

The Mysteries
Of God

By
Don Fortner

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The Mysteries of God
1 Corinthians 4:1

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

As it is ordinarily used, the word “mystery” refers to something that is unknown, perhaps unknowable, a phenomenon. It refers to that which is secret, or hidden. A “mystery” commonly implies the withholding of knowledge. However, as it is used in the New Testament the Word “mystery” refers to divinely revealed truth. A mystery in the Word of God is something that was hidden, or only partially revealed in the types and shadows of the law and in the prophecies of the Old Testament, but is clearly revealed in the New Testament in the gospel of Christ. A mystery is something hidden from natural man, but revealed to regenerate people, to those who are born of God. A mystery in the New Testament is a profound, spiritual truth that could never be known or understood but by divine revelation.

When we come to study the mysteries of God we are studying that which no one can understand apart from divine revelation and a God given faith in Christ. These mysteries revealed in the New Testament are the most profound truths of the universe. Yet, to the believer, these are matters of confidence, assurance, joy, and peace. Our Savior declares, *“It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them (who believe not) it is not given”* (Matt. 13:11). The fact is, the mysteries of God are those aspects of gospel truth which are most confusing to the world, but most comforting to God’s elect. The word “mystery” is used twenty-two times in the New Testament, “mysteries” is used five times; but all the mysteries revealed in the New Testament may be set forth in seven distinct categories. In this study, we will look at all seven in a general overview. In the studies that follow we will study these mysteries individually.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS spoken of in 1 Timothy 3:16 has reference to the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word “godliness” simply means devotion. The devotion, dedication, and commitment of a true believer to Christ is a mystery to the unbeliever and to the religious hypocrite. The world calls our faith fanaticism and our devotion to Christ foolishness. The fact is *“The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not”* (1 John 3:1). What is it that inspires and encourages the believer’s commitment to Christ, his church, and the gospel of his grace? Here Paul declares that the mystery of godliness, the mystery of our devotion to our God and Savior is the person and work of Christ as our Substitute and Savior. Here are *six things* about the Lord Jesus Christ which graciously constrain and irresistibly compel the hearts of all who know him to consecrate themselves to him.

1. ***“God was manifest in the flesh.”*** The Son of God came into this world in human flesh that he might both bring in everlasting righteousness and satisfy divine justice as the Substitute and Representative of God’s elect (Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; Matt. 1:21; John 1:14; Gal. 4:4-6).

2. Our Savior was ***“Justified in the Spirit.”*** There are many ways in which the Holy Spirit has born witness to Christ and justified all his claims as the Messiah and the Son of God. He did so at our Master’s baptism (Matt. 3:13-17). He did so on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33-36). The Holy Spirit bore witness to and justified the claims of Christ by the miracles of the Apostolic Age (Heb. 1:3). He continues to do so today through the preaching of the Word by the gospel. However, Paul is talking about our Lord’s justification from sin by his resurrection from the dead. When he was raised from the dead, Christ, who was made to be sin for us was freed from sin and justified in the Spirit.

3. In all his work as our Representative, the Lord Jesus Christ was ***“Seen of Angels.”*** The angels of God beheld him and

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worshipped him at his birth, saw him and ministered to him in the wilderness, and watched with wonder as he prayed in Gethsemane, as he was made to be sin, and as he suffered and died at Calvary. They watched him in his resurrection and ascension. They behold his face in glory today. They even behold him through the ministry of the Word in the house of God (1 Pet. 1:12; Eph. 3:10).

4. Christ Jesus, our crucified, risen, exalted God and Savior, has been and is now ***“Preached unto the Gentiles.”*** The gospel of God’s redeeming, saving grace in Christ is now preached to us Gentiles, the most vile men and women in the world, the vilest wretches of the earth, by our Lord’s express command (John 3:16-17).

5. The preaching of Christ to the Gentiles has brought saving faith to God’s elect throughout the world. Christ Jesus is ***“Believed on in the world.”*** Wonder of wonders! God has given faith to the most despicable wretches in the world. He has given us faith in Christ. Truly, this is the basis of and motivation for all true godliness, devotion, and commitment.

6. When he had finished all that he came here to do, our Savior, the Son of God, God manifest in the flesh, was ***“Received up into glory.”***

He was raised from the dead in a glorified body. He ascended into heaven in a glorious manner. When he was received up into glory he was there received as our Representative and Forerunner (Heb. 6:20; 9:12). He is crowned with glory. He is the King of Glory. He holds all the fullness of glory for all those for whom he lived, died, rose again, ascended up into heaven, and makes intercession. The believer’s devotion to Christ is not fanaticism. It is the most reasonable thing in the world (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). It is devotion to an all-sufficient Redeemer who is the sovereign Monarch of the universe! *“Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness!”*

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THE MYSTERY OF THE FAITH (1 Tim. 3:9) is the doctrine of the gospel. A pastor must be a man who holds the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. This mystery of the faith is called "*the mystery of the gospel*" in Ephesians 6:19. Paul does not leave us to guess what that mystery is. It is the message which God has sent his ambassadors to proclaim (Eph. 6:20). Very simply put, the mystery of faith, the mystery of the gospel, is the salvation of sinners by a Substitute. It is the revelation of atonement, reconciliation, peace, pardon, justification, righteousness, sanctification, and eternal life for sinners through the merits of Christ's redemptive work as the sinner's Substitute. The mystery of the faith, the mystery of the gospel is Substitution! To the wiseacres of the world, it is foolishness. To the self-righteous religionists it is a stumbling stone and rock of offense. Yet, to every believer it is the power of God, the wisdom of God, and the glory of God. We see and find everything required for the saving of our souls in Christ, our crucified Substitute (Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:12; 1 Cor. 1:30-31).

THE MYSTERY OF SPIRITUAL UNION (Eph. 5:30-32) is one of the most soul-cheering, delightful things revealed in the Word of God. Nothing in all the Bible is more profound and nothing more blessed, than the wondrous union that exists between Christ and his people. This union is a union common to and enjoyed by all believers. We are one with Christ representatively (Eph. 1:6), spiritually (Eph. 4:4), mystically (Eph. 1:22-23), and vitally. We are one in him, like branches are in the vine. He is in us, like the soul is in the body (Col. 1:27). Without him, we cannot live; and without us, he is not complete. Yes, God's elect are the fullness of him that filleth all in all. We are one with Christ eternally. We always have been one with him (Eph. 1:6) and always shall be Rom. 11:29). We shall be one in Christ and one with Christ perfectly forever (John 17:21-26).

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THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE (Rom. 11:25-26; Eph. 3:3-9) is that which assures and comforts our hearts as we face the sorrows, trials, and troubles of life in this world. *This is the mystery of providence* - God almighty sovereignly arranges, manipulates, and disposes of all things for the salvation of his elect (Rom. 8:28). Just as the Lord God raised up Pharaoh and Egypt, and destroyed Pharaoh and Egypt, for the saving of Israel, so to he raised up and destroyed Israel as a nation for the saving of his elect throughout the whole world, so that all the Israel of God shall be saved. It is still true today. God hides the gospel from some in judgment that he might reveal it to others in mercy (Matt. 11:25-26). God, our Father, sacrifices men and nations on the altar of his love for his elect, to gather his precious seed out of the earth (Isa. 43:1-5). This is the mystery of his will (Eph. 1:9-11); and this is cause for adoration and praise (Rom. 11:33-36).

THE MYSTERY OF THE STARS AND THE CANDLESTICKS (Rev. 1:20) speaks of gospel preachers and the churches they pastor. **The seven golden candlesticks are the churches of Christ.** There are seven of them - always enough! Christ is in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20). As he walks in the midst of his churches, he sends out his Word. The churches are established by Him, provided for by Him, and ruled by Him. **The seven stars are the pastors of the churches.** Pastors are God's messengers (angels) to his churches. It is Christ who puts His messengers in His churches. Those who are Christ's messengers are in His hand.

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY (2 Thess. 2:7-12) is called the mystery of Babylon in Revelation 17:5. It refers the delusions of antichrist, the delusions of Arminian, free-will, works religion. One might wonder why God allows so much perverse religion in the world. Why is it that the religion of antichrist is so prevalent in the world today? Do not allow these things to disturb you. This too is according to the purpose of God. When men and women will not receive the love of the truth, God sends them a

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strong delusion and gives them over to a reprobate mind that they might be damned (2 Thess. 2:11-12). The heresies of this age must abound, so that God's elect might be distinguished from the reprobate (1 Cor. 11:9). Christ's sheep hear his voice. A stranger they will not follow! (1 John 2:19, 20, 27). The only reason God's elect are not engulfed in the perverse religion of antichrist is their eternal election to salvation in Christ by his grace (2 Thess. 2:13-14). "*The mystery of iniquity doth already work.*" God's greatest judgment upon this generation is not immorality, drugs, abortion, or aids. God's greatest judgment upon the world in which we live is the perverse freewill, works religion of this age. Just as the universal acceptance of papacy brought degeneracy to the world in those dark days prior to the reformation, so the universal acceptance of free-willism has brought degeneracy upon this age. Wherever and whenever men embrace a religion of works salvation degeneracy and immorality follow!

THE MYSTERY OF THE RESURRECTION (1 Cor. 15:51-58) is the blessed hope set before us. Scoffers laugh at us, skeptics ridicule us, the religious world derides us for what they call our "old fashioned", "unintellectual" beliefs; but all believers walk in the old paths of divine truth, believing exactly what we are ridiculed for believing. We believe in the literal, bodily resurrection of the dead and the triumph of God's elect over death, hell, and the grave. "*We shall not all sleep.*" We will not all die. Some will still be living in faith when Christ comes again. "*But we shall all be changed.*" Both those who have died in the Lord and those who are yet upon the earth when he comes again shall be transformed into the likeness of Christ in glorious immortality and perfect holiness. We shall all be triumphant at last.

The Mystery of Godliness

1 Timothy 3:16

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

When Paul says, *“Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness,”* he means for us to understand three things.

1. The doctrines of the gospel are irrefutable facts. Sometimes the Word “godliness” refers to the whole body of revealed truth, particularly the truth of God as it relates to the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is saying, “The doctrines of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ are indisputable, undebateable, irrefutable facts, so plainly revealed and evidently manifest in Holy Scripture that no reasonable controversy can be raised about them” Yet...

2. The gospel of Christ is a mystery no man can comprehend. It cannot be known, understood, or received by any human being except by divine revelation and regenerating grace (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:5-6). Even to those to whom and in whom the gospel is revealed it remains a mystery that we cannot fully comprehend. *“We see through a glass darkly.”*

3. The basis and motive of all true godliness is the gospel of Christ, the Person and work of our God and Savior. Generally, when we use the word “godliness,” or when it is used in a biblical context, it refers to the believer’s devotion and consecration to Christ. Looking at it that way, Paul is telling us that the mystery of godliness, which the world can never understand is not a legal bondage, but the constraint of love (2 Cor. 5:14; 1 John 4:19; 3:23). In Christ God’s elect are free, entirely free from the law (Rom. 6:14,

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15; 7:4; 8:1; 10:4; Gal. 3:13; 5:1; 1 Tim. 1:9-10). Believers are not motivated or ruled by legal principles in any way or to any degree.

Having said that, Paul goes on to assert six facts, six matters of divinely revealed gospel truth, which to mortal eyes are incomprehensible mysteries. I want us to examine these six statements in this study. These six mysteries of faith are the things that inspire and compel the believer's heart in the worship and service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.” The incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ was an absolute necessity because of God's eternal purpose of grace to save his elect. There was no other way for God to be just and yet justify the ungodly (Rom. 3:24-26). The Lord God declares himself to be both *“a just God and a Savior”* (Isa. 45:20). If there was any other way for him to save that did not involve the incarnation, righteous obedience, and sin-atonement death of his dear Son, *“then,”* as the Scriptures plainly state, *“Christ is dead in vain”* (Gal. 2:21; 3:21). In order for God to save his elect all the demands of his holy law and infinite justice had to be satisfied on our behalf. Someone, whose righteousness and sacrificial death would be of infinite merit, and therefore of infinite efficacy, must make atonement for our sins. Someone had to live and die as our substitute. The only person capable of such substitutionary obedience must be both God and man; and that person is Jesus Christ, who is the incarnate God, God manifest in the flesh.

The results of his obedience unto death as our substitute before God are certain. This great Savior cannot fail to save those people whom he came to save (Matt. 1:21; Isa. 42:4). Therefore every believer may rightfully enjoy the blessed comfort and assurance of his acceptance with God. We have an Advocate with the Father who is so infinitely meritorious, whose advocacy is so justly efficacious that God cannot in justice impute sin to those for whom he lived and died (1 John 2:1-2; Rom. 4:8). This great work

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of redemption by Christ was planned and purposed in eternity by God the Father (Eph. 1:3-6), effectually purchased and obtained for the elect at Calvary by God the Son (Heb. 9:12; Gal. 3:13), and is effectually and irresistibly applied to every chosen, redeemed sinner by God the Holy Spirit in regeneration and conversion (Heb. 9:13-15). Jesus Christ, who is God manifest in the flesh, has fulfilled for every believer all the will and purpose of God according to the Scriptures (Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; Mic. 5:2; John 1:1-3, 14, 18; Heb. 1:1-3; 10:5-10).

Having accomplished redemption for us, the Son of God was **“JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT!”** While he walked upon the earth, his claims as Messiah were justified by the fact that the Holy Spirit was given to him without measure (John 3:34). Particularly at his baptism, as he began his public ministry, in a very public manor the Holy Spirit descended and abode upon him in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:13-17), thereby vindicating his claims and the mission he had come to accomplish. The miracles he performed by the Holy Spirit justified his claims as Messiah (Lk. 11:20; Matt. 1:21). When he was resurrected from the dead, he was by the Holy Spirit justified from our sins that had been imputed to him. He was slain because he had been made to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). When he arose from the dead three days later, his resurrection was God’s public declaration that all the sins he bore in his body on the cursed tree were forever put away. Thus, his resurrection vindicated and justified his claims; and he was justified as our Representative and Surety (Rom. 4:25). The Son of God in all his claims as our divinely appointed Savior was justified by the Spirit through the ministry of his chosen apostles (Heb. 2:3). And he is justified in the Spirit every time the gospel is preached in the power of the Spirit to the salvation of redeemed sinners.

Next, Paul tells us that our Redeemer was **“SEEN OF ANGELS!”** Of course, he was seen of angels in his pre-incarnate glory as our Mediator (Isa. 6:1-7; Rev. 4:8-11; 5:8-10). He was seen of angels at his incarnation. When the angels of God saw God the

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Son, their Creator in human flesh coming into the world to save fallen men, they were overwhelmed with wonder. *"Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"* (Luke 2:13-15). They were astonished at his miraculous conception (Matt. 1:18-21; Luke. 1:26-35) and virgin birth (Luke. 2:8-14). The angels of God observed his life, his baptism (Matt. 3:13-17), and his temptations (Matt. 4:1-11). After his temptations in the wilderness, they rushed to minister to him. The angels of God observed with reverence all his words and works of mercy throughout his public ministry. They beheld him in awe upon the Mount of Transfiguration, as the Father displayed his approval and acceptance of all he had done and would do, and gave a demonstration of the glory that he now enjoys in his exaltation, the glory he obtained by virtue of his obedience (Matt. 17:1-9; Phil. 2:8-11). The angels saw him (How utterly astonished they must have been!) when the God-man's heart was crushed in Gethsemane, as he cried out to his Father at the prospect of being made to be sin for us. No doubt, those holy spirits were moved as they had never known they could be moved, when they saw him break out in bloody sweat. They followed him on to the judgment hall and observed his mock trials, the jeering taunts of the soldiers, the humiliations he endured at their hands, and the beating of his holy body. The angels watched the parade of infamy, the crucifixion, and the torments heaped upon him as he hung upon the cross. The angels observed his willingness to endure it all, observed his dying love for his people, heard his tender words upon the cursed tree; and the angels observed the great transaction of justice and truth. They watched God make his Son to be sin for us. They heard the Savior's cry and watched him as he was forsaken by his Father that we might forever be accepted by him. They saw Immanuel die! The angels were there when he went into heaven with his own blood and obtained eternal redemption for us. They saw him rise from the dead, attended him in his ascension, and shouted for joy as the King of glory sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

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“When in heaven He took His seat,
The seraphs sang all hell’s defeat!”

Next we read that our Savior was **“PREACHED UNTO THE GENTILES!”** This was indeed a mystery. The Jews who had despised him never dreamed that God would reject them and send his grace to the Gentiles. They did not understand the prophets or the gracious purpose of God revealed in them. Certainly, the Gentiles, lost in pagan darkness, idolatry, and superstition, never thought of such a thing. Yet, God had from eternity purposed to gather his church and kingdom, his Israel, out of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue. Therefore, when the fullness of time had come, the gospel of redemption and grace in Christ, the God-man, was preached to the Gentiles. Chosen Gentiles, hearing of God’s purpose of grace toward them, hearing of redemption accomplished by the Son of God, and of the free and full forgiveness of sin by his blood, believed. *“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”* (Acts 13:48). The Son of God will continue to be preached among the Gentiles until all God’s elect have been saved. When the fullness of the Gentiles has been brought in, when the number of the saved equals the number of the elect, then *“all Israel shall be saved”* (Rom. 11:25-26).

As the result of Christ being preached among the Gentiles, he was and is **“BELIEVED ON IN THE WORLD!”** God could call out his elect by any means he desired. Had it been his pleasure to do so, he could have called them without any intermediary means. Had it been his pleasure, he could have sent angels to proclaim the gospel to them. He could have spoken the word of grace by a donkey, or a rock. But *“it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe”* (1 Cor. 1:21). The preaching of the gospel is God’s ordained means of grace to chosen sinners (Rom. 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23-25). Here is a great act of mercy and condescension toward us. Not only has God chosen to save sinners, he has chosen to allow saved sinners to be the instruments in his

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hands by which other chosen sinners hear the gospel of his grace and believe on his Son unto everlasting life (1 Cor. 1:26-31; Eph. 3:8). Christ lifted up upon the cursed tree accomplished redemption; and Christ lifted up by the preaching of the gospel is the means by which God calls chosen sinners to himself in saving faith (John 3:14-16; 12:32).

Our great, incarnate God and Savior, having accomplished eternal redemption for us, was **“RECEIVED UP INTO GLORY.”** There is a man in glory today who is God manifest in the flesh. Once his work of redemption was finished, he sat down at the right hand of God and took possession of heaven as the Representative and Forerunner for God’s elect. There he sits in all the ease and tranquillity of total sovereignty. He is there as our Advocate and High Priest to make unceasing intercession for his redeemed (Heb. 7:24-25; 1 John 2:1-2). Therefore, believers may confidently raise those great challenges of faith found in Romans 8:33-34. ***“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”*** Not only does he intercede for us, the God-man, our Savior holds the reins of the universe in his hands, ruling the world and all things in it for the salvation and eternal, spiritual good of his elect. God the Father has invested his Son, as our Mediator and Savior, with all power, dominion, and authority over all flesh to give eternal life to chosen, redeemed sinners (John 17:2; Rom. 8:28). Every child of God ought to seek grace from God to live every day in the constant, confident awareness of this fact. It would comfort our souls in the midst of every trial, heartache, and trouble we are constrained by God’s providence to endure. God’s purpose in all things is our everlasting salvation and the salvation of all his chosen. At the end of our brief time in this world of woe, we will confess, like those mentioned in Mark 7:37, who beheld his works upon the earth, **“He hath done all things well!”**

The Mystery Of The Faith
1 Timothy 3:9

“Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.”

In 1 Timothy chapter three Paul gives us the qualifications of men for the offices of pastor and deacon. These are characteristics of grace that a man must possess before he is considered for ordination as a pastor or a deacon. In verses one through seven, he tell us that the work of a pastor is a good work, and one to be desired, as well as what kind of man a pastor must be. In verses eight through thirteen, he tells us that the work of a deacon is also a good, noble work in the kingdom of God, and that a deacon must be a man of faithful, godly character. Both pastors and deacons must be men who hold *“the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.”*

Notice the language carefully. The Holy Spirit does not say “the mystery of faith,” but *“the mystery of the faith.”* That definite article, “the,” identifies the faith he is talking about. He is not talking about our faith toward God, the gift of faith, the grace of faith. He is talking about the doctrine of faith, the doctrine of the gospel.

It is called, *“The Mystery Of Christ”* in Ephesians 3:3-4. “One can say that this mystery is, in a sense, Christ himself, that is Christ in all his glorious riches actually dwelling through his Spirit in the hearts and lives of both Jews and Gentiles, united in one body, the church” (William Hendriksen). The mystery of the faith is the mystery of Christ.

It is also called, *“The Mystery Of The Gospel”* in Ephesians 6:19. The gospel is called a mystery because it cannot be known apart from divine revelation. No human eye can see the things of God. No finite mind can grasp spiritual truth. No amount of wisdom,

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learning, and reason in man can discover divine truth. “*The things of God knoweth no man.*” They must be revealed (1 Cor. 2:7-16). The mystery of the gospel is the blessed truth of full, free salvation in Christ for all who trust him, both Jew and Gentile.

The message of grace is called “*The Mystery Of The Faith*” and “*The Mystery Of The Gospel*” because of “the mysterious doctrines of it, such as the doctrines of the Trinity of Persons, of the union of the two natures in Christ, justification by his righteousness, regeneration by his Spirit and grace, the saints union to Christ, and communion with him, (and) the resurrection of the dead” (John Gill).

It is the responsibility of every pastor to proclaim the mystery of the faith faithfully to his own generation and the responsibility of every deacon to assist his pastor in that good work (Eph. 6:19-20).

It is the responsibility of every man called of God to the work of the gospel ministry to give himself wholly to the task of proclaiming the mystery of the faith, faithfully teaching the doctrines of the gospel, proving the mystery of the faith by the Word of God, and protecting the mystery of the faith from those who oppose it.

In this study, we will look at seven things revealed in the Word of God concerning “*The Mystery Of The Faith.*” These are seven aspects of gospel truth that no man could ever know except by divine revelation. At the risk of oversimplifying the subject, I will give these seven things in one word headings, so that they may be easily remembered.

SIN - The first thing made known in “*the mystery of the faith*” is sin. Until men and women know their sin they will never seek a Savior. Until we know our sin, we do not know our need of Christ and will not trust him. So when God the Holy Spirit comes to

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save he convinces men of sin. You may think, “Pastor, everyone knows what sin is.” If you do, you are mistaken. The fact is, very few people know what sin is, where sin is found, or how we became sinners. As long as we think of sin in terms of what men and women do and don’t do, in terms of acts and deeds, we are missing the mark. When men and women are enlightened and made to know the mystery of the faith, they are taught three things about sin that no man can know and acknowledge about himself, unless he is taught of God.

1. **Sin is not so much what I do as it is what I am by nature.** Sin is the enmity and hatred of man toward God that is manifest in rebellion and unbelief (Rom. 8:7; 1 John 5:10).
2. **Sin is not a corruption that invades man’s heart, but a corruption that is found in man’s heart** (Matt. 15:17-20). The heart of man by nature is “*deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*” (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9-14).
3. **Sinfulness is not a nature that is acquired and learned, but a state and condition of birth.** We became sinners by the fall of our father Adam. (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). Adam’s sin was imputed to us by God (Rom. 5:18) and imparted to us by natural generation, so that all are born in spiritual death and sin (Psa. 51:5; 58:3). The nature of man from his birth is depraved. He is incapable of doing good and of ceasing to do evil.

SOVEREIGNTY - Secondly, “*The Mystery Of The Faith*” is the revelation of the one true and living God in the sovereignty of his character. All men by creation and conscience, know that God is, that God is powerful, that God is holy, and that God is good; but the sovereignty of God in the exercise of his providence and grace is something revealed only in the Word of God. **God almighty is absolutely sovereign in...**

- The Universality Of His Providence (Psa. 115:3; 135:6; Prov. 16:4; Isa. 45:7).

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- The Purpose Of His Grace (Rom. 8:28-30).
- The Exercise Of His Grace (Rom. 9:16).

SUBSTITUTION - Thirdly, *“The Mystery Of The Faith”* gives us the revelation of the gospel doctrine of substitution (Gal. 1:3-6; Isa. 53:4-6). The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, assumed human nature, lived and died in the place of his people; and by his obedience to God as our Representative and Substitute obtained eternal redemption, salvation, and everlasting glory for us (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:12).

There has never been a time when Christ did not stand as our Substitute and Surety before God. There has never been a time when God’s elect were not blessed of God and accepted of him in Christ; and there never shall be such a time. He was our Surety in the covenant of grace before the world began (Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Tim. 1:9). He was our Representative while he lived upon the earth as a man, obeying the law and will of God in all things (Rom. 5:19). He was our Substitute when he died in our place at Calvary (2 Cor. 5:21). He is still our Substitute in heaven today, representing us at the throne of God as our all-sufficient Advocate and High Priest (1 John 2:1-2). He shall be our Substitute still in the day of judgment. Just as he stood condemned in our place before the bar of God, bearing our sins imputed to him, we shall stand accepted and blessed before the bar of God, being redeemed from all sin and having his righteousness imputed to us (Jer. 50:20; Rev. 21:27; 22:11).

SATISFACTION - Fourthly, *“The Mystery Of The Faith”* also reveals and assures us of satisfaction for sin made by our Redeemer (Rom. 3:24-26; Gal. 3:13-14; Isa. 45:20; 1 John 1:9). A holy, just, and true God could never save sinners without the satisfaction of his justice. Christ, our Substitute, has fully and perfectly satisfied all the claims of God’s law and justice by his life and by his death. By his obedience in life, he brought in our everlasting righteousness for his people (John 17:4). By his

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obedience in death, he put away our sins, paying for us all the debt we owed to divine justice (John 19:30).

SALVATION - Fifthly, *“The Mystery Of The Faith,”* the gospel of Christ is the revelation of full, free salvation in Christ by the grace of God. All men by nature are self-righteous Arminians. All men by nature believe that salvation is in some measure conditioned upon the freewill and works of men. That is the reason you will find the teachings of freewill, works salvation incorporated in all false religion. That is not the case. Salvation is not the way men think. It takes only a casual reading of Holy Scripture and only a very basic knowledge of spiritual truth to see that...

- Salvation is in Christ alone (Eph. 1:3-6).
- Salvation is by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9).
- Salvation is free and unconditional (Rom. 9:11-16).
- Salvation in Christ is full, complete, and perfect (Col. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 1:30).
- Salvation is obtained by faith alone (Acts 16:31).

SURRENDER - Sixthly, *“The Mystery Of The Faith”* shows us that faith in Christ is more than the acceptance of specific doctrinal truths. It is surrender to Christ as Lord (Lk. 14:25-33). Faith in Christ is neither more nor less than the commitment of my life, body, soul, and spirit, for time and eternity, to the rule, dominion, and disposal of the Lord Jesus Christ.

SOLIDARITY - Seventhly, *“The Mystery Of The Faith”* reveals and compels a real, everlasting solidarity of saved sinners in Christ (Eph. 3:6; Col. 3:10-11). In Christ men and women who are natural enemies, men and women from diverse and opposing cultures, races, and social classes are united in heart and purpose as one family, one body, for the glory of God. We possess a mutual love (Christ) that causes us to love each other. We seek a mutual goal (The Will And Glory Of God) that makes us submit to and serve one another. We shall obtain a mutual inheritance (Heavenly Glory) that shall dissolve all earthly distinctions. In that day, when

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we have obtained that which Christ holds for us in heaven, all true believers shall truly and perfectly be one in him. We shall then enter into the everlasting experience and joy of perfect knowledge, perfect holiness, and perfect commitment to Christ!

This is “*The mystery of the faith,*” “*The mystery of Christ,*” “*The mystery of the gospel.*” It is this mystery which God has called us to proclaim and make known unto all men.

1. Sin - The Depravity Of Men!
2. Sovereignty - The Character Of God!
3. Substitution - The Suretyship Of Christ!
4. Satisfaction - The Basis Of Grace!
5. Salvation - The Work Of Grace!
6. Surrender - The Nature Of Faith!
7. Solidarity - The Union Of Believers In Christ!

The Mystery of Christ and the Church

Ephesians 5:30-32

“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 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.”

“We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” Those are not the words of romantic fiction or poetic exaggeration. Rather they are expressive of an indisputable fact, a fact as profound and mysterious as the incarnation of Christ and redemption by his blood; but this mystery is a fact - *“We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones!”* There is between Christ and his people a union as real, as lasting, and as profound as the union of our Savior’s two natures in his glorious Person. Mr. Spurgeon said, “Sin separated us from God, and in undoing what sin has done, Christ joins us to himself in a union more real than any other in the whole world. This union is very near, and very dear, and very complete. We are so near to Christ that we cannot be nearer, for we are one with him. We are so dear to Christ that we cannot be dearer.” We are so complete in Christ that in him we lack nothing. As he is complete and perfect as both God and man, all believers are complete and perfect in him (Col. 2:9-10). This union is so amazing that the more you study it and meditate upon it, the more amazed you are by it. *“We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones!”*

“O sacred union, firm and strong,
How great the grace, how sweet the song,
That worms of earth should ever be,
One with Incarnate Deity!”

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“Near so very near to God,
Nearer I cannot be;
For in the Person of His Son,
I am as near as He!

Dear, so very dear to God,
Dearer I cannot be;
For in the Person of his Son,
I am as dear as He!”

The union that subsists between Christ and his people is set forth under numerous metaphors in the Word of God. So anxious is the Holy Spirit for us to realize the blessedness of this that he describes it in several ways. It is compared to the union of *a building and its foundation* (Eph. 1:20-22). As a building depends upon its foundation, so we depend upon Christ. As a building conforms to the foundation, so the church of God is conformed to Christ. As the building and the foundation adhere to one another, so Christ and his people adhere to one another.

This union between Christ and his church is also compared to and represented by *a vine and its branches* (John 15:1). It is a vital, living union. As branches draw life and nourishment from the vine, so believers, being graft into Christ by regeneration, draw spiritual life and nourishment from him by faith. As the branch must wither and die when cut off from the vine, so the believer cannot exist apart from Christ. He is truly all in all to those who know him (Col. 1:11). This vital union is a fruitful one too (Gal. 5:22-23). All who are joined to Christ bear fruit from him - the fruit of the Spirit. They do not produce the fruit; but they do bear it. Love, joy, and peace toward God, longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness toward men, and faith, meekness, and temperance within are all characteristics found, to varying degrees, in all believers

This union between Christ and his covenant people is compared to a *legal, representative union* (Eph. 1:6; 2:6). The

believer's acceptance with God is a legal, representative acceptance. That is to say, we are not accepted of God because of what we do, but because of what Christ has done for us as our Surety and Representative (Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22).

Perhaps the most astonishing, mysterious, wonderful picture given in the Scriptures of the believer's union with Christ is that of *a husband and his wife* (Eph. 5:23, 30-32). As a husband and wife are, by virtue of their legal connection to one another, by virtue of their conjugal relationship to one another, and by virtue of their deep, self-denying, self-sacrificing love for one another, in all things one; so Christ and his people are in all things one.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE SO INTIMATELY UNITED WITH THE SON OF GOD? Notice that little word "we". Like the door of Noah's ark, it shuts some in and shuts others out. That word "we" is synonymous with the words "church," "elect," "the redeemed," "the called," "believers," and "saints," as it is used in the fifth chapter of Ephesians. "We" who are members of his body are the "church" Christ loved, chose, redeemed, regenerates, preserves, and will perfect by his grace. It should be obvious to anyone that Paul is not talking about any local church or religious denomination in verses twenty-five through thirty-two. The Holy Spirit is, in this chapter, declaring the promises of God to his elect. He is describing what God has done and without fail shall do for all his elect in Christ, the church universal, which is his body and his bride. To apply the things here spoken of to a local church, or a particular denomination would be to connect salvation to that church or denomination.

Go back to the first chapter of Ephesians. Read it carefully. There you will discover of whom the apostle is speaking when he says, "*We are members of his body.*" The "we" in Ephesians five are...

- The people blessed of God in eternity (v. 3).
- The people chosen by God in electing love (v. 4).

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- The people adopted into the family of God by sovereign grace (v. 5).
- The people accepted in the beloved (v. 6).
- The people redeemed by the blood of Christ (v. 7).
- The people forgiven of all sin by Christ's atonement (v. 7).
- The people in this world and in heaven above who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 13). All God's saints are one in Christ., one church, one kingdom, one family (Eph. 3:15; Heb. 12:22-24).
- The people sealed by the Spirit in Christ (v. 14).

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE METAPHOR? It is evident that Paul is referring to Genesis 2:21-24. The words that he uses to describe the union between Christ and his church were first spoken by Adam with reference to his wife Eve. What did Adam mean when he used these words? That is exactly what Christ means, only in a more spiritual and emphatic sense.

It certainly implies **a similarity of nature**. Adam recognized that he and Eve were of the same nature. She was not a mere plant in the garden, or an animal, but a woman, one of the same race, nature, and character as the man. So when Paul says, "*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones,*" he means for us to understand that Christ and his church are one in nature. That is not an overstatement. Christ became one with us in the incarnation (John 1:1-3, 14). We have become one with Christ by regeneration (2 Pet. 1:4; Col. 1:27). The believer is like Christ in that he strives against sin, seeks to do the will of God, and is motivated by love for God and man.

The metaphor used by the Holy Spirit to describe our relationship with our Savior sets forth **the most intimate relationship there is**. I doubt Adam would have spoken as he did if he had thought that Eve might leave him and become another man's wife. She was made by God for him, to be his helpmeet, in the most

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intimate of all relationships - Marriage! This is the only blessing of Paradise that remains today. Marriage is the living, loving, lasting union of a man and a woman. It is intended for the sanctity, happiness, and peace of our race. Yet, marriage was ordained by God to be a picture of the believers relationship to Christ.

The words of our text imply something deeper still - **a mysterious origin**. When Adam looked at Eve, he seems to have known, by divine revelation, that she was taken out of his side. Therefore, as he looked at her and rubbed the scar in his side, he said, *“She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.”* *“This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”* Here is the mysterious origin of God’s church. She was taken out of Immanuel’s side. As Adam was put into a deep sleep by the hand of God that Eve might be born of him, so the Lord Jesus Christ was put to death by Jehovah’s own hand and buried in the earth that his church might be born of him (John 12:24).

This metaphor also suggests **a loving possession**. When Adam said of Eve, *“This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,”* he declared, “She belongs to me. “She is my property, my responsibility, and my treasure.” So too, when the Lord Jesus declares that we are *“members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones,”* he means for us to understand that we belong to him (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We do not belong to the world or even to ourselves, but to Christ alone.

“Tis done, the great transaction’s done:
I am my Lord’s and he is mine.
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess His voice Divine.

High heaven, that heard my solemn vow,
My vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till in life’s latest hour I bow,
And bless in death the bond so dear!”

The metaphor of marriage represents **a vital, necessary union**. A vital union is a union that must be. It is not an optional thing. It is a necessity. This union between Christ and the church is vital to us. Without him we are nothing and can do nothing. Without him, we must forever die. However this union is vital to Christ, too. As our Mediator and Surety, in his mediatorial capacity, he could never be complete without us, without every one of God's elect (Eph. 1:22-23); and that cannot be. *"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He shall not ail."*

WHAT IS SECURED TO US BY VIRTUE OF OUR UNION WITH CHRIST? If we are one with Christ, we are as safe and secure as he is. If we are one with Christ, we are the objects of his unfailing love. If we are one with Christ, he will nourish and cherish us. He will both provide for us all that we need and cherish us in his constant care. If we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones, he will one day present us to himself a glorious church, without any spot of sin, or wrinkle of infirmity, or any such thing as sin, or weakness, or flaw! If we are truly one with Christ, then all the glory and bliss that he possesses shall be ours (Rom. 8:17; John 17:5, 22).

"Since Christ and we are one,
Why should we doubt or fear?
If He in heaven hath fixed His throne,
He'll fix His members there!"

This is truly a great mystery. It could never have been known except by Divine revelation. We are one with Christ! His obedience is our justification (Phil. 2:8). His atonement is our forgiveness (Eph. 1:7). His life is our regeneration (John 5:20). His holiness is our sanctification (Heb. 10:10, 14). His exaltation is our preservation (Heb. 6:20). His dominion is our victory (Rom. 8:34). His reward is our glorification (John 17:24). *"We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones!"*

The Mystery of Providence

Romans 11:25-33

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

The providence of God is a mystery, hidden from blind, unregenerate, unbelieving people, but revealed to God's elect by the Lord Jesus Christ, through his Word and by his Spirit, whose grace abounds toward us in all wisdom and prudence. *"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself"* (Eph. 1:9-10).

Providence is the government of the universe by God for the accomplishment of his will, which he purposed in himself, which will is the salvation of chosen sinners for his glory. Be sure you understand these two things:

1. The will of God, the purpose and pleasure of the triune God, is the salvation of his elect. When the Bible talks about the will of God, it is talking about the salvation of

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chosen sinners. This is what the will of God is (John 6:39-40; Heb. 10:7, 10).

2. Providence is God's sovereign and absolute government of the universe to accomplish his will, to accomplish the salvation of his elect. The mystery of providence is the fact that God absolutely directs all the affairs of the universe to save his people (Rom. 11:25-33; Eph. 3:3-11).

Look at what Paul says in Romans 11 about the mystery of providence. If you can see it, you will be astounded by it. He tells us, by Divine inspiration, that God sent blindness to the Jews that he might send light and salvation to the Gentiles, and thus save all his elect (vv. 25-26), and that he shut the Jews up in unbelief that he might have mercy upon his elect among the Gentiles (v. 32). The apostle was completely overwhelmed with awe and praise for God when he thought of his providence (vv. 33-36). We would be too, if we understood the wonder, magnitude, and grace of it.

THE MANAGEMENT OF PROVIDENCE - Who is running this world? There are four distinct views, four things taught by men about the government of the world.

1st, Some think that everything comes to pass according to some fixed law called, "The Laws of Nature." Those who teach this are rationalists. They refuse to believe anything that cannot be explained upon natural grounds. The basis of what they believe is found under a microscope, or in a test tube, or in a hypothesis. A "hypothesis" is any guess that denies God.

2nd, Others imagine that everything comes to pass by chance, or mere coincidence. Most people are great believers in "luck." They think there is nothing that is certain, fixed, and absolute, but that one thing is just as likely to happen as another. These people court and seem to adore, and ascribe everything to three women whom they

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think are rivals to God: “*Lady Luck*,” “*Misfortune*,” and “*Mother Nature*.”

3rd, Cold, pseudo-intellectuals would have us believe that everything in the world is ruled by a cold, impersonal force, called “fate.” Do you remember the name used for man’s idea of God in the movie, “*Star Wars*?” They called it the Force. “May the Force be with you,” was *Star Wars*’ idea of a benediction!

4th, However, the Bible teaches us that the Manager, Master, and Ruler of the universe is God almighty (Psa. 135:6-13; Isa. 40:12-17). We affirm and insist that this universe is totally and constantly ruled by God. Our God always has his way and does his will everywhere. There are only two alternatives to this fact: If God is not running the world it is either because he does not want to run it, or he is not able to run it. To say that God does not want to run the world is to say that he has abandoned the work of his hands and abandoned his purpose in creating all things (Eph. 1:11; Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17). To say that God is not able to control the world absolutely is to speak against his very Godhood! “*He is able*,” is the constant song of the redeemed throughout the Scriptures. He is able to deliver (Dan. 3:17; 6:20-22). “*Those that walk in pride he is able to abase*” (Dan. 4:37). He is “*able to subdue all things*” (Phil. 1:21). He is able save and to keep all his people by his grace (Heb. 7:25; 2 Tim. 1:12). Our God is a God who is able to help (Heb. 2:18). He is “*able to save and to destroy*” (James 4:12).

Those who deny God’s absolute, sovereign management of the universe destroy the very basis of worship. If God does not want to govern the world, or if he is not able to govern the world, prayer is a useless thing! Why pray to a God who is not interested or who is not able to intervene in earthly affairs? But that is not the case. The management of the universe is God’s work.

THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE - (Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33). *C. D. Cole* wrote, “Providence is mysterious and perplexing

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because the God of providence is incomprehensible to finite minds, and therefore his ways are too deep for us to understand. We must take Him at His Word.”

There seems to be no order at all in the flight of bees to and from their hive, but if you examine the honey and the honeycomb, you will see that those bees did everything by plan, arrangement, and precise order. So it is with God’s providence.

*“God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will.”*

THE MINUTENESS OF PROVIDENCE - God’s providential rule of the universe encompasses all the minute, intricate details of matter, time, and history. It covers all the little things. Someone once said, “Providence is God’s attention concentrated everywhere.” So detailed, so minute is our heavenly Father’s rule of providence that he has numbered (purposed, ordained, and determined) all the hairs on all the heads of men and numbered the hairs on the heads of his elect with the tender care of a doting mother (Matt. 10:30). No sparrow falls to the ground to get a tiny grain of food or in death without God’s decree and direction (Matt. 10:28-29). The treasures of the snow are scattered upon the earth in their foreordained path by our heavenly Father’s great and gentle hand (Job. 38:22). Even in the casting of lots and the roll of dice, God almighty has his way absolutely (Pro. 16:33).

THE MAGNITUDE OF PROVIDENCE - Here is the magnitude of God’s providence - *“The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet”* (Nahum 1:3). Are you getting the picture? The God we worship, the God of the Bible is in control of everything, absolutely, and always.

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Our God controls *all inanimate matter*. The waters of the Red Sea parted at his command. The opening of the earth to swallow up Korah was by his decree. The fiery furnace in Babylon had no ability to burn his servants, though it consumed their enemies because God willed it. The sunshine and the rain are bountifully scattered or withheld, according to the purpose of God.

God controls *all irrational creatures*. The animals of the earth were brought to Adam to name and to Noah to save by God's decree. Balaam's ass spoke in human language when the Almighty said to the ass, "Speak to Balaam." The flies swarmed over Egypt and frogs invaded the land like an army, when the Lord God ordained it. The lions in Babylon slept like lambs with Daniel, when the Lord purposed it. A great fish was prepared specifically to swallow up God's servant Jonah and carry him directly to Nineveh. The rooster crowed *twice* after Peter denied the Lord *thrice* because the Lord Jesus said it would. We rejoice to sing with the Psalmist, "*The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all!*" (Psa. 103:20).

God controls all things; and God controls *all men, both good and bad*. Both Pharaoh and Israel did exactly what God had purposed (Rom. 9:16-18). The Jews, Pilate, and the Romans did exactly what God ordained must be done in the crucifixion and death of his dear Son, no more and no less (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Our earthly rulers, all of them, do exactly what God almighty has purposed must be done for his elect (Prov. 21:1). Shemei could not curse David without God having said to him, "Curse David"(2 Sam. 16)

Even the devil himself operates only by divine permission and to the exact extent of divine permission. He could not afflict Job or sift Peter without getting God's permission first.

What about sin? God allows sin because he is able to overrule it for his own glory. God is not the Author of sin, but he is

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the Controller of it! Read Psalm 76:10, and rejoice. When it is his pleasure to do so, God sovereignly permits wicked men to do wickedness. When it is not his pleasure to overrule the evil deeds of men for the good of his elect, he will not allow even the wicked to do the evil that is in them (Gen. 20:6).

THE MARVEL OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE - The purpose and plan by which providence operates is God's eternal purpose of grace toward his own elect (Rom. 8:28-30). There is nothing God will not do to save his elect, except that which is contrary to his nature. There is nothing God will not sacrifice to save his elect, except his own honor. He who sacrificed his own dear Son for us will sacrifice anything for us (Rom. 8:32; 1 John 4:9-10).

Silly, sentimental men talk about an indiscriminate, universal love in God, making the love of God meaningless; but the Bible teaches us that God's love for his elect is such a special, discriminating love that he has sacrificed and will yet sacrifice men and nations to accomplish his purpose of grace toward the chosen (Isa. 43:1-7).

There is nothing that can hinder God's purpose of grace. There is nothing under God's dominion that can harm one of the Lord's chosen (Prov. 12:21).

THE MANIFESTATION OF PROVIDENCE (Rev. 5:11-14). When everything that must be has been done, when all the elect are saved, and all the reprobate are forever cast into hell, when our God has made all things new, then he will display forever to wondering worlds how he has done all things well for the glory of his name and the salvation of his elect.

“Sovereign Ruler of the skies! Ever gracious, ever wise!
All my times are in Thy hand, all events at Thy command.

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His decree who formed the earth, Fixed my first and second birth;
Parents, native place, and time, all appointed were by Him.

He that formed me in the womb, He shall guide me to the tomb;
All my times shall ever be Ordered by His wise decree.

Times of sickness, times of health, Times of poverty and wealth,
Times of trial, times of grief, Times of triumph and relief!

Times the tempter's power to prove, Times to taste my Savior's
love,
All must come, and last, and end, As shall please my heavenly
Friend.

Plagues and deaths around me fly; Till He bids, I cannot die!
Not a single shaft can hit Till the God of love thinks fit.

O Thou Gracious, Wise, and Just, In Thy hands my life I trust;
Have I somewhat dearer still? I resign it to thy will.

May I always own Thy hand, And to this surrender stand,
Knowing Thou art God alone, I and mine are all Thine own.

Thee at all times will I bless; having Thee, I all possess;
How can I bereaved be, Since I cannot part with thee?"

--John Ryland

The Mystery of the Stars and the Candlesticks
Revelation 1:20

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. (Revelation 1:9-20.)

These seven churches and their pastors are symbolic and representative of all true gospel churches and all true gospel

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preachers. Historically, the seven churches of Asia Minor mentioned in this chapter did exist during the days of the Apostle John. However, they are used here as allegorical representatives of all local churches in the kingdom of God. The stars, the pastors of the churches, represent all true gospel preachers, given by God to be pastors in his churches. The churches represent all local churches where Christ is worshipped. The mystery of the stars and the candlesticks is full of instruction. May God the Holy Spirit apply that which is here revealed to our hearts continually.

BOTH GOD'S SERVANTS, GOSPEL PREACHERS, AND HIS CHURCHES ARE CONSTANTLY PROTECTED AND PROVIDED FOR BY THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. If the churches of Christ and his servants are so highly valued by him, they ought to be highly valued by us. The greatest blessing God can ever bestow upon any community is to establish a local church in it where men and women gather in the name of Christ to worship him. A local church, in the New Testament sense of that term, is a congregation of saved sinners, united in the name of Christ to worship him and to serve the interests of his kingdom in this world, seeking his glory, proclaiming his gospel, seeking his sheep, and endeavoring to be faithful and obedient to his Word in doctrine and practice.

The greatest blessing the Lord God can or will bestow upon any local church is to give it a pastor after his own heart, a faithful gospel preacher, who will feed his people with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15). Pastors are the ascension gifts of Christ to his church, for the conversion, teaching, edification, and steadfastness of his elect (Eph. 4:8-16). They are to be known, loved, and highly esteemed for their works' sake (I Thess. 5:12-13). These men, as the servants of God, are to be obeyed, as those who watch for the souls trusted to their care by God (Heb. 13:7,17).

I have no hesitancy in stating also that the single most important aspect of every believer's life is the assembly of God's

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saints for public worship (Heb. 13:24-27). It is there that Christ has promised to meet with, minister to, and be worshipped by his people (Matt. 18:20). When public worship is despised and willfully neglected it is an indication of inward apostasy from Christ.

Those who despise God's servants despise God (I Sam. 8:7); and those who seek to divide God's church bring upon themselves the judgment of God (I Cor. 3:16-17). The Son of God places such high value upon his servants that he considers anything done to them, either bad or good, as being done to himself; and He places such high value upon his people that he considers anything done to them, either bad or good, as being done to him. That means that pastors must be very careful in their treatment of God's people and local churches must be very careful in their treatment of their pastors, who are God's servants.

NOTICE THAT EACH OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES HAS ITS OWN ANGEL, ITS OWN MESSENGER FROM GOD. We are told that seven is the number of grace, the number of holiness, completion, and perfection. If that is so, we must assume that the churches of Christ are represented as seven to show us that there are always as many local churches in this world as are needed to fulfill our Lord's purpose, just as many and no more.

The seven stars which John saw in Christ's right hand, represent the angels, or pastors and ministers of the churches in all periods of time, from the first to the second advent of our Lord. Thus, the Holy Spirit tells us that all true gospel preachers are in Christ's right hand (v. 16). They are placed by him where he wants them, protected by him, and provided for by him. All true gospel preachers are under the authority and direction of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. They are instruments in his hands to accomplish his will, by which he serves the interests of his people in this world.

Faithful pastors are here compared to stars and angels. Stars, like preachers, are made by God. Stars, like preachers, give

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out light in the midst of darkness (2 Cor. 4:4-6). True gospel preachers, like stars, are men on fire, burning with zeal for the glory of God and burning with a word from God that must be delivered (Jer. 20:9). Every true pastor is an angel of God to the church to which he is sent. He the minister of Christ and his church. He is sent forth to minister to those who shall be the heirs of salvation. The faithful pastor is a messenger, a man sent with a message from God that he must deliver. The message God sends his preachers to declare is always the same. It is the gospel of his free and sovereign grace in Christ. Like the angels of God, faithful; pastors rejoice in the conversion of sinners by the grace of God.

It should also be noticed that there are no more angels than churches and no more churches than angels. God almighty never lacks for messengers. Whenever and wherever his church needs a preacher, he raises one up. Yet, he never raises up a preacher until he is needed. As one old preacher used to say, “God never made a possum that he didn’t make a persimmon tree; and he never made a preacher that he didn’t make a pulpit.”

EVERY TRUE LOCAL CHURCH IS A CANDLESTICK, A HOLDER OF LIGHT, A CENTER FROM WHICH LIGHT IS DISPELLED. *“Ye are the light of the world,”* our Savior said. The only reason for the existence of local churches is to hold forth the light of life in this world of darkness and death. Local churches do not invent light, or even improve it. They are simply to hold it forth. We get the light from Christ, who is the Light. A candlestick has no more light than is put into it. Even so, we have no light but Christ. We hold forth the light of truth (The Gospel of Christ), that we may guard it, teach it, and extend it. We hold forth the light of purity, that we may keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We hold forth the light of love, that we may comfort and gladden the hearts of men, displaying in the gospel the wondrous love of God and showing forth the result of his love experienced in the heart, which is love for one another. Each local church is called a *“golden candlestick,”* to express the great value of

it. In the eyes of Christ, who loved the church and gave himself for it, and in the eyes of saved sinners, who have heard the Word of the Lord published in Zion, the church of God is precious, more precious than gold.

ALL TRUE GOSPEL CHURCHES ARE UNITED IN CHRIST, WHO IS IN THE MIDST OF THEM. *Alford* wrote “Their mutual independence is complete. Their only union is in him who stands in the midst of them.” Though local churches are independent, without denominational affiliation, influence, or obligation, they are not isolated from other gospel churches. The Head of every true church is Christ. The church of God has no other head! Absolute loyalty to the Son of God is the responsibility of every church and every individual believer. And all true believers are one in Christ, one church, one family, one kingdom, one body, one holy nation (1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13; Eph. 2:19-22; 3:15; 4:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:9). Every true church of Christ is engaged in one work, the preaching of the gospel. Each labors by one Word of authority, the Word of God. Each one has the same goal, the glory of God. And each is governed by one rule, the will of God.

NO LOCAL CHURCH IN THIS WORLD IS PERFECT. BUT EACH HAS ITS OWN EXCELLENCES AND ITS OWN DEFECTS, ITS OWN DANGER AND ITS OWN DUTY. The churches at Corinth, Galatia, and Colosse all had their peculiar weaknesses and troubles, their own faults and failures. Those *super-pious* people who hop and skip from one local church to another looking for one *worthy* of their allegiance, will never find what they are seeking. There are no perfect churches in this world. Churches are made up of saved sinners, not perfect people, forgiven people. Yet, such churches today, with all their faults, are true churches with many excellencies, just as those were in the New Testament era. As we read our Lord’s letters to the churches, we see that one is loyal to the Lord, another wavering. One is on fire, another losing its first love. One has a great reputation, though it is dead. Another is in great poverty, though it is very rich in grace. One church abounds in

every good work, while another is fast asleep. In the churches most full of life, some are dead. In the churches most dead, some are full of life. Loyal and faithful men do not forsake and abandon a ship when it is in trouble. They rally to save it. The only justifiable grounds for separating from a true gospel church is when it ceases to be a true gospel church when it no longer holds to and proclaims the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ, when it no longer holds forth the light of the gospel.

THE LORD JESUS REVEALS AND MANIFESTS HIMSELF TO HIS CHURCHES TO MEET THEIR NEEDS.

He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, not to make people feel good, and shout, and have a good time, but to graciously meet the needs of his people. To Ephesus Christ reveals himself as "*he that walketh in the midst,*" to observe and correct. To Smyrna he is "*the Living One,*" who gives the crown of life. To Pergamos he comes the "*the sharp sword,*" to sever and slay, to divide and destroy from her all that would destroy her. To Thyatira his "*eyes are like a flame of fire,*" to see all, see through all, and to consume all that is dross. To Sardis the Savior comes as he who "*hath the seven spirits of God,*" to quicken, revive, and give life, raising his church from her spiritual death. To Philadelphia Christ appears as "*he that hath the key of David,*" to open to the faithful all the bountiful treasures of the house of God. To Laodicia he is "*the Faithful and True Witness,*" to expose her pride and sin, to call her to repentance, to chasten and to correct his fallen, languishing people.

THE LORD JESUS, WHO WALKS IN THE MIDST OF HIS CHURCHES, PRESERVES AND KEEPS THEM; YET, HE EXPECTS AND REQUIRES OF EVERY LOCAL CHURCH AND EVERY PERSON IN IT, FAITHFULNESS, LOYALTY, AND PERSEVERANCE, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR DIFFICULTIES ARE. Not one of the letters to the seven churches gives us the slightest reason to imagine that the adversities and trials of the people would justify laxity, indifference, or

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surrender. On the contrary, our Lord constantly assures us that his grace is sufficient, - his love is Immutable, - his faithfulness is sure, - his intercession prevails, - his hand is strong. Whatever your trial or temptation is, Christ is greater. He will sustain you, as you cling to him (I Cor. 10:13).

THE LORD GOD WILL PRESERVE OR REMOVE THE CANDLESTICK ACCORDING TO OUR FIDELITY OR INFIDELITY TO CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL (Rev. 2:5). *“Judgment must begin at the house of God”* (I Pet. 4:17); and it shall. When our Lord spots unfaithfulness in us, he will do one of two things. Either he will chasten us and drive way our sin; or he will judge us and sweep us away in his wrath. No true church has anything to fear, except indifference to Christ. If any local church is to be preserved and persevere in the service of Christ, each member must himself overcome those things that hinder obedience and impede faithfulness to Christ.

This is the mystery of the stars and the candlesticks. The stars are God’s appointed pastors. The candlesticks are gospel churches. The churches are made up of sinners saved by the grace of God. While the security of the church is the work of Christ alone, the success or failure, life or death of the church is the responsibility of each member (Rev 3:19-22).

The Mystery of Iniquity
2 Thessalonians 2:7

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

That which Paul calls “*the mystery of iniquity*” is called “*Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth*” in Revelation 17:5. The Mystery of Iniquity and of Babylon is the wicked influence of freewill, works religion, as it is used by God to be an instrument of judgment upon those who receive not the love of the truth. This great mystery is can be understood only in the context in which it is revealed. It cannot be understood apart from that which is taught in 2 Thessalonians chapter two. In the seventeen verses of that chapter the apostle Paul, writing by Divine inspiration, teaches us five things that every believer needs to understand. Here are five facts that we need to be keenly aware of at all times.

1. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS COMING AGAIN (vv. 1-2). Paul himself had written to the Thessalonians, assuring them and us of Christ’s glorious second advent and of the gathering together of God’s elect unto him in the last day (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13-17) and of the believer’s responsibility to watch and be sober in anticipation of Christ’s coming (1 Thess. 5:1-11). However, someone had perverted Paul’s teachings and writings. They claimed to have been inspired by the Spirit of God, to have received another word from God, and to have had a new letter from Paul stating that “the day of Christ is at hand.” They taught that the Lord Jesus would be coming for certain in a matter of days, weeks, or months at the longest. In so doing, they troubled and distressed the saints. Do not imagine that these believers at Thessalonica were not anxious for Christ’s coming. They were (1 Thess. 1:10). But being told Christ is certain to come within a given time frame, these men and women were disturbed about their daily responsibilities, and relationships.

Perplexing questions arose in their minds. If Christ is coming right now, what are we to do? How are we to live?

While we should live upon the tiptoe of faith, anticipating and expecting the Lord's immediate return (Tit. 2:13), no one knows when the Lord Jesus will come again (Matt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32; Acts 1:7). We are given absolutely no indication in Scripture as to the time, not even in a general sense, when the Lord is coming again. We are never taught, since our Lord's ascension, to look for signs of his coming, but simply to live constantly in the anticipation of his coming. Not knowing the time of Christ's coming, it is our responsibility to live, labor, and witness as though the Lord may not come for another two thousand years. Yet we are here told that...

2. TWO GREAT EVENTS MUST AND SHALL PRECEDE THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST (vv. 3-10). "Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." There are no physical signs that will precede Christ's coming: The regathering of Israel as a nation means nothing spiritually. Even if they should begin the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem, it would have absolutely no spiritual significance. God's church is his Israel and his temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Gal. 3:29; 6:16).

There are no physical, material signs to indicate the time immediately preceding the Lord's return. To the unbeliever Christ will come as a thief in the night. However, there are two spiritual signs that only those who are born again and taught of God can see. *First*, there will be an apostasy, a general falling away, from the revealed truth of God, a common denial by the professed church of those very truths upon which it has been built. *Then*, the man of sin¹

¹ This man of sin is not a man, but a system of religion. Antichrist is not one person, but all religion that robs God of his glory as God and as the only Savior of his people. Without question, it includes papacy. Yet, it is a very serious mistake to limit antichrist to the papacy. Every form of Arminian, free-will, works religion is antichrist.

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must be revealed. He is revealed not to the world, but to the saints of God. He is revealed to us by the apostasy he causes. Yet, these two things happen so gradually that God's saints in every age are kept in anticipation of the Lord's return (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3; 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:7).

Carefully observe what Paul says about this system of religion that is opposed to God. He is called the "*Man of Sin*" because the religion of antichrist is a religion of lawlessness and rebellion to authority. He is called "*The Son of Perdition*" because all who follow him are doomed. This system of religion is all freewill, works religion; it is the exaltation of man in the place of God (v. 4).

The greatest religious deception the world has ever known is modern, free-will, works, decisional religion. It is already working (v. 7). It is hindered now by the Spirit of God (v. 7). Thank God, it shall be destroyed; Babylon shall fall (v. 8; Rev. 13: 18; 19). The religion of the beast, of the false prophet, of antichrist, and of Babylon is so impressive, subtle, and deceptive that all the world, except for God's elect, embrace it (vv. 9-10; Rev. 13:8).

I repeat myself and stress deliberately the fact that any and all forms of religion which make salvation to be, in any measure, dependent upon or determined by the will, works, or worth of man is antichrist. It matters not what name it wears, though it claims its place in the temple of God, it is antichrist. God demands a complete separation from and renunciation of all false, works religion (2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1; Rev. 18:4).

3. THESE TWO GREAT EVENTS (THE APOSTASY OF THE CHURCH AND THE REVELATION OF THE MAN OF SIN) ARE ACTS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT UPON A REPROBATE PEOPLE (vv. 10-12). When men and women hear the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ and receive it not, they court divine reprobation (Prov. 1:23-33). And the surest

path to destruction and eternal ruin is false religion (Isa. 28:14-20). Without question, these are days of spiritual famine (Amos 8:11-12). Religion is everywhere; but there is a famine for the bread and water of spiritual truth. In these days of heresy and apostate, false religion, God's elect are made manifest (1 Cor. 11:19) by the fact that they will not embrace the vile, base religion of antichrist. They are not deceived by free-will, works religion. Christ's sheep will not hear the strange voice of Arminianism in any form. They will not follow the stranger into the pit of works religion. They will not be forced by the flattering voice of the strange woman (Pro. 7), who has intoxicated the world with the wine of her fornications (Rev. 18:1-4).

4. GOD'S ELECT CANNOT BE DECEIVED AND DESTROYED BY THE APOSTASY AND THE MAN OF SIN (vv. 13-14). Can you imagine the shouts of joy that must have gone up in Thessalonica the first time that congregation heard the blessed words of verses 13-14? "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: (14) Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." In these two verses, Paul describes the 144,000, the fixed number of God's elect who are sealed and must be saved. Here are five aspects of God's saving grace that all his elect experience:

- Election - *"God hath from the beginning chosen you!"*
- Regeneration - *"Salvation through sanctification of the Spirit."*
- Faith - *"Belief of the Truth.'*
- Effectual Calling - *"Whereunto he called you by our gospel."*
- Glorification - *"To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

God's elect cannot be deceived with the world. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9).

5. HAVING SAID ALL THAT, PAUL CONCLUDES THIS CHAPTER BY TELLING US THAT THESE DARK, DARK DAYS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT ARE DAYS OF HOPE FOR GOD'S ELECT AND CALL FOR STEADFAST, PERSEVERING FAITH AMONG THOSE WHO BELIEVE GOD (vv. 15-17). We must steadfastly hold the traditions, the doctrines we have been taught from the Word of God (v. 15; 2 Tim. 1:9-13). While all the world opposes those glorious gospel truths which lay at the very foundation of our faith (Total Depravity - Unconditional Election - Limited Atonement - Irresistible Grace - Perseverance of the Saints), we must uphold them and proclaim them. Why shouldn't we? In the midst of an apostate generation, sinners trusting Christ alone as Savior and Lord, have a good hope through grace (v. 16). Our hope is in the free, everlasting, distinguishing love of God (Jer. 31:3). The consolation of our souls is the Person and work of Christ as our Surety, Substitute, and Savior. We rest our souls upon the grace of God alone, that grace that is ours in Christ. Electing grace! Redeeming grace! Saving grace! May God himself give you the comfort and strength of his free grace, known and experienced in Christ (v. 17).