

New Testament "Mysteries" or "Secrets"

As used in the New Testament, this word doesn't refer to something that is "mysterious" or "cryptic," but rather to something that needs to be revealed by God, in order for us to understand it. These are *revealed* "secrets" from God, which are intended for influencing our lives and attitudes.

It may be interesting to note that certain man-made religions have "mysteries" or "secrets," which are revealed only to those who have attained various "levels" in their religious systems. God's "mysteries," however, are open for all who are willing to accept them!

A. God's Plans

1. **The Mystery of God** - Revelation 10:7 (read 10:5-7)

The "mystery of God" - everything God announced through his prophets - will soon be accomplished. [This is a *future* event.]

2. **The Mysteries of the Kingdom of God/Heaven** - Matthew 13:11 (read 13:3-23, or further); Mark 4:11 (read 4:3-20, or further); Luke 8:10 (read 8:5-15)

These "secrets" are given to those who are willing to pay attention and accept them. Those who pay attention (who "hear") receive more and are blessed; those who don't accept/hear lose even what they have been exposed to, and are condemned.

3. **God's Will Concerning Christ - His Authority Over All** - Ephesians 1:9 (read 1:3-14)

All things in heaven and on earth will be brought under Christ's authority.

B. Christ and Salvation

1. **The Mystery of Godliness** - 1 Timothy 3:16

The "mystery" of godliness is Christ. Various things about him are mentioned in this verse.

2. **God's Will Concerning Christ - Both Jew and Gentile are Brought Together Under Him** - Ephesians 3:3-4, 9 (read 3:1-12)

Both Jew and Gentile share in the promises that are available through Christ. (The barrier between the two groups is now broken down - see Chapter 2.) This "secret" was not known in the past, but God put Paul in charge of explaining it to us. [This "secret" is directly connected to the "secret" that is revealed in chapter 1, about all things being brought under Christ's authority. (See "Section A" of this outline.)]

3. **The Good News About Jesus Christ (through whom the Gentiles can be saved)** - Romans 16:25 (read 16:25-27)

Through Christ, people of *all* backgrounds have the opportunity to be saved, to trust and obey God.

4. **Jesus Christ and the Cross - "Foolishness" from the World's Perspective, but "Wisdom" from God's Perspective** - 1 Corinthians 2:1, 7 (read 1:18-2:16)

[In verse 1, some manuscripts have the word "mystery" (Greek, *mysterion*), while others have the word "testimony" (Greek, *marturion*).] The testimony / revealed mystery of God is this: Jesus Christ and him crucified (v. 1). This expression of "weakness" (a shameful death on the cross) is the means by which God brings his power into our lives. This testimony/message of "Jesus and the cross" is one of God's "secrets," which can be understood/taught only by the Spirit. Only those who have the Spirit (= saved) can understand it (and let it impact their lives). None of the world's "wisdom" and power can attain it (v. 7).

5. **The Need to Explain This "Secret" (the Good News About Christ) to Others** - Ephesians 6:19 (read 6:19-20) [an example]

Paul asked people to pray that he would be able to do so, and to pray that he would explain it clearly and without fear.

C. Christ and His People

1. **Christ in Us, His People** - Colossians 1:26-27; 2:2 (read at least 1:24-2:5)

This revealed secret is "Christ in you" - that is, in his people (v. 27). This gives us the confident hope of future glory. At the present, we are in the process of becoming perfect in Christ, by means of the things Paul admonished and taught (as well as what is taught in the rest of the Bible). [This presumes that we are willing to let those things change us - and those who have Christ in them will do so.] This revealed

"secret" is the fullest expression of God's message to us (the "word of God" - v. 26). Paul did everything he could, to enable people to know Christ, who he says *is* the "mystery" or "secret" (2:2).

2. **Christ in Us - The Need to Proclaim This Truth** - Colossians 4:3 (read 4:2-6)

Paul asks his readers to pray that he will have an opportunity to clearly proclaim this "mystery" (Christ) to others. (4:3). [He also tells them that they should use whatever opportunities *they* have, to share this truth with others.]

3. **Christ and the Church - Illustrated in Jesus' Appearance to John** - Revelation 1:20 (read 1:9-20)

The revealed mystery regarding the seven golden lampstands and the seven stars: the lampstands represent the churches and the stars represent their "angels" or leaders. (The word can be translated as either "angel" or "messenger.")

4. **Christ and the Church - Illustrated in Marriage** - Ephesians 5:32 (read 5:2-33)

The relationship of Christ to his people (the "church") is illustrated by the relationship that should exist between husband and wife. (When such a relationship does *not* exist, it indicates that there is a problem in the marriage.)

5. **What About the Nation Israel?** - Romans 11:25 (read 11:11-32)

The people of Israel have experienced a partial hardening of their hearts - that is, only a few of them are being saved, at the present time. Once the full number of Gentiles (non-Jews) are saved, this hardening will come to an end. Then Israel will turn to Jesus and be saved.

D. Two of the "Secrets" of Life

1. **Life Now: Learning How to Live with Contentment** - Philippians 4:12 (read 4:11-13)

[Note: This verse uses the verb form related to the word "mystery" (or "secret"). It focuses on the *learning* of these "secrets." (All of the other verses in this study use the noun.)] Paul says: I have learned the secret about being content in any kind of situation... through the strength that God gives me.

2. **Life In the Future: The Nature of Our Resurrection** - 1 Corinthians 15:51 (read 15:50-57, or more of the chapter)

The revealed "mystery": Some will have died; some will still be alive. But all will be changed (etc.). [See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 for another description of this event. (In this passage, the word "mystery" does not occur.)]

E. Issues Related to Sin and Evil

1. **Lawlessness** - 2 Thessalonians 2:7 (read 2:1-12)

The "secret" of lawlessness is already at work; it's already expressing itself, but presently, it is restrained from its fullest expression. The time will come when the restraint will be gone and the "man of lawlessness" will be revealed. [Apparently, this is a "secret" that is not yet fully revealed - in contrast to most of the other "secrets" listed in this study.]

2. **Babylon** - Revelation 17:5, 7 (read ch. 17)

The title written on the woman's forehead "Mystery / Babylon the Great..." (17:5). The explanation of this "mystery" (the significance of the woman in the vision) begins in 17:7.

F. What Value Do Mysteries Have?

1. **When People *Don't* Understand Them: Minimal Value** - 1 Corinthians 14:2 (read 14:1-5, or further)

They benefit nobody when nobody understands them. [Specific issue here: the contrast between explaining truth ("prophecy") and saying things that cannot be understood by others ("tongues"). If "tongues" are spoken, they have no value, unless someone explains what is being said.]

2. **When People *Do* Understand Them: Still No Value for Those Who Lack Love** - 1 Corinthians 13:2 (read 13:1-3, or further)

Without love, understanding these secrets/mysteries has no value.

G. The Role of Leadership - Faithfully Protecting / Keeping These Revealed Secrets

1. **"Servants of Christ," Who Are Entrusted With Them, Must Remain Faithful to Them**
- 1 Corinthians 4:1 (read 4:1-5, or further)

Paul = a servant of Christ, who has been entrusted with God's revealed secrets.
People who have been entrusted with such things must prove faithful. God will judge whether or not they (and we) have done so.

2. **How "Deacons" Must Treat Them** - 1 Timothy 3:9

They must hold on to these revealed secrets with a clear conscience. [Note: A somewhat similar requirement is given to elders/overseers, in Titus 1:9, but the word "mystery" is not used. Elders/overseers would also be included in Paul's statement about "servants of Christ," above.]