

The Mysteries of God

*“The secret things
belong unto the
LORD our God: but
those things which
are revealed belong
unto us and to our
children for ever,
that we may do all
the words of
this law.”*
—Deuteronomy
29:29

TWO IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS are emphasized in our opening text, which are the words of Moses. First, we are reminded that “secret things” belong to God, which means there are certain aspects of his plans and purposes that he has not revealed through his Word, and which, therefore, are

not necessary to our understanding at the present time. Second, God’s purpose in revealing certain things pertaining to his plans and purposes is “that we may do all the words of this law,” or to us, all the words of the “gospel of Christ.”—Rom. 1:16

God says, through the Prophet Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. ... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as

the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”—Isa. 55:8-11

The above passage emphasizes that God’s purpose in sending forth his word is to reveal whatever portion of his “higher thoughts” he desires his people to know. His purpose in giving such knowledge is that something might be accomplished thereby, and he thus assures us that his word will indeed accomplish all that he pleases. As far as the individual child of God is concerned, the most important accomplishment of the Father’s word is in his own heart and life. Jesus prayed on behalf of his followers that they might be “sanctified,” or made holy, by God’s word.—John 17:17

David wrote that the secret of the Lord is for those who fear, or reverence him, adding that “He will make them know His covenant.” (Ps. 25:14, *New American Standard Bible*) This suggests that one of God’s covenant promises is to reveal the secret of his plan to those who reverence him. This does not imply that the Lord reveals to his faithful people all that they might like to know. When the disciples asked Jesus, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus replied, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” (Acts 1:6,7) Here was a “secret” which God did not then reveal to his people.

MYSTERIES REVEALED

Jesus said to his disciples, "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 13:11) This does not mean that all the mysteries pertaining to the kingdom are revealed to the followers of Jesus during the present age, but only those which they need to understand in order to know and to do the will of God.

The Apostle Paul speaks of himself as one of the "ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." To this he adds, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." (I Cor. 4:1,2) Thus, an understanding of the mysteries of God's plans imposes responsibility, and only by being faithful in the discharge of those responsibilities can we be pleasing to the Lord. Faithfulness as stewards of the mysteries of God calls for self-sacrificing zeal in making known those mysteries to others.

The apostle also wrote, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."—I Cor. 2:7-10

Regardless of how faithful we may be in declaring the mysteries of God, none will be able to understand them except those to whom they are revealed by God. We may proclaim these secrets from the housetops, yet they will remain secrets to all but

one here and one there. In all, it is a “little flock,” to whom it is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom during the present age. To these, however, he is pleased to reveal some of the mysteries of the kingdom.—Luke 12:32

MANY MYSTERIES

In I Corinthians 13:2 the Apostle Paul speaks of understanding “all mysteries,” meaning, of course, all that the Lord had been pleased to reveal to him. This expression, nevertheless, indicates that there is more than one aspect to what he refers to in another place as, “the mystery of the gospel.” (Eph. 6:19) Important among these is “the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.” To this the apostle adds, “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—Col. 1:26,27

Through the prophets of the Old Testament God had set forth the “hope of glory” for the Messiah, who is Christ of the New Testament. Peter mentions this, explaining that it was the Spirit of God in and through the prophets which “testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”—I Pet. 1:11

Prior to the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the “sufferings of Christ” constituted one of the mysteries of God’s plan which was not generally understood. Even Jesus’ closest disciples expected him to immediately set up the Messianic kingdom, not realizing that it was necessary first that Christ should suffer and

die before he would “enter into his glory.”—Luke 24:26,27

The hearts of two of the disciples burned within them as the risen Lord unfolded this mystery. Doubtless all his followers experienced the same joy when they realized that the death of Jesus was not a miscarriage of the divine plan and purpose, but that it was necessary so that mankind might be redeemed from death.—vss. 31,32

There was a further aspect to this mystery which the disciples did not understand prior to Pentecost, which was that the foretold sufferings of Christ would also include the experiences of his footstep followers. It was this further feature of the mystery that Paul wrote about, saying, “I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf. And with my own body I supplement whatever is lacking on our part of Christ’s afflictions, on behalf of His body, which is the church.” (Col. 1:24, *Amplified Bible*) It is because those who are a part of his “body” have the privilege of suffering with Christ that they have the same hope of glory. That same hope which enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame heaped upon him by his enemies is shared by his body members, lest they “be wearied and faint” in their minds.—Heb. 12:1-3

Concerning this mystery Paul further wrote, “We are members of his body. ... For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:30-32) For those to whom this mystery has been revealed, it is not complex or difficult to understand. The knowledge of the church’s relationship to Christ explains, for example, why

his faithful followers of the present age have been permitted to suffer. It also reveals why the kingdom of Christ was not established at the time of his earthly ministry.

This understanding further explains why the world has not yet been converted to Christ. By understanding this mystery, we know that God's purpose for this age has not been the conversion of the world. Rather, it has been to gather out from the world those who, by divine providence, hear the call to discipleship, accept it, and prove their faithfulness by suffering and dying with Christ.

THE GENTILES ALSO

There is another aspect to the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." It is that in this blessed and vital relationship with Christ, believing Gentiles share even as do believing Jews. Paul wrote to the brethren at Ephesus concerning this: "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."—Eph. 3:1-6

Paul was very appreciative of the fact that God had selected and empowered him to preach this great mystery of the divine plan to the Gentiles. He

wrote, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."—Eph. 3:8,9

To us there is nothing mysterious about the fact that Gentiles should be accepted into the fellowship of the body of Christ. However, the situation was quite different at the beginning of the Gospel Age. Prior to that time the Israelites were the chosen people of God. God had said to these, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."—Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2; Amos 3:2

When Jesus sent his disciples into the ministry he specifically told them not to go to the Gentiles. (Matt. 10:5) Even though after his resurrection Jesus broadened his commission to his disciples, telling them that they were to be his witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth, it was difficult for the Jewish disciples to grasp the "unsearchable riches of Christ," which included the opportunity for believing Gentiles to be fellowheirs with them.

To assist Peter in grasping the broadening of this mystery, the Lord gave him the wonderful vision of a sheet let down from heaven filled with all sorts of "unclean" animals. Later, by the Lord's further providence, Peter went to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, where he presented the Gospel. There the apostle witnessed a manifestation of the Holy Spirit coming upon the believing Cornelius and his household. Concerning the significance of this, Peter said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of

persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”
—Acts 10:9-35

The revelation of this mystery to Peter that now Gentiles, through belief and dedication, could be fellow heirs with Jewish believers, was a great help to him in his ministry of the Gospel. Throughout his first epistle he not only continued to emphasize that the true disciples participate in the foretold sufferings of Christ, but also that Gentile believers share this opportunity to prove worthy of the promised Messianic glory.—I Pet. 2:20,21

Peter wrote, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” (I Pet. 2:9,10) In “time past” the Gentiles were not considered as part of the “people of God,” but now they had this privilege along with believing Jews. Furthermore, they all, Jews and Gentiles, had “obtained mercy.” This is one of the revealed mysteries of the Gospel, being closely associated with the mystery that Christ is not one member, but many.—I Cor. 12:12-14,27; Gal. 3:28

MYSTERIES—BUT NOT MYSTERIOUS

The mysteries of the kingdom which are revealed to the Lord’s people are to them no longer unknown, but understandable facts concerning the divine purpose for the salvation of the world of mankind from sin and death. It is important to realize this, and to rejoice that things which are revealed now

belong to us to understand and to be our inspiration and joy.

These revealed mysteries of God's plan are not mysterious. It does not require specially trained minds to understand these truths. Some may have the mistaken notion that the "deep things of God," cited earlier, refer to that which is complex and difficult to grasp, but this is not the case. If it were true, then the Heavenly Father would have called only those with brilliant minds.

Nevertheless, while God's revealed mysteries are easily grasped by those to whom he has given his Holy Spirit, there are almost limitless opportunities in the Scriptures for study in order to become more familiar with all the glorious truths which he has now supplied for us as spiritual food. However, the fact that every aspect of revealed truth is established and supported by many statements of God's word does not make that truth mysterious, nor more difficult to understand.

All the glorious truths of God's plan which he has revealed to his people in this harvest period at the end of the age are simple, and easily understood. How marvelously these simple truths shine forth in their lustrous beauty as one after another the assurances of God's word are associated with them! In harmony with this, the Apostle Paul warned that the minds of the Lord's people should not "be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."—II Cor. 11:3

Jesus said to the religious leaders of Israel, "It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true." (John 8:17) It is in keeping with this detail of his own law that our Heavenly Father,

through his word, has established every point of truth with respect to his plan of salvation, not by two witnesses only, but by many. For example, how many times we are told, in one form of words or another, that “the wages of sin is death,” and that “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. 6:23; Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:4,20; Gal. 6:7,8; I John 5:11,12

Think also of the many Scriptures the Lord has provided to give us a firm foundation for faith in that glorious truth that Jesus Christ “by the grace of God should taste death for every man,” that he “gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (Heb. 2:9; I Tim. 2:3-6) We can mention one after another of the vital aspects of God’s plan and note how substantially each one is supported by God’s witnesses, the Holy Scriptures.

In addition, the Heavenly Father has furnished a wide array of illustrations, examples, or “types,” and “shadows,” all of which help us to understand the simple doctrine of his Word more clearly, and make its study ever more refreshing and stimulating. (I Cor. 10:11; Heb. 8:5) Certain individuals in the Old Testament are specifically referred to in the New Testament as examples, or typical, of someone greater in the outworking of God’s plan. For example, both Moses and David are mentioned in the New Testament as pointing forward to Christ. (Acts 3:20-22; Luke 1:32) Isaac, too, is spoken of by Paul as being “typical” of Christ and his church.—Gal. 3:16,27-29; 4:28

This does not mean, however, that all the personalities of the Old Testament are typical of individuals or groups with whom the Lord deals at a later time.

Yet, they are examples of faithfulness to the Lord, if indeed they were faithful; and those who were unfaithful serve as warnings against following their example.—I Cor. 10:6-10

How beautiful and inspiring is the devotion of God's people reflected by that long list of faithful ones mentioned in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. Some of these, and their activities, we know pointed forward typically to greater things to come through Christ. All of them, though, serve as a "cloud of witnesses" by which, as we meditate upon their faithfulness, we are inspired to greater diligence as we endeavor to be faithful to the Truth by which we are guided in the doing of God's will.—Heb. 12:1

We are wonderfully blessed that the Lord has provided us with all these aids to faithfulness! They do not complicate the simple truths, but are designed to help us apply them in our daily lives, and thus to be conformed more and more to the image of God's dear Son. (Rom. 8:29) Let us not get the notion that only complicated and hard to understand explanations of the truth comprise the "deep things," or "strong meat," of the Word.—I Cor. 2:10; Heb. 5:14

It is this mistaken idea that, throughout the centuries, has led to many of the unreasonable and contradictory traditions with which the professed Christian world is plagued. When proponents of these theories are asked to explain their beliefs and provide scriptural support, the response often given is: "That is one of the mysteries which we are not supposed to understand."

It is certainly true that among the high thoughts of God there are many things our finite minds are

unable to fully comprehend. These are the “secret things” which belong to God. However, those things which he has revealed to us, we can know and claim as our own. They are simple and understandable. Frequently we find that even children are able to grasp and appreciate the basic truths of God’s plan.

REASONING TOGETHER

In Isaiah 1:18 God asks us to reason together with him, but not on a level that is beyond our comprehension. In extending this invitation the Heavenly Father states the subject, saying, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Here God is assuring us that our sins, “red” stains though they may be, can be made “white” through the arrangement which he has provided for this purpose.

When we “reason together” with the Lord on this point, the Scriptures reveal that this great blessing comes to us through the merit of the shed blood of Christ. (I Pet. 1:18,19; I John 1:7; Rev. 1:4,5) This is not mysterious to us, but rather the result of reasoning upon the simple and harmonious statements of the Bible.

“BLESSED BIBLE”

May our rejoicing in the revealed truths of the Bible increase, as day by day, through our study of its pages, we discover scriptural promises which give us additional assurance concerning the precious truths of God’s plan. In the familiar hymn, Blessed Bible, the poet writes that the “precious Word” is a “boon most sacred from the Lord.” It is given to us as the channel through which he reveals those

otherwise hidden things of his plan which he wants us to know.

In the last verse of the hymn, the poet speaks of the Bible as a “mine,” deeper than any mortal can go; “Search we may for many years, Still some new, rich gem appears.” Surely, we will never cease to find in the Bible nuggets of simple truths which harmonize with, and support, the great fundamentals of the divine plan and purpose. These “new, rich gems” are often precious promises of God which we had not noticed before, or perhaps had forgotten, though they were in his word all along.

If our search for treasures in the word of God is properly conducted, we will be built up more and more in our most holy faith. If, on the contrary, we spend our time searching for the mysterious, or for “new light,” we are apt to find ourselves more and more confused, and far from being established in those revealed truths, the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” These revealed and simple truths which have been so graciously made known to us constitute the Gospel of Christ, which is “the power of God unto salvation.”—Rom. 1:16 ■