

Theology of Mystery
Selected Verses
January 22, 2012

Introduction

Paul introduces a term here in **Colossians 1:26-27; 2:2; and 4:3**, and that term is “mystery”. This word holds much glorious truth, and I wanted to look here before we go further in our study in Colossians because by understanding what this term “mystery” we will be able to better understand the heart of Paul and his ministry to which he discusses in **Colossians 1:24-29**.

Paul uses this word (in **Gk—mysterion**) 20 times in his epistles (with the overall of 27 times in the NT). The word simply means secret or hidden. In the Greco-Roman days, this word was used in mystery religion where there were only the top levels of the hierarchy were privileged to know such mystery. This is often found today in religious cults such as Scientology where if you have enough money and clout, then you would be shown the secrets of this religion not revealed to those who are in the lower caste. However, Paul’s use of mystery is different. In fact it could not have been more different from the mystery religion because Paul meant that there were something hidden in the past which could not have been known by human efforts or reasoning, but has been revealed by God. In fact, Paul gives us this very definition in:

Romans 16:25 *Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,*

Colossians 1:26 *the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.*

Ephesians 3:3 *that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.*

What is this mystery? In order for us to know, let us look in the OT and the NT and see what the Bible tells us this mystery.

I. Mystery in the Old Testament

- **Daniel 2:1-15**
 - King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, but he did not know what this dream was. All he knew was that he was scared of that dream. He asked the wise men to tell him what the dream was and interpret the dream. No one knew what he had dreamed about, nor could they interpret it.
- **Daniel 2:16-23**
 - Along with his friends, Daniel prayed to God to reveal to him the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. God revealed the dream to Daniel because He was the one that sent the dream to the king and wanted Daniel to reveal to the king the dream and its meaning.

Daniel 2:19 *During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven. (See also 2:22, 28, 45, 47)*

- Two things about Nebuchadnezzar’s dream
 - Nebuchadnezzar’s dream—hidden by God
 - Daniel’s interpretation—revealed by God
- What does this mean?
 - God has secrets

Deuteronomy 29:29 *The secret things belong to the LORD our God.*

- Humans on their own power cannot know or understand such mysteries

Note: The truths of the hidden things of God cannot be stolen from heaven by self-inspired guesses of religious geniuses.

- God reveals those secrets to His special people

Psalms 25:14 *The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him.*

Proverbs 3:32 *but His secret is with the righteous.*

Transition: Further there are secrets that God has hidden from everybody in the past, but He has revealed to all the saints in this church age or last days.

II. Mystery in the New Testament

- Jesus says that the mystery are revealed to those who believe in Him

Matthew 13:11, 17 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. (17) for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Verses in context: This is the parable of the sower, and the disciples asked Jesus why He speaks in parables. This is exactly how God operates! He keeps secrets from the world, but reveals to His people the truth. The mystery.

Analogy: parable as a fruit. The unbelievers see fruit as it is...the outside part. The believers see and eat the fruit. They understand the goodness of the parable, and its meat nourishes the soul. Unbelievers will never know the truth of the parables or its life-changing power unless the Spirit of God changes them.

- Paul's use of "mystery"
 - Mystery of Incarnation (and Trinity)

1 Timothy 3:16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He 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.

Verse in context: Paul was writing to Timothy about the qualifications of bishops and deacons (and deaconesses) and part of the qualification is the knowledge of Christ—which is a mystery, revealed to the saints.

- Mystery of the plan of salvation

Ephesians 1:9 And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ.

Verse in context: Paul makes this statement after a sweeping view of God's plan of salvation, starting before the foundation of the world. He covers election, calling, justification, and sanctification (positional). Again a mystery that was hid in the OT, but now revealed to the saints in the New.

- Mystery of the gospel

1 Timothy 3:9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

Verse in Context: Qualification for deacon—their grasp of the gospel. Paul is talking about the gospel.

Colossians 1:25-26 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, (26) the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

- Mystery of the union of Christ and the church

Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (32) This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church

Verse in context: Paul describes the marriage between husband and wife and then he goes further with the mystery that is revealed in the relationship between Christ and the church. More in 3rd point.

Colossians 1:27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Note: The OT saints had no idea of the concept of God being in us...of our bodies becoming the temple of the Holy Spirit. With the formation of the church, Jesus has chosen to identify Himself in the church through the church. He is the head of the church and we are the body—we are identified in Christ.

- Mystery of the Jews and Gentiles united in Christ

Ephesians 3:1-12

Ephesians 3:6 *This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

Note: This passage actually starts in **2:11** when Paul talks about how the Gentiles have been joined with Israel. And when Paul starts to pray for them in **3:1**, he stops and takes the time to really explain to them, to make sure they understand the mystery of the Jews and Gentiles united in Christ. In the OT, the Jews and Gentiles were separate and segregated themselves from each other. The early church thought that the Gentiles should be circumcised into the faith. Jesus had destroyed the wall that had separated the two peoples.

Note: Again all the mysteries above are when God had hidden from Israel in the OT, but He has revealed such truth to the saints. The focal point of all the mysteries is Christ. He is the revelation of God to men (**Heb 1:1-3**).

III. Stewardship of the Mystery

1 Corinthians 4:1 *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

- Privilege of Stewardship

Note: Paul saw himself as the steward of the mystery. It was an honor to Paul, an honor of such astonishment that God would give him such privilege of sharing the truth. We see this gratefulness in every words he wrote, and we see the depth of his love and ministry for the church. It is this stewardship that compels Paul to preach and continue to preach even after he was beaten, jailed, left for dead, mocked, etc. Why? Why would he do such a thing? Why would he consider such stewardship such high importance?

We have to look at Paul. He was a Jew of Jew, a Pharisee. He said that under the law he was blameless (as a Pharisee following the law). He saw that the Christians were a threat to the true religion that he was in and that they were enemies of God. However, on the road to Damascus, Christ met with Paul and forever changed his life. Jesus asked Paul, "Why are you persecuting Me?" All of a sudden, Jesus reveals to Paul the mystery that was hidden from him...namely that Jesus Christ is the Promised Messiah. Notice also that Jesus said that persecuting the church was persecuting Him. Paul learned that to identify with Christ is also to identify with the church. Jesus has chosen the church to be the stewards of the gospel, and thus it means that every believer in the body of Christ is a steward of the mysteries of the gospel. Paul wanted us to proclaim the unspeakable riches of Christ and proclaim the gospel to the world.

- Stewardship of the riches of Christ

Note: One of Paul's favorite topic is the unspeakable riches we find in Him. This is a mystery that was hidden from us when we were enemies with God, but now revealed to us through the Holy Spirit and the Word. Paul was materially poor, but he was spiritually rich, and he wanted everyone in Christ's kingdom to experience the riches Christ has for each one of us.

Ephesians 3:6-8 *This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (7) I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. (8) Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*

- God's grace is rich (**Eph 1:7**)
- God's goodness and patience are rich (**Rom 11:33**)
- God's mercy is rich (**Eph 2:4**)
- God in Himself is rich (**Eph 3:16**)
- God's blessings are rich (**1 Tim 6:17**)
- God's assurance is rich (**Col 2:2**)
- God's word is rich (**Col 3:16**)

- God's love is rich (**Eph 3:18-19**)

Note: What this means is that this is what the Lord has done for us! This is the glorious position we have in Christ. Paul wants us to know this. He lived it and experienced it. He certainly did not keep it a secret, but declared to us the riches of Christ.

- Stewardship of the ministry of the church

Ephesians 3:9 *and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.*

Note: "to make plain to everyone". This was Paul's heart...not only the riches of Christ but also how the church to live daily and minister to each other. This is the stewardship that was entrusted to Paul. This is also entrusted to us.