

The Mystery of the Cross

Romans 16:25–27; Colossians 1:25–28; 2:2, 3

“By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

“Mystery” is not to be understood as “mysterious” (as is the case with mystical ecstasies, vibrations, the occult, or hobgoblins). Mystery and superstition have nothing in common. People love the magical, the bizarre, and the sensational. We are more interested in teasing our curiosity than understanding the truth. God gives us the right kind of mystery in the gospel message. The simple and divine things always have a mystery to them (such as marriage; Ephesians 5:20–33).

We can easily say more than we can understand. “Mystery” does not refer to something we need a detective to investigate. It is not the absence of meaning, but it is the presence of a greater meaning than we can comprehend. The fact that you cannot fully understand something does not mean that you cannot understand it at all. No one can fully grasp love, faith, justice, or goodness; but we believe in them and seek to exhibit them.

The cross is the greatest mystery of God. A little child

can drink of it; old men can meditate upon it for a lifetime. Still, people do not know even a “thimbleful” about it. It is “unexplainable,” yet we can grasp the import of its eternal truth. Mystery challenges and allows growth. Creeds do not have mysteries.

A mystery defies our grasp and is difficult to communicate. Eternal principles are larger than human words. We think we know who we are, but we finally recognize that we are seeing ourselves through a darkened glass! (See 1 Corinthians 13:12.) We have daily surprises that result in our saying, “I never understood this!” Sinful man is always strong in things that do not matter but weak in eternal things that do matter. We do not conquer mystery—we use it, grow in it, and celebrate it.

Mystery is understood only by revelation, not by reason. God can be known but not figured out. We cannot understand God’s grace until we accept His wrath. Until we understand the cross, we cannot understand Christianity.

Where there is no mystery, there is no wonder. Without wonder, there is no real worship. When one explains a magic trick, he finds nothing is left; when we accept God’s mystery, we find everything!

Mysteries are not discovered in Eastern religion or Western logic. Mystery comes only by divine revelation. A mystery is an eternal secret that can be disclosed by God alone. A truth once hidden is now revealed. The secret things belong to God . . . but they are revealed to us. We do not have to be “one of the initiated” or know the “secret handshake” to enter the mystery of God.

Paul said that the gospel message is a mystery (Ephesians 6:19). Faith is a mystery (1 Timothy 3:9) to be lived in a pure conscience. Redemption in Christ is the mystery that

saves and unites Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 1:7–13). Paul said that this truth about Christ had been kept secret since the world began (Romans 16:25, 26; 1 Corinthians 2:7). This mystery was “for obedience to the faith” (Romans 1:5; NKJV). The mystery by revelation tells us what to believe and what to obey. The Spirit has revealed through His holy apostles and prophets this mystery of grace (Ephesians 3:2–6). This truth, this unity, had not been previously made known. Paul also referred to “Christ and the church” as a “great mystery” (Ephesians 5:32). He used this description in regard to husbands and wives and the depth of marriage (Ephesians 5:21–33). All the beautiful things, the great things in life, involve mystery.

One of the great revelations of truth is found in Ephesians 3:9–11. God created all things in and for Christ. God planted a cross in His mind and heart before the creation. Christ fulfilled His plan on the cross. His blood purchased the church (Acts 20:28). Now, the manifold wisdom of God is displayed only in Christ by His church. This is God’s eternal purpose. Mystery requires obedience without full knowledge. We are simply to trust and obey the plain truths of the Scriptures and grow in the knowledge of the Word every day! We must know enough not to deny what we cannot understand.

Great living demands a great mystery! Our deepest passion must focus upon things too wonderful to be fully understood, such as “the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit” (Ephesians 3:4b, 5).

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*