

The Mysteries of God

May 20, 2012

The Text: Eph 1:8b-10

In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him

I. Mystery:

A. Definitions:

From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

Primarily that which is known to the mustes, "the initiated" (from muevo, "to initiate into the mysteries")

In the NT it denotes, not the mysterious (as with the Eng. word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit.

In the ordinary sense a "mystery" implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed.

Among the ancient Greeks 'the mysteries' were religious rites and ceremonies practiced by secret societies into which anyone who so desired might be received. Those who were initiated into these 'mysteries' became possessors of certain knowledge, which was not imparted to the uninitiated, and were called 'the perfected.'

From Thayer's Greek Lexicon:

a hidden thing, secret, mystery:

1. a hidden or secret thing, not obvious to the understanding: 1 Co 13:2
2. a hidden purpose or counsel; secret will:
3. it denotes the mystic or hidden sense:

From Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament:

The word "mystery" is "a hidden thing, a secret, a mystery," in N.T., "the secret purposes and counsels which God intends to carry into effect in His kingdom."

It is something which is not understood until revealed, and when revealed, not difficult of being understood by the Spirit-enlightened believer.

From Vincent:

"Another key-word of this epistle. God's grace as manifested in redemption is a mystery in virtue of its riches and depth—as the expression of God's very nature. The mystery of the redemption in Christ, belonging to the eternal plan of God, could be known to men only through revelation—making known. Of His will; pertaining to His will."

From Barnes' Notes:

The word "mystery" means literally something into which one must be "initiated" before it is fully known; to initiate, to instruct; and then anything which is concealed or hidden.

We commonly use the word to denote that which is above our comprehension or unintelligible. But this is never the meaning of the word in the New Testament.

It means there some doctrine or fact which has been concealed, or which has not before been fully revealed, or which has been set forth only by figures and symbols. When the doctrine is made known, it may be as clear and plain as any other.

Such was the doctrine that God meant to call the Gentiles, which was long concealed, at least in part, and which was not fully made known until the Savior came, and which had been until that time "a mystery-a concealed truth" - though when it was revealed, there was nothing incomprehensible in it.

Thus, in Col 1:26, "The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints."

So it was in regard to the doctrine of election. It was a mystery until it was made known by the actual conversion of those whom God had chosen.

So in regard to the incarnation of the Redeemer; the atonement; the whole plan of salvation.

Over all these great points there was a veil thrown, and people did not understand them until God revealed them. When they were revealed, the mystery was removed, and men were able to see clearly the manifestation of the will of God.

B. Mystery is used 27 times in the New Testament as follows:

Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Rom 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thes 2:7; 1 Tim 3:9, 16; Rev 1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7

1. Mystery of the kingdom (of heaven, God).

Matt 13:10-11 and the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

Mark 4:11 And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,

2. Mystery of the gospel

Eph 6:19-20 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Rom 16:25-26 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 which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;

3. Mystery of faith

1 Tim 3:8-9 Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

4. Mystery of His will

Eph 1:9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

5. Mystery of God

1 Cor 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

1 Cor 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

6. The hidden mystery

Rom 16:25 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 which has been kept secret for long ages past,

1 Cor 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

Col 1:26 ... the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations ...

1 Co 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

Eph 3: 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

7. The mystery now manifested

Rom 16: 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;

Col 1: 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints

8. The mystery is Christ himself

Col 2:2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,

9. The mystery of Christ

Col 4:3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;

Eph 3:2-4 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

10. Mystery of Christ and the Church

Eph 5:32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Col 1:25-27 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

11. The mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory"

Col 1:26-27 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

1 Co 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

12. Mystery of godliness

1 Tim 3:16 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, the taken up in glory.

13. Spiritual maturity is not marked by knowing all mysteries.

1 Cor 13:2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

14. We speak mysteries when we used the gift of tongues.

1 Cor 14:2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.

15. We speak mysteries when we minister the gospel

Eph 6:19-20 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Col 4:3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;

1 Cor 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

Col 1:25-27 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

16. The mystery of contentment

Phil 4:12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

17. The mysteries of the seven stars and seven lampstands

Rev 1:20 "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

18. The mystery of the resurrection

1 Cor 15:51-52 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

19. The mystery of God is finished

Rev 10:7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.

20. The mystery of Israel's partial hardening

Rom 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation--that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

21. Evil mysteries:

a. The mystery of lawlessness - the Antichrist

2 Thes 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

b. The mystery of Babylon, the woman and the beast

Rev 17:5-7 and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth." And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

II. He has made known to us the mystery of His will.

Eph 1:9-10 ... He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him

A. His will

From Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament :

Expositors translates "the mystery touching or pertaining to His will." The word "will" is the translation, not of *boulē* (βουλή), a desire based upon the reason, but *thelēma* (θέλημα), a desire based upon the emotions. God's will or desire here, comes from His heart of love.

B. According to His (Father) kind intention.

From Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament :

This will or desire is "according to His good pleasure." The words "according to" are *kata* (κατά), the preposition meaning "down" and suggesting domination. This desire on God's part is dominated by His good pleasure (*eudokia* (εὐδοκία)). This Greek word is made up of *dokeō* (δοκέω), "to seem, to be accounted." It is often used in the question, "What does it seem to you?" The word *eu* (εὐ) means "well, to be well off, to prosper." Thus *eudokia* (εὐδοκία) means "that which seems good or well" to one. God's good pleasure, therefore, is not an arbitrary whim of a sovereign, but represents that which in the wisdom and love of God would contribute most to the well-being and blessing of the saints. The word means "will, choice, delight, pleasure, satisfaction." In the case of God, all these are dictated by what is good or well. Thus, the delight, pleasure, and satisfaction which God has in blessing the saints is found in the fact that what He does for them is dictated by what is good for them.

This good pleasure is that "which He hath purposed in Himself." "Purposed" is *protithēmi* (προτιθημι), "to set before one's self," thus, "to determine." This good pleasure God purposed "in Himself." As Expositors so aptly puts it, "The purpose is God's own free determination, originating in His own gracious mind."

From Barnes' Notes:

Which he hath purposed in himself

Without foreign aid or counsel., His purposes originated in his own mind, and were concealed until he chose to make them known (2 Ti 1:9)

2 Ti 1:9-10 who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

C. View to an administration suitable

From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words,

administration is the Greek word *oikonomia*; primarily signifies "the management of a household or of household affairs" (*oikos*, "a house," *nomos*, "a law"); then the management or administration of the property of others, and so "a stewardship," Lk 16:2-4;

Elsewhere (it is) only (used) in the epistles of Paul, who applies it

A. To the responsibility entrusted to him of preaching the gospel, 1 Co 9:17

B. To the stewardship committed to him "to fulfill the Word of God," the fulfillment being the unfolding of the completion of the divinely arranged and imparted cycle of truths which are consummated in the truth relating to the church as the body of Christ, Col 1:25; Eph 3:2.

C. It is used of the arrangement or administration by God, by which in "the fullness of the times" (or seasons) God will sum up all things in the heavens and on earth in Christ, Eph 1:10 and 3:9

Note: A "dispensation" is not a period or epoch (a common, but erroneous, use of the word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement or administration of affairs. Cf. *oikonomos*, "a steward," and *oikonomeo*, "to be a steward."

From Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament :

The purpose God had in mind is given us in the words, "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, etc." The preposition is *eis* (εἰς), "with a view to," indicating what direction the purpose took. The word "dispensation" requires some study. It is not preceded by the definite article. The word is *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία) which is made up of *oikos* (οἶκος), "house," and *nomos* (νόμος), "law." The compound word means, "the management of a household. or of household affairs, the management, oversight, administration of other's property, the office of a manager, overseer, stewardship." Thus, it speaks here of an administration by God of a certain period of human history designated as "the fulness of times." Our word "dispensation," used in Bible teaching nomenclature, refers to a certain period of time marked by a certain method in which God administers the affairs of mankind, such as the dispensation of grace, etc. It does not have that meaning here. Instead of referring to a dispensation itself, it speaks of the method by which God administers the particular time referred to in the words "the fulness of times."

D. Fullness of time

From Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

Traditional rendering of two similar Greek expressions in Gal. 4:4 and Eph. 1:10. The first refers to a past event, the sending of Christ to redeem those born under the law. While the sending of God's Son encompasses the whole of Christ's incarnate ministry, the NT specifically relates the sending to Christ's death as a saving event (John 3:17; Rom. 8:3; 1 John 4:9-10). The sending of Christ in the fullness of time refers not so much to world conditions in the sense that the prevalence of Greek as a common spoken language, Roman roads, and the Roman enforced peace made the rapid spread of the gospel possible. Rather the emphasis is on God whose sending of Christ is not a "last-ditch effort" but part of God's gracious plan from the beginning.

The reference to the fullness of time in Ephesians is more difficult. Some translations understand the time when all things are gathered together in Christ to lie in the future (NIV, TEV); others, in the past (REB). A major theme of Ephesians is that Christ has already broken down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile (2:11-22, esp. 2:14, 21). Therefore, it seems likely that the crucial shift in time between the past with its hopelessness and hostility and the present age of reconciliation has already occurred.

From Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

Expression meaning "when the time was ripe," occurring in English translations of Galatians 4:4 and Ephesians 1:10. In Galatians the reference is to the time when "God sent forth his Son."

The apostle Paul used the image of a child coming of age to say that Jesus came at a point in human history when the time was ripe and released humanity from bondage to the Law.

Traditionally theologians have seen indications of the ripeness of the time of Jesus' birth in the historical circumstances of his day. Rome's conquests had produced "Roman peace," so that travel was both safe and easy. That political unity was built on the earlier victories of Alexander the Great, whose expansion from Greece to Egypt to India left in its wake the Greek language and culture, which later made the spread of the gospel easier. Greek-speaking Jews lived in every city of the Roman Empire. Their religion was protected by Roman law, and that law protected Christianity for its first half century. Many Gentiles who were interested in the monotheism and morality of Judaism went to the Jewish synagogues.) Thus the synagogue was a natural starting point for the church's early outreach to Gentiles.

In Palestine the Jews were longing for a Messiah (deliverer) since they were politically subject to the Herods and the Romans. Messianic rebellion simmered constantly, and repeatedly broke out in open battle. Socially, peasants were oppressed by large landholders, who used every opportunity and legal loophole to expand their properties. Many of those oppressors were from the chief priestly families, whose greed was well known to all. Throughout Palestine messianic speculation was at a high point. The Pharisees talked about what would happen when the Messiah came, and the scribes at Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls community) wrote books about it. The time was ripe for Jesus' coming, as he himself indicated (Mt 13:11, 16, 17; Mk 1:15).