

# 1 Corinthians

## Bible Study

### Mysteries of God

#### 1 Corinthians 4:1–2

Paul finishes up chapter three by coming back to where wisdom is really found. Wisdom only comes from God, never man. Man's wisdom is at best limited, and does not rely on the spiritual component imparted by the Holy Spirit. Wisdom that comes from man is actually foolish. This was the problem with the Corinthians. They were following the wisdom of various men instead of the truths of the doctrine given to them by Paul. They were using human reasoning to evaluate spiritual truths. This was the source of the divisions that had develop within the church. Instead of boasting about following certain men, they needed to understand, and put their faith in, the godly doctrine that came from Paul. They had everything they needed to properly evaluate spiritual matters, but they were relying on human wisdom instead of the Holy Spirit in understanding Paul's doctrine.

#### **Faithful steward**

Paul is always very careful to guard the information Jesus Christ gave to him concerning the Mystery doctrine. He calls himself, and those working with him, stewards of the mysteries (plural) of God. A steward is a servant who is given much responsibility by the owner of a household. They oversee the whole operation in the absence of the owner (Luke 12:42–44).

In the Greek, a steward is someone who dispenses (*oikonomos*). They are therefore managing a dispensation, which in the Greek is *oikonomēā*. A dispensation describes the manner in which God deals with mankind. It is how He has decided to administer His program over men. God delegated to Paul the responsibility to be a steward over His household during this special period of God's grace. In order to please God, all people today must get behind and support Paul as the steward of the mysteries of God.

Paul understood this important function and responsibility he was given as God's steward. He had passed on these sound words of doctrine to Timothy who was told to hold tightly to the sound words of doctrine which he learned from Paul (1 Timothy 4:6). Timothy was then responsible to pass on these sound words to other faithful men who in turn would continue the process (2 Timothy 2:2). A faithful workman is one who studies and rightly divides Scripture (2 Timothy 2:15).

As the lead person in the Body of Christ, Paul is our pattern and example (1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1). Most people think that it is the earthly Jesus whom we are to follow. Many even think that we are to follow the apostle Peter as our apostle. Paul was told by the risen and glorified Jesus Christ that he was to be the administrator of the Dispensation of Grace and that he was therefore our example (Ephesians 3:2; Colossians 1:25). Paul was not a follower of the fleshly Jesus as Peter was, but followed the final words of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16; 1 Timothy 6:3; Colossians 5:26).

#### **Mysteries of God**

The term, *mysteries of God*, is often misunderstood and mis-taught. Most would understand these to be general things we don't know or can't know about God. Obviously, there are many things that fit within these parameters. Others confuse Paul's mysteries of God with the mysteries of the Kingdom, information kept secret to those who rejected Jesus as Messiah concerning the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). They were called mysteries because they were not going to be revealed to unbelievers. The mysteries of God that Paul is talking about are made know to us throughout his writings as part of the doctrine given to Paul by Jesus Christ. They are not related to Israel's Kingdom program.

When Paul speaks of the Gospel of Grace, he is not always referencing salvation. It often includes the whole body of doctrine that was put in his trust as a steward of God's word. He sometimes lumps

everything revealed to him as the Mystery (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:3). Sometimes he is referring to only one element of God's revelation to him (Ephesians 5:32). Lets look at some of the mysteries of God.

#### **Jew and Gentile on equal footing**

According to Ephesians 3:4–6 it was a mystery that the Jews and Gentiles would be treated without differentiating between the two. Gentiles are now able to come to God in the same way as a Jew in this Dispensation of Grace. In the past, Gentiles could come to God, but only through the nation of Israel. In the Millennial Kingdom, Israel will once again be given dominion over all the nations. Gentiles will still be able to be saved, but they will need to come to God though Israel (Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18–19; Zechariah 8:20–22).

#### **The mystery of godliness**

Paul says that the mystery of godliness is the Body of Christ. This was a mystery revealed to Paul, completely hidden before that. 1 Timothy 3:15–16 is often understood to be about Jesus Christ, but I believe it is referring to the Church, the Body of Christ, after all it is not a mystery that Jesus Christ is godly. Paul is speaking of the Church, the Body of Christ, in all the verses previous to verse 16, and he continues the thought saying that we (the Church, the Body of Christ) are God manifested in the flesh (2 Corinthians 4:10). We were justified in the Spirit. We are being observed by angels as they try to understand God's program of Grace (1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10–11). We are ambassadors with the message of reconciliation, literally preaching in the world, and our message is for the whole world (not just within the nation of Israel). Finally, we are seen as already received up into glory (Romans 8:30; Ephesians 2:6). Notice how the order makes more sense for the Body of Christ than it would of Jesus Christ.

#### **The mystery of the union of the Body of Christ with Christ**

Christ is the head of the Church, the Body of Christ. This was a new concept (a mystery) revealed to the apostle Paul by Jesus Christ. Before this, God revealed to Israel that He was their King, their Shepherd and their Messiah, but now the church has been given a special relationship with God as the Head (Ephesians 5:31–33).

#### **The mystery of Israel's blindness**

Partial blindness has come to Israel because of their rejection. This blindness will be removed following the fulness of the Gentiles (Romans 11:25). While anyone can freely come to Christ, Jews have a veil blinding them to the truth (2 Corinthians 3:15–16). However, understand that all believers have been blinded to the truth of the word of God (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).

#### **The mystery of God's will**

God made known to us the mystery of His will (Ephesians 1:9). Notice that God's will (for the Body of Christ) was a mystery until it was revealed through the apostle Paul. It is no longer a mystery because it was plainly given to us through Paul. There is nothing more that God will reveal to us.

#### **The mystery of the rapture**

According to 1 Corinthians 15:51 we will all be changed at the sound of the trumpet. This is the calling home of all believers in the Rapture. This event is called a mystery because it was not revealed before it was given to Paul for the Church, the Body of Christ.

Although the whole body of truth in Paul's writings is repeatedly referred to as the Mystery, Paul often breaks down the Mystery into smaller bite-size chunks and calls them mysteries. The above list is not exhaustive. There are a number of additional mysteries not mentioned.

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