The law was not the source of life.”<sup>39</sup>

Thomas R. Schreiner<sup>40</sup> summarizes what could be considered the lawful purpose of the law. First, the law had a “convicting function,” revealing that humankind without the Holy Spirit was incapable of living in right relationship with God. The basis of acceptance by God was repentance from sin and faith in him as a loving and merciful God who provided forgiveness, uprightness, and fellowship with himself. Second, the law had a “prophetic function” revealing God’s promise to send his Servant, the Messiah, the Son, and Seed—the Savior who would provide blessings for all the nations.

It seems one of the unlawful uses of the law promulgated by the opponents was to compel their Jewish followers to maintain their distinct ethnic identity and adhere to cultural norms that promoted separation from Gentiles. Gentiles, who converted to Christ and later followed the false teachers were expected to live Jewishly, adopted a Jewish cultural lifestyle, and upheld Old Testament commands including dietary laws such as abstaining from certain foods (4:3). The opponents’ views of the dietary laws corresponded with early Jewish Christian beliefs exhibited by Peter in Acts 10:13-14, who, in spite of Christ’s teaching on dietary liberation (Mark 7:19), held to Old Covenant restrictions, which thus divided Christian Jews from Gentile seekers (Acts 10:28).

The false teachers attempted to keep their followers from transgressing God’s law (1:9-10). The focus was more on the immoral conduct to be avoided and only to be maintained, rather than investing toward the Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life to be lived. These identity markers of their group exhibited a Jewish lifestyle and started by avoiding sinful behaviors (1:9-11). For Paul, the ultimate identity markers of those made righteous by Christ were “love” and humility, neither of which were observable among the opponents (1:5, 7; 6:4).<sup>41</sup> He may have drawn his reference to love from the heart of the law, the *Shema*: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut 6:5), and reinforced by Christ’s declaration of the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind . . . and the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37-39). Love fulfilled the law.

The teachings of the opponents replaced the declaration of the gospel and marginalized the centrality of Christ. These teachers of law undoubtedly regarded Moses and the angels as the mediators between humankind and the high and holy God.<sup>42</sup> Guthrie comments, “Jewish transcendental theology demanded an efficient mediatorial system to bridge the ever-widening gap between man and God.”<sup>43</sup> He adds, “In Jewish thought angels performed mediatorial function in relation to the law.”<sup>44</sup>

To counter this doctrinal wandering, Paul highlighted the Person of Jesus Christ who “came into the world to save sinners.” He stressed that Christ Jesus entered the created order as a human being, a “man,” “appearing” visibly and tangibly (1 Tim. 1:15; 2:5; 2 Tim. 1:10). Paul emphasized the humanness of the divine mediator who bridged the gap between a holy God and sinful people,<sup>45</sup> the only mediator between humankind and God (1 Tim. 2:5). Christ Jesus was their hope (1:1; 4:9) and their Lord (1:2, 12). He was the Savior of all (4:10) who gave himself as a ransom for all people, including Jews and Gentiles (2:6-7). He displayed unlimited patience, love, and mercy towards sinners, lawbreakers, and rebels who had transgressed God’s law. Jesus came to save sinners, not the righteous. And while Jesus was no longer with them physically, he was in them through the presence of the Holy Spirit and would one day return and appear again (2 Tim. 4:1, 8).

Paul argued that the man, Christ Jesus, served as the only mediator. As for God’s angels, they were an “unseen presence” serving and observing believers, noting their righteous judgments (5:21), stressing the believers’ accountability to God, but contributing nothing to Christ’s work of salvation.<sup>46</sup> G. W. Bromiley made this observation about angels, “They do not do the real work of reconciliation, which is Christ’s prerogative ... Jesus had to tread his way of atoning self-giving alone.”<sup>47</sup>

For Paul, acceptance by God did not come through adherence to the law, Jewish ethnicity, or living according to Jewish cultural norms and sensibilities, but by faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup> Repeatedly Paul spoke of the necessity of faith in Christ as the means for entering and abiding in God’s Kingdom. His own transformation served as “an example for those who would believe on him” (1:16). This worst of all sinners (1:15) experienced God’s mercy and forgiveness and had entered God’s Kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The advancement and promotion of God’s work was “by faith” (1:4). “God is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe” (4:10). Timothy exemplified a model for the believers

in his faith (4:12). Paul confidently confessed, “I know in whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able” (2 Tim. 1:12).

When readers note the multiple references Paul made to the inclusiveness of the gospel, for both Jew and Greek, it appears he was offsetting the false teachers’ message of an exclusive salvation for the Jews.<sup>49</sup> Paul responded: “[God] wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth ... [Christ Jesus] gave himself as a ransom for all men ... For this purpose, I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth. I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles” (2:4, 6, 7).<sup>50</sup>

The misled teachers appeared to blend their commitment to Mosaic Law with Hellenistic dualism to the deceived people. They considered the spirit good and matter evil.<sup>51</sup> They forbade people to marry and ordered them to abstain from certain foods (4:3). This perspective seems quite contrary to the Hebrew Bible, which portrayed God creating man and woman in his own image, blessing them, and calling them to be fruitful, increase in number, and fill the earth (Gen 1:26-28). Regarding diet, in the beginning all seed-bearing plants and fruit were their food (1:29). But the Ephesian teachers viewed marriage, conjugal relationships, physical pleasure, and certain foods as evil, creaturely, and of the flesh.<sup>52</sup> The human body, at best, was a matter of indifference and functioned as the vehicle for the spirit.<sup>53</sup> Moral constraints were not crucial because the body would perish. The body, at worst, was evil and needed to be treated harshly, severely limiting its behavior.<sup>54</sup>

Coupling this ascetic view with the errant belief that “the resurrection had already taken place” (2 Tim. 2:18), the opponents adopted an over-realized eschatology. The false teachers earnestly believed they were already living the existence of angels.<sup>55</sup> Before being enlightened by their mixed blend of doctrine, they acknowledged they were spiritually dead. But after being instructed to accept their heterodox creed, they came alive in their spirits. They believed they had already experienced spiritual resurrection—no further physical resurrection was needed. They had become angel-like where gender distinctions were irrelevant. Holding these views led them to teach the emancipation of women from social standards, which later became a part of their corrupt, created order.<sup>56</sup> The basis of their message could have emerged from a mystical interpretation of Jesus’ answer to the Sadducees when asked about marriage in heaven: “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25). Thus, marriage was considered to be carnal, conjugal relationships and as



inappropriate, and childbearing impossible.<sup>57</sup> It seems this teaching was most readily received by some women in the church who were committed to spreading the deception further.<sup>58</sup> Wives, now living the life of angels as authentic spiritual people, were to avoid conjugal relationships with their husbands. This teaching in Corinth resulted in Christian husbands succumbing to the temptation of cohabitating with prostitutes (1 Cor 6-7). In Ephesus, Paul's repeated plea was for moral purity, marital faithfulness, and proper respect within the marriage (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:2, 22; Eph 5:21-33).

When it came to their teaching regarding godly character, conduct, and attitudes, this group-imposed rules but did not address the need for ethical love and respect. Their conceit led to division, strife, quarrelling, envy, slander, and suspicion (6:4). In a milieu of conflict, Paul needed to exhort the believers, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger and disputing" (2:8).

Their seared consciences, hypocrisy, and dualistic asceticism allowed them to preach ascetic restraint, on one hand, while being greedy for financial gain, on the other (6:5-10).<sup>59</sup> Likewise, while disdaining the flesh and preaching against marriage, they had sexually taken advantage of women in the church, especially young widows (5:4, 15). Of these teachers, Paul warned: "They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires" (2 Tim. 3:6). Paul admonished Timothy to pursue absolute purity in his relationships with younger women (5:2; 4:12), and he called for younger widows to marry and bear children (5:14).

While the false teachers were indoctrinated by and followed deceiving spirits and demons, true Christians sought the voice of the Holy Spirit, warning them of hypocritical liars (4:1). The Spirit lived in the followers of Christ, gave them discernment of the truth and deception, enabled them to uphold the truth, and empowered them to live uprightly before God and people (2 Tim. 1:14). True believers collectively represented the temple of God (1 Tim. 3:15) where God's Spirit dwelt (1 Cor. 6:19). With regards to the false teachers, they made no mention of the Holy Spirit. Paul taught elsewhere that the Spirit was not present in the lives of unbelievers (compare Rom 7 with Rom 8). They lived under the enslaving power of sin and were incapable of doing God's will.

The heresy of the false teachers in Ephesus was complex and deceitful. It attracted many and caused believers to wander from the gospel. The truth of the gospel was compromised; the

attractiveness of the gospel was distorted. Silencing the elders who boldly propagated this errant message with its perverse lifestyle was Timothy’s top priority.

*The Literary Context of the Hymn*

Having looked at the historical situation in Ephesus giving special attention to the content and conduct of the false teachers, our focus will narrow to the paragraph containing the song (3:14-16). In these verses Paul described the occasion and purpose for the epistle.<sup>60</sup> While he was occupied elsewhere personally addressing other apostolic issues, Paul maintained great concern for the church and his emissary in Ephesus. He desired to return and work alongside Timothy to squelch the false teaching and proclaim the true gospel, but he recognized his plan to travel back to Ephesus could be delayed.<sup>61</sup> However, the fragility of the spiritual climate in the Ephesian church could not wait for his personal intervention or be dependent on him alone. In light of this uncertainty, he drafted the apostolic missive<sup>62</sup> of 1 Timothy commissioning his official representative to exert greater zeal in confronting the false elders embedded in the church and exerting a very destructive influence on the faith of believers and the witness of the gospel to unbelievers. He also wanted to use the epistle to publicly convey greater apostolic authority on his young ambassador which would serve to encourage Timothy and influence the church leaders and congregants to heed Timothy’s instructions. It was mandatory that Timothy and the church recognize their critical role and responsibility as the people of God in the city of Ephesus and in the province of Asia.

Paul states that his chief purpose for writing was to call attention to the conduct (ἀναστρέφω)<sup>63</sup> of the members of God’s household (οἶκος) and not only among family members but as God’s witnesses in the environment of Ephesus.<sup>64</sup> He sought to alert them to the fact that God had claims on and expectations for the behavior of his people.<sup>65</sup> Character and conduct, along with sound doctrine, were woefully lacking in the church due to the impact of the false teachers. One word that seemed to comprehensively describe the conduct Paul wanted for the believers was “godliness.”<sup>66</sup> For him this word encompassed the breadth of their responsibilities to understand the truths of the Christian message and demonstrate godly behavior, relationships, and attitudes that faithfully bore witness to the person of Christ.

Regarding their conduct, while Paul saw the necessity of godly elders pastoring each congregation and setting an example for their congregations to follow, the behavior of the saints

was not to be legally imposed on them by a hierarchy of leadership but be self-regulating with the enablement of the Holy Spirit. His appeal was that every believer would “conduct themselves,” stressing the middle voice of the infinitive, as loving and loyal children in God’s family (3:15). Their confession of faith had to be mirrored by godly living that affected every aspect of life and every relationship. Their conduct and their verbal witness had to manifest the character of Christ.

The churches met in homes and reflected the social dynamics of a typical Greek household where there were elders, parents, family members, servants, and slaves.<sup>67</sup> Paul believed the interpersonal relationships in the body of Christ, the spiritual family that made up the household,<sup>68</sup> were vital to the testimony of the gospel. God was “Father” of all, the source of their physical and spiritual life (1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). His people were adopted into and made up one united family through redemption offered in Christ. As a member of this family, Timothy himself was instructed to treat the older men as “fathers,” older women as “mothers,” younger men as “brothers,” and the younger women as “sisters” (1 Tim. 5:1-2). The normative household codes that governed relationships in society, including husbands and wives, parents and children, owners and slaves, were to be honored while raising the standard for these relationships based on Christian love, respect, and purity.

The family household of God was “the church of the living God” (3:15). They were the people of God who assembled to worship, pray, study, serve, and witness on behalf of the God who was alive, active, powerful, and present among his people.<sup>69</sup> They “had been entrusted with the truth”<sup>70</sup> and had the responsibility to proclaim and safeguard it with faithfulness and integrity. The “church of the living God” stood in stark contrast to the pagan temples dedicated to Artemis, the Caesar cult, and other local deities, but tragically had wandered from the truth and lost the vitality of her spiritual life and witness.

The church represented a metaphorical temple with its pillars and a foundation devoted to God. Paul frequently referred to the believing community as the temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwelt (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21).<sup>71</sup> Wherever the believers gathered to worship Jesus Christ and proclaim the gospel, they functioned like a temple erected in a public space where the citizens of the city could listen to and observe the gospel in action. Paul referred to two essential components of a temple inscribing both as anarthrous singular nouns: a pillar (στῦλος) and a foundation (ἐδραίωμα), and both were directly related to the truth of the gospel.<sup>72</sup>

A singular pillar symbolized the church as a unified body holding up the truth for the community to observe. Possibly Paul used the anarthrous form to indicate that the church in Ephesus was very important in the spreading of the gospel, but it represented only one of many churches charged with this same responsibility.<sup>73</sup> Pillars held the roof aloft. In the context of Ephesus, the temple of Artemis, one of the wonders of the ancient world, housed 100 columns, each standing 18 meters high to support an auspicious, glimmering, marble roof honoring their goddess.<sup>74</sup> The church had the obligation to lift high the truth of the gospel for all to see. Solomon Andria notes that the pillars functioned to support the roofs of ancient temples, but they also displayed inscriptions praising the gods being worshiped in that facility. The writing engraved on the stone columns provided stories for the worshipers about the character and accomplishments of their gods for successive generations.<sup>75</sup> Paul’s admonition to God’s household in Ephesus was to boldly declare the gospel through their proclamation and behavior.

Paul used the analogy of the foundation of a temple to describe another aspect of the church’s responsibilities. The foundation served to buttress, hold firm, stabilize, and keep the structure from shifting.<sup>76</sup> In like manner, God’s family was to bear the weight of the gospel and safeguard it from being shifted or eroded by perpetrators of heterodox doctrine, whether they were false Christian teachers, Judaizers, or pagans.

Paul’s emphasis in this paragraph that introduced the song was of the Church of the Living God, as they knew how to conduct themselves within the household of faith and among their pagan neighbors. Their conduct included the responsibility of proclaiming the truth with clarity and boldness and safeguarding the truth from compromise.<sup>77</sup> Bridging between his metaphors, which described the role and mission of the believers, and the song, he reflected: “Beyond all question,<sup>78</sup> the mystery of godliness is great” (ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον, 3:16). By common agreement among the people of God, the mystery that produced the capacity for God’s household to fulfill their calling in declaring and protecting the truth of the gospel as a way of life was beyond human comprehension.<sup>79</sup>

To understand the phrase, the mystery of godliness (τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον),<sup>80</sup> it is essential to analyze the syntactical relationship between mystery and godliness. The definite article and the noun, “the mystery,” form an *inclusio* bracketing “the godliness.” Literally, it reads, “the—of the godliness—mystery.” One explanation of the syntactical relationship is to identify “the godliness” as a genitive of product. Daniel B. Wallace explains that the genitive

(godliness, εὐσεβείας) is the product of the noun to which it is related.<sup>81</sup> godliness is the product of the mystery. This grammatical perspective can be seen in Towner's translation of the passage: "the mystery from which true godliness springs is great."<sup>82</sup>

Godliness (*eusebeia*) was an important concept that Paul used multiple times in the Pastorals (1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:1).<sup>83</sup> In the first century Greek context, godliness referred to an entire way of life that manifested respectful devotion to a god or to God.<sup>84</sup> For Paul, *eusebeia* represented a life that honored and revered God as Creator and Redeemer in all aspects of life, including external behavior, internal attitudes, and sound doctrine. The person who pursued godliness devoted his entire life—body, mind, and spirit—to honoring and pleasing his god/God. The apostle believed redeemed human beings, full of God's Spirit, were capable of and expected to live this way in their relationship with the living God and before all onlookers. True godliness included conduct that was pleasing to God and loving towards people. Godliness included a power dimension<sup>85</sup> that brought about internal transformation: constraint against carnal temptations, courage to proclaim the gospel, and faith to perform the miraculous.<sup>86</sup> However, the source that provided the capacity to live a life of godliness was indeed a mystery—a truth only comprehensible through divine revelation.

What then was the mystery that could generate a lifestyle of godliness? That God made it possible for sinful people to become members of his family, know and experience the truth, and conduct themselves in ways that honored Him and demonstrated love for others, was a great mystery. How was it possible that people once dead in sin (Eph 2:1, 5) could exhibit this type of godliness?

A mystery (μυστήριον) was a truth about the Person of God or a work of God which could only be known when God provided revelation for people to understand what was unknown and unknowable. Paul selected a song that explained the mystery of how people could live godly lives.<sup>87</sup> The punctuation at the end of the phrase (ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον), a colon or semicolon, indicated that there was not a full stop (period) between the declaration and the song. The phrase was intended to continue with a relative pronoun, "who" (ὃς), followed by the song which explained the mystery describing how it was possible for believers in Ephesus to conduct themselves in all godliness as God's people. This mystery was not simply a revelation of information, but the mystery was a person, Jesus Christ. The mystery was Christ who serves as the subject for each of the six lines in the song.<sup>88</sup> The answer to how it

was possible for the members of God’s household to live in godliness was the premise of the song’s content.

While it is beyond the scope of this study, readers should note that Paul moves immediately after the song with an adversative (δὲ, *de*, 4:1) to describe what the Holy Spirit had revealed about the false teachers. While Christ provided the way for his followers to live godly lives, deceitful spirits and demons deceived the false teachers to mislead and destroy the people’s faith and lead them towards lives marked by ungodliness. Paul denounced them and the demonic sources of their teaching, the perversion of their content and conduct, the contradictions of their message compared to God’s revelation, and the tragic impact they were having on the gospel witness and the household of faith.<sup>89</sup>

### *The Song*

We now turn to the words, meaning, and structure of the song itself,<sup>90</sup> which Paul employed to explain the mystery of godliness.<sup>91</sup>

Who appeared in a body,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,

Ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί,  
ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι,  
ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις,  
ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν,  
ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ,

The song is introduced with a masculine relative pronoun (ὃς, *who*),<sup>92</sup> and the song functions as a relative clause clarifying the content of the mystery that makes godly living possible.<sup>93</sup> Grammatically the gender of the relative pronoun is confusing because the previous statement contains no masculine nouns to serve as the antecedent of the relative pronoun. The two nouns in the introductory clause, mystery (μυστήριον) and godliness (εὐσέβεια) are neuter and feminine, respectively. Wallace resolves the issue: “One of the standard features of Greek poetry is the introductory use of the relative pronoun. Sometimes, however, the relative pronoun has no antecedent because the hymnic fragment is introduced without syntactic connection.”<sup>94</sup>

The mystery that makes godliness achievable is a person, the Lord Jesus. The song reveals how he modeled a life of godliness and made godliness possible for his followers. The emphasis on Jesus Christ is significant not only because he is the heart of Paul’s gospel, but also

how Christ serves as the divine-human mediator who came to earth, exemplified godliness, and offers this transforming enablement to those who faithfully follow Him. It was Jesus whom the false teachers marginalized by replacing Him with other mediators, and rather than depending on Christ's provision of salvation by faith, as they put their confidence in adherence to the law to make themselves acceptable to God.

Before looking at the six phrases in the song, one should note that scholars approach the song with many theological presuppositions based on their views of the essential steps which Christ took to provide salvation. As Fee rightly observes, "There has been considerable debate, with nothing in consensus."<sup>95</sup> Some view the hymn as a Christological creed that describes the truth that was to be proclaimed and safeguarded by the church (3:15).<sup>96</sup> But few report a close connection between the words of the song and the issues being faced in the Ephesian context. It seems one's hermeneutics should assume Paul composed or selected this hymn because of its relevance to the topic just introduced, which then leads towards the mystery that produces Godliness, as well as the upheaval being faced by Timothy and the church caused by the false teachers.

Interpretation of the song is affected by its poetic nature, the structure of the phrases, and the meaning of the words as intended by Paul for this context. Each of the six phrases in the song begins with an aorist passive verb (with a -θη ending to exhibit a repeated assonance) where the subject, Jesus—as the antecedent of the relative pronoun—is the recipient of the action. Each of the lines, except the third, contains the preposition ἐν (*en*) which means in, by, or among and requires the noun it governs to be in the dative case.<sup>97</sup> And each of the six nouns following the preposition are anarthrous.

Regarding the overarching structure of the song, there are three options. Some view the song as six independent stanzas, some two stanzas with three lines in each, and some three stanzas with two lines each. The structure is adjusted by the interpreter based on how he/she interprets the meaning of each line.

Some see a chronological progression in the life of Jesus described in the six lines, moving from incarnation to ascension.<sup>98</sup> Those who advocate two stanzas with three lines each thus interpret the first three lines as chronological describing Jesus' earthly, salvific ministry (incarnation, resurrection, ascension); and the second stanza recounts the ministry of the church after Pentecost: preaching Christ and seeing the nations respond in faith.<sup>99</sup> However, this group

struggles with the logical placement of line 6 and claim it describes the ultimate glorification of Jesus “in glory,” not referring to a location, in the heavenlies, but the manner of his exaltation—he has been glorified. Those who view the song as three stanzas with two lines each stress the antithetical parallelism of the phrases based on the meanings of the final nouns (for example, flesh/spirit; angels/nations; world/glory).<sup>100</sup> The first stanza describes Jesus’ life in Palestine depicting his life from incarnation to death and from resurrection to ascension. The second stanza records those who witnessed his earthly ministry—angels in the heavenlies and nations on the earth.<sup>101</sup> The third stanza describes the reception he received on earth and in heaven—accepted on earth by those who believed in Him and in heaven by the angelic hosts who welcomed Him on his return to glory. Rather than indicating those who received and honored Christ, Guthrie explains that the third stanza portrays places of Christ’s triumph: on earth and in heaven.<sup>102</sup>

If one reads through the song, it will seem that a more literal reading would be chronological, starting with Jesus’ incarnation and concluding with his ascension. Keeping in view the purpose for the song, which is to reveal the mystery that made godliness possible for God’s people contrasted with another gospel being proclaimed in the city, one could conclude that the song revealed how Jesus lived a life of godliness and made godliness possible for his followers. Below is a brief explanation of each of the six lines considering what Jesus, the provider of godliness, did to make godliness a reality in the lives of believers in the context of Ephesus.

*Line 1: Who was manifest/revealed in flesh / Ὃς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί*

The opening line of the song stressed Christ’s incarnation as a human, taking on flesh with all of its incumbent weaknesses.<sup>103</sup> Given the context of the false teachers who minimized the role of the “man” Christ and viewed flesh as evil, this line captured what Paul had already claimed about Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5), who “came into the world” (1:15), appeared before people (2 Tim. 1:10), identified himself with creaturely humanity, and as God served faithfully as the mediator between God and humankind (2:5). The incarnation was a fundamental Christian truth without which salvation was not possible.<sup>104</sup> His becoming fully human undermined the false teachers’ emphasis on asceticism and dualism that disdained flesh and praised the spirit. This



opening line affirmed the reality of Christ's incarnation and implied his preexistence.<sup>105</sup> The eternal God became flesh and made his dwelling among humankind (John 1:14).

Regarding the issue of the lack of an article before "flesh," Mathewson and Emig note, "Articles are often absent before definite nouns in prepositional phrases."<sup>106</sup> The key determinate whether a scholar should add the definite article or not is the context. Should the text read he appeared in flesh or in the flesh? The anarthrous phrase emphasized quality—he was truly flesh or existed in the sphere of creatureliness.<sup>107</sup> Given Paul's message that Jesus was the mystery who made godliness possible and served as the example of godliness for his followers, even though he was fully human, his emphasis on the humanity of Christ seems clear. God invaded human history as a man of flesh to bring salvation and serve as the only qualified mediator between God and fallen humanity. Portraying Christ being fully flesh and yet setting an example of godliness provided encouragement to the believers that they too could be godly while creaturely, and they could value their bodies, originating from dirt, yet made in the image of God.

*Line 2: was vindicated/justified by (the) Spirit / ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι*

The verb to justify or vindicate (δικαιόω) is a highly charged theological term.<sup>108</sup> A. E. McGrath notes that Paul's use of vocabulary related to justification remained grounded in the OT where the meaning is more in alignment with rightness than righteousness. "Justification results from an action of God whereby an individual is set in a right relationship with God, vindicated, or declared to be in the right."<sup>109</sup> People who have been justified or vindicated are in "a right and faithful relation" with God. Some stress that only God is righteous and does what is upright morally, ethically, and spiritually. All people are sinners—unrighteous before God. They believe God forensically declares the unrighteous to be righteous when they repent and come to Him in faith. Sinners are still sinners in their fallen state but God, as Judge, declares them righteous.<sup>110</sup>

The word, justify, can mean made righteous, declared righteous or just, or shown to be righteous or innocent.<sup>111</sup> Here the concept can include a change of heart and character, an "uprighting" of a person's inner being before a holy God. God transforms and imparts righteousness into one's being. Fee observes, "Paul knows nothing about a salvation that does not include the righteousness of God, both received as the gift of right standing with God and as behavior that reflects that relationship . . . the Spirit [is] the one who [a]ffects God's

righteousness in our everyday lives."<sup>112</sup> Right relationship and right character marked Jesus Christ in his human existence and project the image his followers were to emulate.

How would Paul apply these ideas to Christ who came into the world as a fleshly human being and yet was faultless? Theologians would not question his perfect and sinless character. His personhood did not need to be vindicated. Many scholars read line 2 as God vindicating Christ through the resurrection which followed his humiliation and death on the cross.<sup>113</sup> Keener views line 2 as depicting Christ's resurrection which is a demonstration of God's acquittal of Him after his condemnation by Pilate and the Jews which led to his death.<sup>114</sup> Those who hold this view presume that Christ's death and resurrection are cardinal doctrines for Paul and must be implied in line 2. Even though the song does not speak directly of Jesus' death,<sup>115</sup> Paul must have seen vindication connected to his resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is evident that Paul spoke of Christ's death in 1 Timothy 2:5, but was he implying his death, followed by his resurrection in this phrase in the song? By way of comparison, one should note John's apocalyptic and compressed description of the triumphant Christ who was born and immediately caught up to his throne without any mention of his death (Rev 12:5). Could there be another way of understanding Paul's statement in light of the Ephesian crisis?

Returning to a chronological portrayal of Christ's exemplary life in the song, line 2 could be viewed as recording the next great event experienced by Jesus. At Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in visible form and God publicly declared, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). This event served as a public vindication of the man, Christ Jesus: a declaration of innocence from the voice of God, followed by the visible coming of the Spirit to rest upon Him. In spite of his scandalous birth and simple upbringing, Jesus' identity and holiness were confirmed: he was God's Son, God's Messiah, his unique Servant.<sup>116</sup>

According to the pattern found in Luke's Gospel, the Spirit as the divine agent came upon people who were described as already righteous (Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, and Simeon were reported to be "righteous" or "favored" before the Spirit came upon them; Luke 1:6, 28, 30, 34; 2:25).<sup>117</sup> The Spirit coming upon his appointed people vindicated them in the eyes of their critics and empowered them to engage in God's redemptive history. Following the anointing of the Spirit on Jesus, the Father declared Christ's identity, mission, and righteousness, "This is my

Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the “man” Christ Jesus initiated his public, messianic, vocational, ministry.<sup>118</sup>

While Jesus was fully flesh, the Spirit vindicated Him.<sup>119</sup> This message clearly countered the dualistic and ascetic teachings of the false prophets who viewed the flesh as evil and the Holy Spirit as good. The Spirit coming upon the man Christ Jesus did not change his creaturely nature but showed the presence of both flesh and Spirit at work in his life to accomplish God’s purposes. As flesh and filled with the Spirit, Jesus exhibited godliness in word and deed. His followers, including Paul the worst of sinners, were vindicated while fully human by the coming of the Spirit and empowered to live in godliness. Line 2 supported Paul’s view that salvation and Spirit anointing were holistic and all-encompassing. The whole being of Christ was anointed by the Spirit. Likewise, his followers received the Spirit and developed godly practices in word, deed, faith, attitudes, and adherence to doctrinal truth.

The antithetical parallelism of the last two words of lines 1 and 2, flesh and Spirit, could be viewed as highlighting the holistic nature of Christ. He was completely flesh but also filled with the Spirit beginning at his conception by the Spirit (Luke 1:35), later anointed and empowered by the Spirit (Luke 3:22), led by the Spirit (Luke 4:1), and filled with the Spirit throughout his life on earth (Luke 4:1; 10:21; Matt 27:50-53).<sup>120</sup> Those who followed Christ were of a similar nature as fully human but also made alive, guided, and empowered by the Spirit.

*Line 3: Was seen/viewed (by) angels / ὡφθη ἀγγέλοις*

Line 3 is the exception to the grammatical pattern in the song. There is no preposition (ἐν), but the noun is in the dative, a dative of recipient<sup>121</sup>—Jesus was seen or observed with respect to or by angels or by the angels. Wallace describes this dative as emphasizing the passivity of the recipients, those represented by the noun in the dative. The recipients did not act or initiate the act of seeing. They simply observed the actions of the subject of the phrase, Jesus Christ.<sup>122</sup> This emphasis on the observer’s role of the angels is based on the line’s grammatical construction and is supported by Daniel Reid who states that Paul at times “could employ angels as foils for the surpassing glory of the gospel of Christ.”<sup>123</sup> From Paul’s perspective, when did the angels view Christ?

Marshall, holding to a two-stanza structure for the song, claims that Jesus was seen by angels in heaven after his resurrection and ascension. He maintains that this statement provides further evidence of his vindication.<sup>124</sup> Bromiley, on the other hand, describes the presence of angels during Jesus’ ministry on earth, “They are naturally present when this [story of Christ] both begins with the nativity (Matt 1; Luke 1-3) and ends with the resurrection (Matt 28:2) and the ascension (Acts 1:10ff) . . . on his way to the cross in his temptation (Mark 1:12) and then before the crucifixion (Luke 22:43) . . . They will come with Christ when he returns in glory (Matt 24:31).<sup>125</sup> Andria holds a similar position: the vindication by the Spirit and seen by angels occurred at Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River.<sup>126</sup>

Recalling the historical context of Ephesus, the false teachers minimized the importance of Jesus as the One and Only Mediator between God and human beings. They believed the mediatorial role was filled by angels and the giver of the Law, Moses. To clarify the participation of angels during the ministry of Christ and in the lives of those who followed him, Paul used this phrase to emphasize the witnessing role of angels in the saving work of Jesus Christ. They observed the One who took on flesh to mediate between God and humankind, overcame the temptations of the devil, ministered selflessly, was misunderstood, and ultimately condemned and murdered. Line 3 minimized the importance of angels which may be the reason why Paul altered the grammatical form of this statement while keeping the main attention on Jesus. In the epistle, Paul mentions that angels observe and bear witness of the work and judgments of Christ’s followers (1 Tim. 5:21). Angels are God’s messengers and assist his people, but Jesus alone is Mediator, Savior, and the Provider of Godliness.

*Line 4: Was preached among the nations / ἐκκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν*

This phrase of the song could assert that the person and ministry of Jesus was publicly proclaimed in the sphere or realm of the nations.<sup>127</sup> Some scholars consider the first three lines as one stanza dealing with the ministry of Jesus on earth: he was incarnated, resurrected, and exalted to heaven where he was seen by the angelic hosts. The next stanza, according to this group, describes the ministry responsibilities of the church. “Back on earth,” in contrast with what occurred in heaven at Jesus’ exaltation, Jesus was preached among the nations and believed on in the world.<sup>128</sup> This perspective is reasonable except for the sixth line which returns to the

subject of Jesus as he was either taken up in glory at the ascension or honored with glory in the heavenlies.

Part of the motivation for interpreting line 4 as the ministerial responsibility of the church following Christ's ascension is the presupposition by some that Jesus' earthly ministry was almost exclusively limited to Jews in Israel. On the day of Pentecost and thereafter, global evangelization and discipleship became the agenda of the church.<sup>129</sup> For example, Keener states, "The Gentile mission was at most peripheral to Jesus' earthly ministry: he did not actively seek out Gentiles for ministry (Matt 10:5) . . . The Gentile mission became central to the early church."<sup>130</sup> It is true that the church began to slowly move centrifugally from Jerusalem to evangelize people beyond the Jews in Israel following Pentecost. However, this perspective ignores the ministry of Jesus to Gentile nations while he walked this earth. It also ignores the expanding propagation of the gospel by those transformed by Christ after personal encounters with him. Matthew, the Gospel writer considered by some to be writing primarily to a Jewish audience, highlights the gospel witness to Gentiles who amplified the message. Matthew records that Jesus was preached among the nations by the magi (Matt 2:2-3), by many who experienced healing even as far as Syria (4:24), by Gentile inhabitants in Galilee who saw the great light (4:15-16), through the testimony of healing by the Roman centurion's servant (8:10, 13), through the witness of the deliverance of the Syrophoenician's daughter (15:22, 28), and by the Roman guards at his crucifixion and resurrection (27:54; 28:4). During his life on earth, the gospel of Jesus was preached among many of the ethnic groups (*ethnē*)<sup>131</sup> throughout the Middle East.<sup>132</sup>

Unlike the false teachers who showed racial exclusivism and partiality in their witness, the church had to be faithful to the one who "wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).<sup>133</sup> Jesus came to earth to fulfill the promise given to Abraham that his seed would be a blessing to all the nations. He intentionally crossed political and cultural borders to bring the good news to other people and nations. Those who heard, believed, were healed, and expanded the claims of the gospel.

The mystery of godliness came to offer salvation to all and to provide the ability to live in all godliness no matter what was one's ethnic or religious background. Unlike the restricted and exclusive message of the opponents, Timothy and the Ephesian church were to continue to spread the gospel in the city, province, and beyond to all who would hear.

The antithetical parallelism of the final words of lines 3 and 4, angels and nations, could represent two audiences: one who observed and the other who not only saw but received the gospel. Angels witnessed but did not participate in the work of salvation nor receive its benefits. The nations experienced the gospel and were commissioned to continue the disciple-making process as an expression of their godliness.

*Line 5: Was believed on in the world / ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ*

The false teachers appeared to emphasize obedience to the law and living Jewishly in terms of customs and culture. They ignored the importance of faith, especially faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They replaced faith in Him with observance of the Law and, in the vacuum of faith, they propagated extreme practices such as abstaining from marriage and avoiding certain foods. For Paul, faith in Christ was the essential step needed to be approved by God. Jesus modeled the life of faith as he bore witness to God and entrusted himself to his heavenly Father. The life of godliness commenced with faith for anyone living in this created world (*kosmos*)<sup>134</sup> and moved forward from faith to faith.

*Line 6: Was taken up in glory / ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ*

The term for “taken up” is found in Mark 16:19, Acts 1:2, 11, 22. In each of these cases, the authors described the physical ascension of Jesus into heaven. Perkins reports that taken up (ἀνελήμφθη) “always refers to the ascension . . . the relocation of a person to another place.”<sup>135</sup> Marshall notes, “He was taken up to be with God in glory; although this clause comes after the mention of the worldwide mission, it can only refer to the ascension.”<sup>136</sup> If someone acknowledges that the earthly mission of Jesus included the proclamation of good news to the nations and that faith in Him was the entry point into his Kingdom, line 6 is the appropriate chronological description of the end and climax of his earthly ministry—he ascended into heaven and to his throne.<sup>137</sup>

There are alternate views about the meaning of line 6. Keener states that this phrase refers to “Jesus’ return (cf. Dan 7:13-14) rather than to his ascension.”<sup>137</sup> Towner believes the emphasis is not on his ascension from earth, but the status of glorification conferred on Him through his exaltation.<sup>138</sup>

The dative, in glory (ἐν δόξῃ<sup>139</sup>), could be a dative of manner<sup>140</sup> or a dative of location: the manner in which he ascended was one that was glorious as “he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight” (Acts 1:9). Or the emphasis of the dative could be on the location, the highest heavens, when God “raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given” (Eph 1:20-23).

The one who lived in all godliness was taken up by God in a glorious manner and exalted over all creation. Christ was taken into heaven bodily including his flesh and Spirit. Those who put their faith in Him had the promise that one day they would be resurrected and join Him in the heavenlies. If his people would be faithful in their faith, godliness, and testimony, they lived with the blessed hope that their resurrection awaited them (2 Tim. 2:18).

Viewing the song as a chronological description of the life of Jesus seems to explain the basis for the mystery that makes godliness possible and provide a polemic against the false teaching of Paul’s opponents. While the false teachers gave their attention to navigating a dualistic existence between flesh and spirit, stressing adherence to the law in order to avoid living unrighteously, Paul’s song exalted Christ and provided guidance and hope for those who lived for Him in this sinful world.

The final words of lines 5 and 6 make another interesting comparison between the world (*kosmos*) where Christ came to provide salvation for all humankind and glory (*doxa*) the eternal location where Christ and his people would be united and spend eternity together. Godliness was to be the distinguishing mark of his people while they lived on this earth, and it was the key characteristic of those who would be caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thess 4:17).

### *Conclusion*

Songs are amazing means of communication in that they convey a message that far exceeds the limitation of their words. Songs inspire the imagination and faith while speaking explicitly to the existential conditions one faces. Paul used the Christ hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16 because it expressly addressed the *ad hoc* conditions being faced by the church in Ephesus. The song countered the false teachings of the opponents to the gospel and exalted Christ who not only lived a life of godliness as a human being on earth but provided the spiritual enablement so his followers could live and grow in godliness. The members of God’s household would truly

proclaim and safeguard the truth of the gospel as they committed themselves to honoring Christ, lived in the presence of the Spirit, exhibited moral purity and holiness, loved one another, and boldly proclaimed the gospel to the nations. Choose your songs wisely and pay attention to the words.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16 is labeled by various scholars as a song, hymn, hymn fragment, or credal statement. See Jeremy Beghie, “The Bible and Music,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 523. The hymn may have already been well-known in the early church. Paul employed it to stress his agenda. See William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 551-552. Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 762, refers to the passage as an early Christian hymn focusing on Christ.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on commissive and inferential language see Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 73-74. Commissive language is an important reminder that God communicates to people holistically including their rational minds and emotions.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 192.

<sup>4</sup> It is not in the scope of this article to address the authorship or dating of 1 Timothy. For further examination of these issues, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 607-649; Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 23-68; and Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 9-36.

<sup>5</sup> Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 762, observes, “The question of context usually either is neglected or at best receives mere lip service.”

<sup>6</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 24.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 10, rightly observes, “The letter betrays evidence everywhere that it was intended for the church itself, not just Timothy. But because of defections in the leadership, Paul does not, as before, write directly to the church, but to the church through Timothy.” For a similar view see Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Mounce comments, “It is generally recognized that this paragraph is the heart of the Pastoral corpus.” William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 214.

<sup>9</sup> Mounce translates the phrase “the pillar” as “a pillar” which agrees with the anarthrous form in the Greek text. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 213.

<sup>10</sup> Mounce uses the relative pronoun, who, in his translation which agrees with the Greek text and is supported by the oldest manuscript evidence. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 213-214.

<sup>11</sup> The NIV uses this indentation scheme for the song which proposes three strophes of two lines each and a type of parallelism within each strophe. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 214, configures the hymn with two strophes, each with three indented lines. The poetic aspects of the song will be discussed below.

<sup>12</sup> Fee believes the only legitimate occasion and purpose for Paul writing this epistle is to stop the influence of the false teachers. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 7. However, Samuel M. Ngewa, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Nairobi: Hippo Books, 2009), 80, states that “Paul’s ultimate goal in writing this letter is to inform Timothy and the members of the church in Ephesus how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household.”

<sup>13</sup> Paul writes to Timothy to command certain, unspecified men μὴ ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν (not to teach other, different, or novel things). The present tense complementary infinitive has the prefix ἕτερος, meaning other, so “other” of a different kind, which is combined with the word, διδάσκω, means to teach. The word, called “a fascinating word” by Mounce, refers to false teachings which differ from Paul’s gospel (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 19) and is only found twice in the NT, both times in this epistle (1 Tim 1:3; 6:3). It is also worth noting that the infinitive is in the present tense implying that the action is present and is ongoing. Thus, Mounce translates it “continue to teach.” See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 598-599; and William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 303.

<sup>14</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 44. Paul speaks of “Jewish myths” in his letter to Titus in Crete (Titus 1:14), but he does not use the word “Jewish” in his letters to Timothy. There is clearly a strong Jewish influence on the content of the false teachers in Ephesus in terms of teaching the law and an implied exclusion of Gentiles from the believing community. A Jewish perspective could explain the attention to myths, genealogies, and the mediatorial roles of Moses and angels.

<sup>15</sup> The magical milieu of Ephesus is seen in the slow conversion process of Ephesians who held onto their practices of sorcery until a gospel power encounter exposed the demonic nature and destructiveness of their indigenous religion. Their total commitment to the Lordship of Christ was marked by their abandonment and eradication of their pagan religious paraphernalia (Acts 19:17-20)

<sup>16</sup> Ephesus was known as a trading center with a robust economy giving profit and wealth opportunities to the group of aggressive, shrewd, and hardworking people. A significant portion of the economy centered on religious worship (Acts 19:23-31). See Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 37, 38.

<sup>17</sup> See 1 Corinthians 7:1 where the Corinthians assert that it is not good for a man to marry (“touch a woman” as a euphemism for conjugal relationships with one’s wife) which seems quite similar to the false teachers of Ephesus who forbid people to marry (1 Tim. 4:3). For an in-depth discussion of the issue in Corinth, see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 270-277.

<sup>18</sup> Paul confronted the false teachers in Colosse who were imposing human-made rules on the believers and judging them based on what they ate and drank (Col 2:16, 21, 23). In Ephesus, the opponents are commanding believers to abstain from certain foods (1 Tim 4:3). See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 113-129.

<sup>19</sup> In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul addressed many of the issues that reoccur in his correspondence to Timothy such as the supremacy of Christ over all aspects of his creation, the mystery of Christ’s saving work, the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ, household codes related to marriage and to owner-slave relationships, and godly conduct in terms of sexual morality, conversations, and anger. For further study, see Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*.

<sup>20</sup> Every aspect of life in Ephesus, which included civic, religious, cultural, social, and economic affairs, was permeated by religious beliefs and practices. The cult of Artemis predated the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The influence of the emperor cult was growing. Judaism was being practiced by local Jews and possible God-fearers as indicated by the presence of a local synagogue (Acts 18:19). Whereas the Jews in Ephesus initially welcomed Paul and his gospel preaching, they grew hostile, became obstinate, refused to believe, and maligned the Way (Acts 19:9). This led to Paul establishing a teaching-preaching-miracle working, missional sending center, distinct from the synagogue, the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-12). See Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 37-39.

<sup>21</sup> It is generally understood that the church in Ephesus consisted of numerous house churches scattered across the city and beyond. Multiple gatherings made supervision of church leaders and their doctrine more challenging. See Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> I. Howard Marshall, “1 Timothy, Book of,” *DTIB*, 801.

<sup>23</sup> Paul refers to a group of false teachers as “certain men” (τισιν, an indefinite plural pronoun, 1 Tim 1:3), unspecified people. However, he named two of the more destructive leaders, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20), whom he had excommunicated. Hymenaeus is referenced again along with Philetus (2 Tim 2:17) as ringleaders who have wandered from the truth and destroy the faith of others. Alexander the metalworker opposed the gospel message and brought great harm to Paul. He was an ongoing threat (2 Tim 4:14-15).

<sup>24</sup> Mounce stresses the fact that these men “made a conscious, deliberate choice to reject the truth and as a result have brought the church into reproach.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 67.

<sup>25</sup> Guthrie notes an “absorbing interest in genealogies” among contemporary Jews which centers mainly around Pentateuchal descendancy. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 628. Friedrich Büchsel proposes that the genealogies are the biblical history of Jewish people but embellished by mythical interpretation. Friedrich Büchsel, “γενεά, γενεαλογία,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 664. Towner mentions one reason for studying genealogies, “Within Judaism, genealogies played the key role of establishing a person’s bloodline and link to a particular family and tribe: rights by birth.” Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 110. However, some scholars think the pursuit of genealogies had to do with the content of their teaching and not about their status in the community. “There is no evidence to suggest . . . that the false teachers speculated on their own genealogies which would give them standing in Judaism.” See: I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (London; T&T Clark, 2004), 366. However, the opponents desire to be recognized as teachers of the law (νομοδιδάσκαλοι) by the community implies they were searching for ways to strengthen their leadership positions in the churches where they were already teaching unorthodox doctrine.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew E Hill, “Genealogy,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 245.

<sup>27</sup> According to Büchsel, “They are Jews.” Büchsel, “γενεά,” 664; of the same opinion is Solomon Andria, “1 Timothy,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), 1469.

<sup>28</sup> The practices they imposed on their followers may not have included circumcision which is not mentioned in either of the epistles to Timothy. On one hand, they instituted a measured Judaizing, and on the other hand, they were extreme in their religious and cultural restrictions: forbidding marriage and the eating of certain foods.

<sup>29</sup> Larry J. Perkins, *The Pastoral Letters: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 10, observes that the teachers “may not be Jews.”

<sup>30</sup> A case can be made for the false teachers being Hellenistic Gentiles. The two teachers whom Paul excommunicated, Alexander and Hymenaeus, have names that identify them as Greeks (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17; 4:14). Hymenaeus was a name frequently found in Greek mythology. Regarding Alexander, although this name was given to Jews, Towner asserts that this man was the same individual who inspired the riot of the idol makers against Paul in Acts 19:33. His occupation and influence in the city would imply that he was a Gentile who eventually gained a prominent position in the Ephesian church. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 160.

<sup>31</sup> Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 28. The name Alexander is a Greek name but was used by both Gentiles and Jews.

<sup>32</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 628.

<sup>33</sup> Highlighting one’s identity with a tribe in Israel along with maintaining Jewish religious and cultural practices and having received formal, Jewish orthodox training served increase the status of teachers both in the church and synagogue (Phil 3:3-6).

<sup>34</sup> To bolster his authority as a commissioned agent of Jesus Christ who has the right to stop the false teachers, Paul stresses that he is an apostle of Christ within the Ephesian context. Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> The content of the false teachers was a syncretistic blend of many religious elements but not clearly systematized.

<sup>36</sup> In Paul's two letters to Timothy, there is no mention of the opponents pushing for circumcision as was the case with Pharisaic Christian Judaizers in Galatia, Antioch, and Jerusalem. This leads one to believe that the false teachers of Ephesus were more Hellenized and, while they held strongly to some aspects of asceticism, they maintained a high view of the human body. Unlike most Hebraic Christians, they did not advocate circumcision, their perspective agreeing with Paul but for different reasons. Another possible explanation for no mention of the need for circumcision was that the audience being targeted by the false teachers was Jewish, people who already bore the mark of the covenant. They had little concern for preaching their hetero-gospel to the Gentiles.

<sup>37</sup> The law (νόμος) was to be used lawfully (νομίμως), also translated as properly or rightfully. Paul used the same adverb in 2 Timothy 2:5 to describe the athlete who was required to complete "according to the rules" (νομίμως). This observation is probably a play on words: the law used lawfully. Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 85. Paul taught that obedience to the law did not make one righteous, upright before God. While the law was good and spiritual (Rom 7:13-14), it was powerless to transform lives and to enable people to overcome sin and live uprightly (Rom 8:3). The law set apart the OT people of God from their pagan neighbors, but it did not change their hearts nor enable them to keep from transgressing God's standards.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>41</sup> Mounce further explains, "The opponents' preaching resulted in speculation. The goal of Paul's command that they stop their false preaching is love, thus repeating a basic conviction of the early church that the greatest command, in that it sums up all the other commands, is the command to love (Matt 22:34-40; Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14) and that love is more significant than ritual observance such as law keeping." Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel G. Reid, "Angels, Archangels," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 22, observes, "In some Jewish traditions, the Law had been ordained through angels and by a mediator" which stood in stark contrast to Paul's teaching on the work of God in Christ.

<sup>43</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 568.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 566, 568.

<sup>45</sup> Andria states, "This verse [2:5] clearly affirms the humanity of Jesus . . . a mediator has to be one of us." Andria, "1 Timothy," 1470. Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 35.

<sup>46</sup> For a further examination of the role of angels, see Stephen F. Noll, "Angels, Doctrine of," *DTIB*, 45-48. See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 315.

<sup>47</sup> G. W. Bromiley, "Angel," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 46.

<sup>48</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 244, aptly comments, "Sincerity is not enough. As long as people are 'sold as slaves to sin,' sincerity by itself can never lead to genuine fulfillment of God's law."

<sup>49</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 165, 167, speaks of the false teachers' separatist and elitist tendencies.

<sup>50</sup> Gentiles is the translation of *ethnê*, which Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 37, asserts a reference towards the nations distinct from Israel (1 Tim 2:7; 3:16; 2 Tim 4:17).

<sup>51</sup> Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011.), 200, 203, describes the ascetics who claimed, “The body is evil. True spirituality means even if you are married, marital relations should be avoided . . . they were convinced that spirituality and sexual practices were incompatible.”

<sup>53</sup> Believing that the body would be destroyed by God in the end, bodily appetites such as food and sex were matters of indifference. They had no bearing on one’s eternal destiny. This view encouraged a libertine perspective on life. However, Paul admonished Christians to have a high view of their bodies and to guard their moral purity because the body was included in the saving work of Christ. Their bodies belonged to the Lord, served as a temple for God’s Spirit, and would one day be resurrected. See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 255-260.

<sup>54</sup> Fee discusses the dualistic view of the body: one from an ascetic perspective; the other from a libertine angle. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 273-280.

<sup>55</sup> Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 99.

<sup>56</sup> Werner Foerster, “σέβομαι,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7; ed. G. Kittel, G. Friedrich; trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 183. To counter the opposition’s views about creation, social order, and procreation, Paul himself referenced the creation account (1 Tim 2:13-14).

<sup>57</sup> Foerster, “σέβομαι,” 183, reports that the false teachers “regarded the family with contempt.”

<sup>58</sup> Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 8, 122.

<sup>59</sup> Marshall observes that Paul, in this epistle, provides “a full-scale treatment of the dangers of wealth, both the desiring of it and the misuse of it (6:3-19; cf. 2:9-10; 5:6). The author is quite clear that there are real dangers, against which Christians must be extremely vigilant.” Marshall, “1 Timothy,” 804.

<sup>60</sup> Fee believes this paragraph presents the occasion but not the purpose which was stated in 1:3, silence the false teachers. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 91. Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, rev. ed., TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 98, seems misdirected when he states, “This section marks a pause in the apostle’s instructions . . . to give a reminder of the wonder of the Christian revelation.”

<sup>61</sup> While the situation in Ephesus was dire, Paul must have identified other locations that were equally or more tenuous. For this reason, he left Timothy in Ephesus while he traveled on to Macedonia (1:3). Paul undoubtedly received updates on the progress of Timothy’s mission in Ephesus and saw the need for his return. One cannot be certain whether he faced travel delays or ongoing spiritual dilemmas in his current location that demanded more of his time and attention, but in any case, he realized his speedy return to Ephesus was unlikely.

<sup>62</sup> Paul started this paragraph by stating, “I am writing these things to you [Timothy]” (Ταῦτά σοι γράφω), where “these things” is a reference of all he had already penned and possibly included the entire epistle. See Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 68.

<sup>63</sup> Paul uses ἀναστρέφεσθαι which is a present, middle or passive, infinitive. In the middle voice, it would read “to conduct oneself.” The verb means to behave or conduct oneself in a general, comprehensive sense. See Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 139. Mounce says this word refers to people’s general conduct, their way of life. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 220; Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 70.

<sup>64</sup> In the Greek text, the subject of the verb, to conduct, is not stated. While some believe Paul is speaking primarily Timothy, his deputy representative, the context seems to include the entire church, the household (οἶκος) of faith, all those commissioned to live in all godliness, proclaim the truth of the gospel, and safeguard the doctrine taught by the apostle. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 99. Paul used the word house or household to emphasize the people, not the building, and the social-spiritual unit they represented. The concept of the household included family relationships, loyalty, responsibilities, identity, protection, and refuge. See P. H. Towner, “Households and Household Codes,” in *DPAHL*, 417-418.

<sup>65</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 272-273.

<sup>66</sup> A comprehensive definition of godliness is provided below along with its syntactical relationship to “the mystery,” the subject in the nominal clause.

<sup>67</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 608.

<sup>68</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 103-104.

<sup>69</sup> Stott, *The Message*, 104.

<sup>70</sup> Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 91.

<sup>71</sup> For further discussion, see Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 92.

<sup>72</sup> Pillar and foundation stand appositionally to the church and household. Each of these descriptions is a critical component of the responsibility of the body of Christ in Ephesus. See Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 71.

<sup>73</sup> See Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 100.

<sup>74</sup> Stott, *The Message*, 105.

<sup>75</sup> Andria, “1 Timothy,” 1473; Keener, *Bible Background*, 608, refers to the role of pillars as providing support, upholding structures.

<sup>76</sup> Stott, *The Message*, 105. Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 71.

<sup>77</sup> Paul believed that Timothy’s example of godliness would have a more powerful influence against the false teachers than any attempt to combat their baseless myths. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 653.

<sup>78</sup> Paul introduces the song with the statement, “By common consent, great is the mystery th[at] produces godliness.” By common consent, undeniably, or most certainly are translations of ὁμολογουμένως. By common consent within the body of Christ, the mystery that makes godliness possible is great—beyond human comprehension. See Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 72.

<sup>79</sup> The greatness of this mystery is emphasized by Paul based on the word order of the sentence, “great” coming first in the statement and serving as an adjective to “the mystery.” Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 72.

<sup>80</sup> Both nouns have a definite article: the mystery and the godliness. “The godliness” accentuates the particular character that God has made possible through his mystery.

<sup>81</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 106. Wallace labels this form a genitive of produce. “The genitive substantive is the produce of the noun to which it stands related.”



<sup>82</sup> Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 270.

<sup>83</sup> *Eusebeia* occurs 15 times in the NT. Of those, 10 are found in the Pastorals.

<sup>84</sup> Foerster, “σέβομαι,” 168-196, asserts that godliness (*eusebia*) describes “the whole of Christian existence as the vibrant interplay between the knowledge of God and the observable life that emerges from this knowledge.” Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 170. See F. Q. Gouvea, “Godliness,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 468. Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 72, 62, translates *eusebia* as complete piety which integrates faith and life. He explains that this manifestation of piety included “the daily decision to pursue a life of godliness in conformity with the gospel.” Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 763, 792, states, *eusebia* “refers to the manner of life that issues from a [proper] knowledge of God, and thus includes both right thinking and right living.”

<sup>85</sup> John R.W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 88, reports, “True religion combines form and power.”

<sup>86</sup> Paul describes the false teachers displaying a form or veneer of godliness while denying the power of godliness (μόρφωσιν εὐσεβείας —τὴν δύναμιν εὐσεβείας, 2 Tim 3:5). These two genitives are genitives of production, “the genitive substantive produces the noun.” Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 104). Godliness was exhibited publicly through true worship and authentic love, not through ascetic practices and Jewish legalism. The mystery which was Christ produced godliness through the power of the gospel (Rom 1:16) applied to the life of the believer through the presence of the Holy Spirit. See Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 792-793; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 547-548; Guy H. King, *A Leader Led: An Expositional Study of 1 Timothy* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1962), 91.

<sup>87</sup> See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 226. Mysteries are described by Paul in Colossians 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; Ephesians 5:32.

<sup>88</sup> Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 73.

<sup>89</sup> See Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 432.

<sup>90</sup> Marshall labels the hymn as a “cryptic description of Christ . . . a remarkable revelation of God.” Marshall, “1 Timothy,” 802.

<sup>91</sup> Andria observes that a mystery cannot be known without the intervention of God who, in this hymn, reveals the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Andria, “1 Timothy,” 1473. Keener simply refers to the content of the hymn as “the standard of faith,” without referencing the mystery of godliness. Keener, *Bible Background*, 608. Mysteries were truths that exceeded people’s ability to understand unless God provided some revelation. In Paul’s other epistles, he described the “mystery.” In Colossians 1:27, he gave a definition of “this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” In this same epistle, he said that God “has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:12–14). The mystery of godliness was the divine revelation that sinners who had lived under the dominion of Satan could be transformed to be like Christ, receive adoption into his household of faith, and be given the spiritual ability to live godly, holy, lovingly, and boldly for Christ and the truth.

<sup>92</sup> Later manuscripts changed the relative pronoun, who (ὃς), to the noun, God (θεός). For further examination of the textual critical issues, see Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 95; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 214; and Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 278.

<sup>93</sup> David L. Mathewson and Elodie B. Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 432.

<sup>94</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 341.

<sup>95</sup> Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 93.

<sup>96</sup> Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 91, 95.

<sup>97</sup> If one follows the eight-case system, the noun following ἐν could be in the dative, locative, or instrumental case.

<sup>98</sup> Stott, *The Message*, 106-107, comments that the chronological interpretation views each line as a “fresh, consecutive event or stage in the career of Jesus, taking us from the first coming to the second.” For Stott, the hymn is a liturgical, doctrinal statement; he makes no connection between the hymn and the immediate context of the church in Ephesus.

<sup>99</sup> Stott, *The Message*, 107, mentions that the second stanza alludes to the “life of the exalted Lord” who was preached, believed on, and glorified. The two-stanza view is the one held by Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 431.

<sup>100</sup> Some further note the chiasmic nature of the song with the pattern of ab/ba/ab. See Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 96.

<sup>101</sup> Stott, *The Message*, 107-108.

<sup>102</sup> Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 102.

<sup>103</sup> According to Wallace’s paradigms, *Greek Grammar*, 153, this phrase could be labeled a dative of sphere. “The dative substantive indicates the sphere or realm in which the word to which it is related takes place or exists.” Jesus became manifest in the realm of creaturely flesh existing in the realm of humanity. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 765, considers this phrase a dative of sphere meaning in the “sphere of humanity.”

<sup>104</sup> Andria, “1 Timothy,” 1473.

<sup>105</sup> Marshall, “1 Timothy,” 802.

<sup>106</sup> Mathewson and Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar*, 151, 171-172.

<sup>107</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 243-244, reports that qualitative, abstract nouns stress quality, nature, essence, and class traits and are anarthrous. The song could be stressing the human, creaturely nature into which Jesus was incarnated. This very nature would have been viewed as evil by the ascetic opponents of Paul.

<sup>108</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 227, writes, “The second line is one of the more difficult lines in the hymn to interpret.” Those with a Reformational perspective stress the utter sinfulness and helplessness of people. For sinful humans to be accepted by God, God must do all the work of transformation while the sinner receives God’s grace passively. The change is viewed as forensic stressing that God makes the declaration of “uprightness,” even though the person is still a sinner but saved by grace.

<sup>109</sup> A. E. McGrath, “Justification” in *DPAHL*, 518.

<sup>110</sup> Steven M. Studebaker, “Beyond Tongues: A Pentecostal Theology of Grace,” in *Defining Issues in Pentecostalism*, ed. Steven M. Studebaker (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008), 49, 48, explains, “The crux of salvation is forensic justification . . . covered by the righteousness of Christ . . . they should be accounted righteous outside themselves . . . Christ’s work is for us, but outside of us.”

<sup>111</sup> Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 73.

<sup>112</sup> Gordon D. Fee, “Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections on Ephesians 4.30 and Pauline Pneumatology,” in *Spirit and Renewal: Essays in Honor of J. Rodman Williams*, ed. Mark W. Wilson (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 140, 141.

<sup>113</sup> Those who apply this perspective to line 2 would then assert that line 3 reveals Christ’s exaltation and praise by the angelic hosts, all after the resurrection and ascension to his divine seat at the righthand of God. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 227, asserts that the phrase “most probably refers to the resurrection.” Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 766, claims that based on Christ’s resurrection, he entered the sphere of the supernatural, the spiritual, and the realm of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>114</sup> Keener, *Bible Background*, 608.

<sup>115</sup> Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 102, makes the important observation: “It is noticeable that nowhere in the hymn is the death or resurrection of Christ mentioned.” He explains that Paul only used selected parts of the hymn for specific purposes.

<sup>116</sup> The events related to Jesus’ water baptism, the coming of the Spirit, and the voice of God have clear intertextual connects with Isaiah’s identification of God’s special servant: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations” (Isa 42:1).

<sup>117</sup> Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 107, says that in Luke 1-2, “We are introduced to a host of righteous characters.”

<sup>118</sup> Roger Stronstad, “The Charismatic Theology of St Luke Revisited,” in *Defining Issues in Pentecostalism*, ed. Steven M. Studebaker (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008), 106, 105-122, states, “In Luke-Acts all who receive the Holy Spirit have first gained the essential spiritual prerequisite, namely, they are already saved . . . all are in right standing before God.” He also stresses that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon people is for prophetic, vocational ministry both for Jesus and his disciples.

<sup>119</sup> Spirit, in the dative case, is used as a dative of agency or agent, the one performing the action. “Vindication happened through the agency of the Holy Spirit.” Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 73. See Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 101. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 163, explains, “The dative substantive is used to indicate the personal agent by whom the action of the verb is accomplished.” The Spirit is the Person who vindicated the incarnate Jesus who humbled himself to become “man” in order to serve as the effective mediator between God and humankind. It should also be noted that Spirit is anarthrous. But as a proper name and “one-of-a-kind” noun, the definite article is unnecessary. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 245, 248.

<sup>120</sup> For a significant discussion of the Spirit at the time of Jesus’ death, see Blaine Charette, *Restoring Presence: The Spirit in Matthew’s Gospel* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 92-96.

<sup>121</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 165, 148. Wallace explains, “in no instance can it be said that the person(s) in the dative case initiate(s) the act. In other words, volition rests wholly with the subject, while the dative noun is merely recipient.” One might label this phrase as a dative of recipient. The noun is anarthrous and could be understood as a generic noun referring to the myriads of angels, God’s created heavenly hosts, who watched the Son of God enter the realm of humanity in order to provide salvation for God’s human creatures. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 253. Perkins, *Pastor Letters*, 74, labels the phrase as a dative of reference which refers to the person or party to whom God decides to make himself visible.

<sup>122</sup> Stott, *The Message*, 107, reports that the angels “watched the whole unfolding drama of salvation.”

<sup>123</sup> Reid, “Angels,” 22. However, it should be noted that Reid, in examining this song, notes a correspondence between lines 2, 3, and 6 and claims, “Christ’s appearance before angels refers to his exaltation in the presence of

angels of glory who acclaimed honor and praise to the exalted Lord, perhaps in triumphal procession,” 21. Based on the grammar of line 3 and the historical context of Ephesus, his view of the song seems amiss.

<sup>124</sup> Marshall, “1 Timothy,” 802.

<sup>125</sup> Bromiley, “Angel,” 46.

<sup>126</sup> Andria, “1 Timothy,” 1473.

<sup>127</sup> Examining Wallace’s categories, *Greek Grammar*, 148, 153, 142, the phrase could be viewed as a dative of recipient, the nations being the ones to whom Jesus was preached; a dative of sphere—in the realm or sphere of the Gentile nations, emphasizing that the gospel was proclaimed beyond the Jews and the borders of Israel; or it could be viewed as a dative of advantage—Jesus was preached for the benefit of the nations. Anarthrous “nations” could emphasize this particular class or quality of peoples who stood outside or distinct from the nation of Israel, the target audience of the opponents. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 244.

<sup>128</sup> Marshall, “1 Timothy,” 802.

<sup>129</sup> Stott, *The Message*, 107, reports that this phrase is “a clear reference to the church’s world-wide mission in obedience to the great commission of the risen Lord.”

<sup>130</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 263. He also comments, “Jesus historically limited his own mission primarily or exclusively to Israel” (315). For a similar view see Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, THNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 146, 100, who comment, “Jesus has defined the boundaries of his mission . . . to focus (exclusively) on Israel rather than on Samaritans or gentiles (10:5-6).”

<sup>131</sup> *Ethnê*, the nations, as distinct from Israel. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 129.

<sup>132</sup> Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah recorded 700 years before his coming, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

<sup>133</sup> Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 74-75, seems to overlook the exclusive nature of the preaching of the false teachers. While he acknowledges that for the term *ethnê* “the usual reference in the NT is to non-Jews,” he proposes that nations, in this case, “probably includes both Jews and non-Jews.”

<sup>134</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 153, dative of sphere, in the realm of created matter which God had created. The *kosmos* represented the “all” whom God wanted to be saved and to benefit from the saving work of Christ. The anarthrous “world” or “created order” would represent a quality or nature of this generic noun. There was one way alone for all humankind to experience God’s grace and have the possibility of becoming godly, and that was through faith—no other way. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 244.

<sup>135</sup> Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 75.

<sup>136</sup> Marshall, “1 Timothy,” 802. Stott, *The Message*, 107, notes, “The final statement . . . sounds like another reference to the ascension,” considering the vindication by the Spirit to be the first reference to the resurrection and ascension. To maintain a chronological sequence, he claims that line 6 refers to the *parousia* “foreshadowing the final epiphany in power and great glory.”

<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, King, *A Leader Led*, 67, indicates that line 6 is out of order because the ascension had to precede the preaching to the nations.

<sup>137</sup> Keener, *Bible Background*, 608.

<sup>138</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 284.

<sup>139</sup> Glory (*doxa*) could be understood as an abstract noun, thus anarthrous, or a one-of-a-kind location, the glorious realm of God. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 244, 248-249.

<sup>140</sup> According to Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 161, 147, the dative of manner denotes the manner in which the action of the verb is accomplished. It could also represent a dative of destination, Christ's transfer from one place to another—from the realm of the created order (κόσμος) to the realm of the glorious heavens, the place of glory (δόξα).