

Mystery

[all references are from NKJV]

Deutronomy29:29

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Does this verse mean that there are secrets (mysteries) that belong to God that are hidden? If that is true why God doesn't reveal them to us; and what is the benefit of these mysteries?

Romans 16:25-26

“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith”—

Colossians 1:26

“The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.”

Here it is clear that the mysteries have certain times to be revealed for a greater benefit. The revelation of the mysteries is not only according to God's wisdom in choosing the right time but also for other divine purposes.

1 Coronthains2:9-10, 12

“But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

1Co 2:12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God”.

In these verses, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is the one who reveals what is in God's heart. Consequently knowing 'these things' reveals more of God's heart to us, so in turn we know him more, 'heart to heart'.

'Mystery' according to Apostle Paul

Christ is a mystery (Colossians2:2, 4:3 & Ephesians3:4)

The Church is a mystery (Ephesians3:3,4,6,9)

The Gospel is a mystery (Ephesians 6:19)

All these are the foundation of faith and they are all a mystery!

Also faith itself is a mystery (1Timothy 3:9).

Lawlessness is a mystery (2Thess2:7).

God's will is a mystery (Ephesians1:9) and

Godliness is a mystery (1Timothy3:16).

Everything is by faith and mystery

After the reformation movement, the western theology tended to teach that everything is by faith. This is partially true because 'faith' according to the Bible doesn't stop at just believing. This theology (after the spiritual darkness during the Middle Ages) shrunk and focused on logic and matters only understood by reason and the mind. (Some catholic ideas were a reaction to this theology). We are used in our prayers to say 'I believe you God', 'I accept your promises and believe them'...etc.

However, faith is partly believing through our mind and partly receiving through the spirit.

Galatians 5:5 'For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of the righteousness by faith'.

God has made man trifold: spirit, soul and body. The spirit part is the element that connects us with God. God knows that there are spiritual and theological issues that are above reasoning and logic of the mind (He gave us logic and mind). These matters can only be comprehended and realized through our spirit. (Our spirit is God given so we can know the divine matters. Also the Holy Spirit dwells in our spirit). Therefore, faith stays very limited if it is confined only to logic, reason and the mind. So from here we can complete the theological well known expression that everything is by faith and mystery.

So mystery is a God given gift or grace to our spirit to comprehend, accept and believe divine matters. This will result in completion of our salvation and God's purposes fulfilled in and through us.

To sum up:

This fact receiving by faith and spirit was agreed upon by the whole church until the movement of Enlightenment (18th cent) which everything must be apprehended by mind otherwise rejected. This movement has its historical background that explains its approach. However, it ended in such a loss as it is already explained Spiritual things can never be contained in the small box called mind. Still we thank God for this great gift of the mind, but it is limited regarding spiritual things because it is related to Spirit of God who cannot be limited.

Therefore we are now aware that we can just receive part of the limitless truth of God and we have to apprehend it well and obey it. But knowing that the truth still has a lot that we can only approach by receiving it by faith and prayer in our spirits. In due time the Holy Spirit will continue to reveal what we have received in our spirits to our minds part by part in the proper time when we are prepared to understand it and when we are in need to it. Thus we grow deeper in the Word of God and in understanding Hid Ways.

Now let us go to further focused study after this general outline

Mystery & Mystical life

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ' (Ephesians 1: 3).

God has truly blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

Yet, what are these blessings, how can we receive them, and where are they deposited?

In his epistles, Apostle Paul often uses the word '*mystery*': the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the Church, the mystery of faith, the mystery of salvation, etc.

Let us look at some examples:

Christ:

'...to speak the mystery of Christ...' (Colossians 4: 3).

'...by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ'
(Ephesians 3: 4).

The Church:

'...how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery...' (Ephesians 3: 3).

'This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church' (Ephesians 5: 32).

Here, the Apostle likens the unity between Christ and the Church to the unity between a bride and a bridegroom. He is also highlighting that the Church includes both the Jews and the Gentiles.

The will of God:

'...having made known to us the mystery of His will' (Ephesians 1: 9)

The Gospel:

'...and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel' (Ephesians 6: 19).

Salvation:

'Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began'
(Romans 16: 25).

Faith:

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

Lawlessness:

'For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work...' (2Thessalonians 2: 7).

All the above are the foundations of the Christian faith and the Christian life. We notice that the Apostle used the word '*mystery*' before each of them. What does this signify?

The word '*mystery*' is the translation of the original Greek word '*mysterion*'. The Greek word is used to refer to a secret that waits to be revealed; it does not refer to something hidden or unknown.

The early fathers loved this understanding and dimension in the Christian life. This matter about the mystical dimension was of great importance in their spiritual life and walk with God because they had realized that the human mind is so limited while the spiritual life is so unlimited.

Therefore, it is not possible to put the unlimited in the limited. In other words, how can it be possible for us to perceive the unlimited spiritual life by our limited mind? It is written: '*I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad*' (Psalm 119: 96).

In addition to this, the human mind varies from one person to the other depending on various factors among which are:

- Some people are highly educated while others are illiterate
- Some are very bright and highly intelligent while others have average or below average intelligence
- The way one is brought up affects the shaping of the mind and hence one can be analytical, another argumentative, a third teachable and so on.
- The change and gap between generations create a huge variation in the mind-set of each generation. In some generations, the Church was severely persecuted; the persecution brought dark shadows on the mind of God's people, their way of thinking and the way they respond to things. There are other generations where the Church was shining with holiness and holy people; this brought a divine light to the minds of the people of God.

Since the mind is limited and is influenced by many variables and circumstances, it is neither appropriate nor fair to put the divine matters and God's salvation and grace under this

changeability and variations. Therefore, the only solution is that the spirit of the person would be the part in man that should receive the words of the Spirit.

For practical application, let us take the example of *'reading the bible'*. The early fathers used to advise the person to continue to regularly read the bible whether he understands or not. If a person searches for the explanation of a certain verse in the books of interpretation and commentaries, he may understand the ambiguous meaning, yet, without being aware, he would be putting the unlimited in the limited. It would be a great loss if one stops at the point of the explanation he read for the verse because by this he would be putting in his mind a specific meaning for the verse which does not allow adding to it, going deeper or entering further dimensions.

This does not mean undermining books of interpretation; they are indeed useful and important, especially in clarifying the historical and cultural backgrounds of the books of the Scriptures. This in turn aids in understanding. Besides, books of interpretation did not appear in the 19th or 20th centuries; there were those who interpret the books of the Scriptures since the early centuries of Christianity like Origen, the great theologian and thinker, and Saint John Chrysostom of the 4th/5th century.

The early desert fathers did not normally write interpretations for the books of the Scriptures – except those fathers who were specifically granted this gift by the Spirit. They mainly relied on providing answers to the questions of the brethren who in turn wrote these answers which were passed on from one generation to the other.

The great loss and danger would be if one's mind is only focused on one interpretation of the word of God where one becomes mentally and consequently spiritually constrained in this one interpretation and fails to be open up to further meanings and revelations in the word of God. It is indeed impossible to constrain the gospel of Jesus Christ to the understanding of one person because the gospel has no boundaries!

Therefore, if we resort to books of interpretation to help us in understanding the word of God and stopped at this point, this will bring light to our minds but it will only light one room of the mind,

while the others will remain dark. Yet, if we put the word of God in our spirit, it starts to illuminate all the rooms of the mind in due time. This is because the spirit is like an open room that has no limitations; it can broaden as much as we give it a chance.

Each time one comes to the Lord with an eager and sincere heart, the gifts of grace are deposited in his spirit. The mind may understand little or much, in part or in full; yet the gift of grace would be already deposited in the spirit. As a result, in due time, one will understand, be enlightened and enlighten others.

The Holy Spirit, the Person of the Trinity who vigils on man in working out his salvation and who accompanies the Church until Christ comes again, takes upon Himself the responsibility to take from what was deposited in the spirit and transmit it to the mind in a complete and amazing way and at the suitable time. As a result, nothing of it is lost, stolen or forgotten because the Spirit Himself is the One who opens the mind to understand the Scriptures: *'Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures'* (Luke 24: 45).

Because of this, the early fathers gave great importance to kindling their spirits. Since the fall, man's spirit became constricted while in its nature it is very elastic and stretchable like a balloon. Whenever kindled, it broadens and whenever neglected, it quickly shrinks. When nourished daily, it continues to widen without limits because it has no limits as explained above. Therefore, the mystery of God is first deposited in the spirit and is then revealed to one's understanding in due time because the understanding is limited.

Therefore, Apostle Paul loved the word *'mystery'*. Similarly, the early fathers loved it. They taught, emphasized and handed on that the spiritual life is a mystery which is deposited in the spirit and is gradually revealed to the mind. This revelation extends to the feelings, emotions, and the wounded/hurting areas of the soul which have gone through difficult experiences, healing, sanctifying and lighting. All the spiritual gifts go from the spirit to the mind or from the spirit to the soul.

There are other channels to receive the mysteries of God other than the bible like the seasons of salvation during a yearly calendar and the role of sacraments applied in some Churches.

What a great loss for the people of God these days because this preliminary and essential understanding regarding the spiritual life has become absent! As a result, the fellowship with God has become shallow and superficial. The way and the walk with God have rules and principles. When man understands them, he is enabled to go through the journey of his life safely no matter what he faces in the way whether hindrances, oppositions, or stumbling blocks. This is because he would have deep and genuine foundations which the Church passed on from one generation to the other until our days.

God does not leave Himself without witness; He desires many witnesses in a generation eager to see living examples who witness to the mystery of the spiritual life: *'you are my witnesses, declares the Lord'* (Isaiah 43: 12).