

The Mystery Of Christ

"... how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit ..." (Eph. 3:2-5).

The word "mystery" ordinarily carries the thought of something difficult to comprehend or understand. It is used, I believe, in this sense in Ephesians 5:31f.: *"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church ..."* The word "mystery" is also used this sense in 1 Timothy 3:16: *"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; he who was manifested in the flesh; justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."*

However, in Ephesians the word "mystery" is most often used to signify something once concealed, but now revealed. Romans 16:25-26 clearly spells out "mystery" in this sense: *"... according to the revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested, ..."* A previous article dealt with Paul's "dispensation of grace" which involved preaching this mystery. At least six times in the Ephesian letter the word "mystery" is found and at least five of those instances use mystery in this sense. And, what is true of the Ephesians letter is true in large measure in all Paul's letters. "Mystery" is found in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Colossians and 1 Timothy and most occurrences are references to the "mystery of Christ" something once unknown but now known.

This mystery once unknown but now known involved the joining of Jew and Gentiles together in "one body;" for after Paul wrote that the mystery he now has revealed (3:5), he proceeds to state, *"... to wit that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs ..."* (3:6). This mystery also includes Christ's relationship to His church (5:32) and that He sustains a personal relationship with each Christian for *"God was pleased to make known what is the riches of his glory, this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Col. 1:27). Aside from the truth concerning the mystery of Christ, consider two other truths regarding the mystery about Christ.

First, the mystery was not known in ages past. There are a few folk who, seizing on the statement that the *"gospel (was preached) beforehand unto Abraham"* (Gal. 3:8), conclude that Abraham had knowledge of Jesus and

what He would do. The "gospel" (good news) preached unto Abraham was that in his seed all families of the earth would be blessed, which is precisely what the passage in Galatian states. That was all Abraham knew about the coming Messiah. The mystery about Christ and His church was "*kept in silence through times eternal*" (Rom. 16:25); "*hid for ages and generations*" (Col. 1:26) and "*in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men*" (Eph. 3:5). Like all men, save Adam, Abraham was the son of a man, and as such the mystery about Christ was not revealed to him. Even angels did not know God's purpose, which would not have been true had men known it, for angels delivered God's messages to men in ages past (1 Pet. 1:12).

Second, once the mystery was revealed, man could, by reading what Paul (and others) wrote about the mystery, understand God's word. Man does not have to have help from the Holy Spirit to understand for Paul wrote, "*Whereby, when ye read ye can perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ*" (Eph. 3:4). The theory that men cannot understand and believe God's word without the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit is a "flawed" theory. Paul denied it in these words of his from Eph. 3:4! NEXT: "The Church: The Manifestation Of The Manifold Wisdom Of God."

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