

December 2018

Frank W. Nelte

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

There is a saying that "everybody loves a mystery". Why is that so? What is it about "mysteries" that attracts us?

Let's start by clarifying what we mean by "a mystery". The English word "mystery" comes to us from the Greek word "mysterion", a word that is used 27 times in the New Testament.

"Mysterion" in turn is derived from a Greek word that means "**to be initiated into secrets**". It has to do with "shutting the eyes" and "shutting the mouth". In other words, those who are initiated must keep that mystery a secret from all other people, by keeping their mouths and their eyes shut. With a mystery, silence (i.e. the shutting of the mouth) is imposed on those who are "initiated into the secrets". This is the thinking underlying the Greek word "mysterion".

So "the mystery of God" concerns **secrets of God and secrets about God and about God's plans that people in general do not understand**. People's eyes and ears have been shut from those secrets. And it is God who decides which people should be given the opportunity to be initiated into His secrets, though the people given this opportunity may still renege on that opportunity. They themselves may still choose to shut their eyes and to shut their ears (see Matthew 13:15). In fact, most of the people given this opportunity by God do not follow through in grasping it. That's why many are called, but few are chosen (see Matthew 22:14).

So back to our question: why does everybody love a mystery? The answer goes back to Adam and Eve. Satan told Eve that if she would eat the forbidden fruit, then she would be initiated into God's secrets. Her eyes and ears would be opened.

For God does know that **in the day you eat thereof**, then **your eyes shall be opened**, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3:5)

Satan told Eve: God has shut your eyes to His secrets, and eating this fruit will open your eyes. Eve wanted to be let in on the mystery. She "desired" to understand God's secrets. And so she ate that fruit.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree **to be desired to make one wise**, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (Genesis 3:6)

Ever since then we human beings have loved a mystery, because **we desire to be initiated into secrets** that most other people don't comprehend. It is exciting to know something that other people don't know. As the Apostle Paul said, "**knowledge puffs up**" (1 Corinthians 8:1); it makes us feel important to know something that other people don't yet know.

Now we love a mystery because we believe, or at least hope, that there is the prospect that we can be initiated into the secrets of that mystery. And people will expend a lot of effort and energy to become initiated into whatever it is that intrigues them. This insatiable drive for more knowledge has led to many discoveries and many inventions. And in many cases that's fine. But obviously not all inventions achieved through this process have been good.

This is where the principle which Moses explained in Deuteronomy 29:29 enters the discussion.

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

While Moses was talking about the laws of God being revealed, this principle has a wide application. We have access to all the things that are "revealed" or "uncovered". That includes access to knowledge concerning a large part of all the physical, material things in God's creation. God created us with minds that have the capacity to "uncover" such information. And **God expects us human beings to use our minds** in order to come to a constantly greater understanding. We are expected to constantly grow in understanding.

A problem develops with this pursuit of our desire to know and understand all things when we human beings channel that desire in the wrong direction. As God said at the time of the tower of Babel:

And the LORD said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and **this they begin to do**: and **now nothing will be restrained from them**, which they have imagined to do. (Genesis 11:6)

"Imagination" took people in the wrong direction. They channeled their desire to know in the direction of competing with God and challenging God. That was clearly wrong. They should have channeled their desire for knowledge and understanding into a completely different direction.

Getting back to Deuteronomy 29:29, there are also "secret things" or "hidden things". The primary area of secret or hidden things concerns knowledge about God and about God's actions and plans and purposes. This is the area of knowledge that God has hidden, and it is the area of knowledge the people in Genesis 11:6 were trying to uncover by their own self-willed powers.

However, that is an area of knowledge and understanding that is impossible for the human mind to uncover on its own. It's way off limits! God created the human mind in such a way that this category of knowledge and understanding lies above the capacity of the natural human mind. As Paul said, "**the things of God knows no man**, but the spirit of God" (see 1 Corinthians 2:11).

Let's compare the human mind to the engine of a car.

Let's say that the car model we are looking at has an engine that runs smoothly and efficiently at 3,000 rpm, and it has the capacity to run at up to 7,000 rpm for short periods of time, before causing irreparable damage. Those are the limitations of the human mind.

Now to understand the secret things of God requires an engine to run at 20,000 rpm. But that is something which the engine representing the human mind is utterly incapable of doing. It can't even get up to 10,000 rpm without blowing up, let alone getting up to 20,000 rpm.

That is the limitation with which God created the human mind, that knowledge about God lies beyond the scope of the human mind, much like requiring an engine capable of running at 7,000 rpm max to somehow run at 20,000 rpm.

Now when God decides to grant certain human beings access to a part of "the secrets of God", then **God has to do something to the human mind** to enable it to understand things that can normally only be understood "at 20,000 rpm", to use our analogy. This is where God's holy spirit enters the picture.

The human mind is restricted to 7,000 rpm maximum as long as we are in this physical body. The holy spirit does not increase our rpm level capacity. No, what the holy spirit does for us is **gear down**

knowledge, which normally requires 20,000 rpm to be comprehended, so that it can then be understood by a mind running at the 3,000 to 7,000 rpm level.

So **for the natural human mind** with its 7,000 rpm maximum, all knowledge that requires 20,000 rpm to comprehend is totally out of reach.

But **for the human mind that has received God's holy spirit** that 20,000 rpm knowledge is geared down, to the point where it can be understood by a human mind which is still only operating at the 3,000 to 7,000 rpm max level.

This is only an analogy, and yes, it is easy to find some flaws with it.

But can you follow the point I am trying to explain? When God gives us His holy spirit, then that spirit adds a dimension to our human minds, which empowers us to understand certain "secret things of God" that normally lie beyond the reach of the natural human mind.

The holy spirit does not increase the "rpm level" of our minds, because our minds still have **the same limitations as all other human minds**, as far as all fields of knowledge in general are concerned. The holy spirit only lowers the rpm level required for understanding spiritual knowledge, **one very specific area of knowledge**. In that way it becomes possible for us to understand knowledge about the secrets of God, even though our minds are still restricted to operating at the same rpm level at which all other human minds operate.

It is not that our minds operate at a higher level than all other human minds. It is really a case of God's holy spirit bringing that required higher level down to the level where it becomes possible for us to deal with that knowledge and that understanding. However, it will still require effort on our part. God requires of us that we put out the effort to study in order to show ourselves "approved unto God" (see 2 Timothy 2:15).

So once we have received God's spirit, we ourselves must be prepared to run regularly at 3,000 rpm, with occasional bursts up to 7,000 rpm, in order to comprehend the mystery of God.

If we don't put out that kind of effort, then God's spirit having brought an understanding of the secrets of God within our reach is not going to achieve anything. We have our part to do in this endeavor.

God is not requiring us to put out a 20,000 rpm effort, because we are simply not capable of doing that. No, God is only expecting from us the level we are capable of generating, which is in the 3,000 to 7,000 rpm range, and we are required to do so on a permanent basis. **This is something the "one talent servant" in Matthew 25:18 was not prepared to do**; he wasn't prepared to put out that kind of effort.

God's spirit puts spiritual understanding within our reach. But even then it still requires effort on our part to acquire that understanding.

So as far as the mystery of God is concerned:

God knows that **if** we human beings really have a desire to know the mystery of God, to understand what it really is that God seeks to achieve and to accomplish, **then** we will also put out **a great deal of effort** to come to understand God and everything about God's plan and God's intentions. In this situation **we ourselves have to generate that desire**. We ourselves have to fervently desire to come to understand the mystery of God.

If we do not have that kind of desire, then no amount of sermons and booklets and articles and Bible studies will "initiate us" into the secrets of God. The desire to really want to know and to understand must be there first, before exposure to spiritual knowledge can be of any benefit.

Let's be honest:

In our present age tens of thousands of people have been **exposed to tons of sermons** and Bible studies and booklets and articles; and yet they never did come to understand the secrets of God. They never came to a real understanding, because **they lacked the right desire** to learn all they could about the will of God, and then willingly submitting themselves unconditionally to that will of God.

They were simply "ever learning, and **yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth**" (see 2 Timothy 3:7). They never really did understand God's truth in spite of years or even **decades of sitting in Church** and reading all of the Church's literature. They didn't really have **the self-generated desire "to grow in knowledge"** and in understanding (see 2 Peter 3:18). And all that exposure to knowledge and information while attending God's Church didn't do those particular people any good.

And so in due time they "went out from us" because "they were not of us"; they didn't have the required desire to change and to understand the mystery of God (see 1 John 2:19). They never grasped the implications of having been exposed to truth and to understanding; those implications being that **we ourselves must also change in response to everything we learn.**

The Apostle John gave us one key that applies here.

But he that hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and knows not whither he goes, because **that darkness hath blinded his eyes.** (1 John 2:11)

Here is what John is telling us in this verse. "Walk" is a reference to how we live. **If we have any wrong emotions or motivations**, hatred for other people being the specific example John refers to in this context, **then we are living in darkness.** This applies to all negative emotions, and not just to the matter of harboring hatred.

And if we live in darkness then our minds will be blinded to understanding the truth of God; our minds will be blinded to understanding the mystery of God, **even as we sit through decades of church services.** When we lack the right desire to submit to God, when we in effect "fear not God nor regard man" (see Luke 18:4), then it will be impossible for us to really understand the mystery of God. **A shallow superficial understanding is very commonly a wrong understanding.**

Many of us know people who used to attend God's Church with us, but who left the Church at some point during the past three decades or so. This also includes many ministers who have left the Church. While they were in God's Church they seemed to understand many things about God's truth, and they may even have given sermons on subjects that required a certain level of understanding.

And then, after they had left God's Church, they seemed to lose the understanding they used to have. What happened in those cases is that once they harbored wrong emotions, **they began to walk in darkness**, and that darkness then blinded their eyes to the truth they used to understand. It is a matter of cause and effect. In many cases such people still claim to be Christians, but their behavior and their actions say otherwise. As the Apostle John put it:

If we **say** that **we have fellowship with him**, and **walk in darkness**, we lie, and do not the truth: (1 John 1:6)

People who reject any true teaching of the Bible end up walking "in darkness". And it is common for people in that situation to deceive themselves and to believe that they still have "fellowship with Jesus Christ". Obviously, such people will not really understand "the mystery of God", even when they can still use some of the right religious expressions and terminology in their speaking. As Jesus Christ said:

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied **in Your name?** and **in Your name** have cast out devils? and **in Your name** done many wonderful works? (Matthew 7:22)

These people think that they are converted Christians. But they are not at all converted. So Jesus Christ replied:

And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you:** depart from me, you that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:23)

These people always walked in darkness, even when they attended the Church of God. Jesus Christ had not known them at any point in the past, meaning that they had never, at any time, been in possession of God's spirit.

Let's now consider some of the New Testament Scriptures that speak about the mystery of God.

SCRIPTURES ABOUT THE MYSTERY

When the disciples asked Jesus Christ why He spoke to the people in parables, He replied:

He answered and said unto them, Because **it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**, but to them it is not given. (Matthew 13:11)

This is not the type of understanding that any human mind can figure out on its own. It must be given to us by God the Father. **It is also not something that we can then give to anyone else.** Only God can give such understanding to a human mind. Only God can lower the required 20,000 rpm to the accessible level of 3,000 to 7,000 rpm for any individual person, to use our analogy. We ourselves cannot pass that understanding on to other people **without God first doing something for the minds of those other people.**

Typically we don't really grasp this!

We don't understand what is required from other people, for them to be able to comprehend spiritual understanding.

So when God opened our minds, then for us God slowed down the required 20,000 rpm to the 3,000 to 7,000 rpm range, so that an understanding of God's plan and purposes became accessible to us. **But we ourselves were not aware of this "slowing down" process.**

All we knew was that this spiritual knowledge was logical and easy to follow. And therefore **we assumed** that it should be equally logical and equally easy to follow for all our friends as well. After all, in all other areas of life their minds can understand all the things our minds can understand.

And so we presented one new understanding after another to our friends and relatives, while reasoning: look, **this is so clear and logical** that anyone with an average unbiased mind should be able to

understand this. **But it just didn't work that way.**

And we could not grasp why they couldn't understand the things that are so clear and so obvious to us. We could not understand why their minds could not understand knowledge that normally requires 20,000 rpm to understand, because we did not understand that **for us** God had slowed down to only 3,000 rpm the requirement for comprehending that knowledge.

But meanwhile the natural minds of our friends were still hostile to God (Romans 8:7), and therefore **for them this understanding still required the 20,000 rpm level**; and that level is impossible for them to attain.

We did not comprehend that the only reason why we could understand God's truth was because **it has been given to us**. For all other people, **to whom it has not been given**, this understanding remains totally outside of their reach.

And so all our explanations about the Sabbath and the Holy Days and the truth about heaven and hell and no immortal soul, and God building a Family, etc. fell on deaf ears, because their 3,000 to 7,000 rpm minds could not comprehend knowledge at the 20,000 rpm level. And we couldn't grasp why they could not understand things that were so clear to us.

The difference here is between something given to us or not given to us. That's what the Apostle Paul was speaking about to the Ephesians.

Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself: (Ephesians 1:9)

How that **by revelation He made known unto me the mystery**; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in **the mystery of Christ**). (Ephesians 3:3-4)

The point is that God has to enable us to understand things that are far above the capabilities of the natural human mind. Empowering our minds to comprehend the truth about God, by gearing that understanding down to our level, is how God "makes known" to us His mystery.

THE NATURAL MIND'S IDEAS ABOUT GOD

Consider for a moment the hundreds of ways that the natural human mind has tried to figure out the mystery of God. **On its own the human mind will always reach wrong conclusions.** Look at the world!

The carnal mind thinks God is a trinity. Or it thinks of the sun as god, or the moon or the stars. Or certain animals are viewed as gods. Or idols made out of metal or stone or wood are viewed as gods. Then the mind develops various systems of supposed reincarnations. At other times various human beings, like kings and emperors, have been viewed as gods. Or sometimes the human mind point-blank refuses to admit the existence of God, as with atheists. And on and on it goes.

As Paul said:

And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into **an image** made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. (Romans 1:23)

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and **worshipped** and served **the creature** more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. (Romans 1:25)

And as Revelation tells us:

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and **idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood**: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: (Revelation 9:20)

Human beings have thought up **thousands of different ideas** about the mystery of God. But on their own they have never come up with the truth.

The truth is that God is building a Family through a process that involves a very specific sequence of steps: **first** Jesus Christ, the God who dealt with Israel during the Old Testament period, became a born Son of God; **then** will follow the first resurrection for 144,000 individuals into the Family of God; **and then** will come "the end ones" (see 1 Corinthians 15:23-24).

That is such a plain and easy to understand process for a mind that is guided by God's spirit. Yet on its own the human mind would never come to this understanding in a million years. This is understanding on the 20,000 rpm level, and it only becomes plain and easy-to-understand for those people, for whom God slows it down to the 3,000 to 7,000 rpm level. For everyone else it remains a mystery.

For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of **this mystery**, lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that **hardness in part is happened to Israel**, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (Romans 11:25)

(Comment: The Greek word "porosis" here translated as "blindness" really means "hardness". "Blindness" is a serious mistranslation.)

Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of **the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began**, (Romans 16:25)

This understanding is simply not available to the unrepentant human mind. And Paul explained that the mystery is about the Family that God is building.

Behold, **I show you a mystery**; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

It is a mystery to mankind in general as to what it is that God wants to achieve. And so human minds come up with all kinds of weird ideas: about nirvana, and about sitting on a cloud while playing on a harp, and about looking at the beatific vision, etc. But **the truth would never occur to the natural human mind**. The truth is that God will build a Family of God beings, in which He will be the Father. And that Family is going to be productive on a mind-boggling scale. So much for sitting around playing a harp. The resurrection at the seventh trumpet, referred to in the above Scripture, represents one specific step in achieving that goal. But all this is a mystery to the natural mind.

STEWARDS OF GOD'S MYSTERIES

Ministers in God's Church are charged with being "**stewards of the mysteries of God**" (see 1 Corinthians 4:1). That is a very interesting statement, one to which we usually don't give much thought.

Being stewards of the mysteries of God means that ministers have the responsibility "to initiate" into God's mysteries those people who are being called by God. At the same time "**the mysteries**" **are not to be presented to the world at large**. They are to be guarded by responsible stewards.

Understand the following point:

If God wanted His ministers to tell everybody in the world "the mysteries", then ministers would no longer be "stewards" of those mysteries. The Greek word translated as "stewards" is "oikonomos", a form of "oikonomos". This Greek word comes from "oikos", which means "a house", and it is used to refer to "a family", all those living in one house.

So ministers are supposed to be people who look after the interests of the house of God, or the Family of God. Being stewards of God's mysteries means that **ministers are supposed to look after and guard the mysteries of God**. But that is not the case when we try to tell these "mysteries" to every human being on earth. Something that is made available to everybody does not require any guarding or looking after.

So the point is:

God's ministers are to explain the mysteries of God to those people that are being called by God, i.e. to initiate, as it were, those people into God's mysteries. But **God's ministers are not to present those mysteries indiscriminately to all people**, because that would mean the end of any stewardship for these mysteries.

At the second coming of Jesus Christ "the mystery of God" will be completed (see Revelation 10:7), and **during the millennium** the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God (see Isaiah 11:9 and Habakkuk 2:14), and then there will be no "stewards of God's mysteries", because there will not be any "mysteries". **Everybody will have access to understanding God's plan and intentions and purposes**. And nobody will be designated as "stewards" of God's mysteries. God's plan will then no longer be a mystery to anybody.

The reason why the truth about God's plan and God's purposes is a mystery today is because in this present age the vast majority of people are not being called by God to have a part in the first resurrection. In this age only a small minority of people are given the opportunity to be in the first resurrection; and they are the ones who need to understand the mysteries of God. But the rest of humanity in this present age is "hardened" (see Romans 11:7), i.e. the rest have hardened their own hearts.

(Comment: The Greek verb "poroo" in this verse means "hardened" and not "blinded".)

It was at the time of the flood that God modified the plan of salvation for mankind in several ways. That is the time referred to in the Bible as "the foundation of the world". This is discussed in detail in my 2011 article "What Does 'The Foundation Of The World' Really Mean?" It was **at the time of the flood that God's plan of salvation for mankind became a mystery**.

And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of **the mystery, which from the beginning of the world (i.e. age) has been hid in God**, who created all things by Jesus Christ: (Ephesians 3:9)

From the time of the flood onwards and up to this present time that mystery has been hidden from

mankind in general. It has only been revealed to specifically selected individuals, people who were called by God. Coming down to the time of Moses, the things God revealed at that time were a mystery to all other nations.

Paul made the same point to the Colossians.

Even **the mystery which has been hid from ages** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: (Colossians 1:26)

Note that the mystery "is made manifest to His saints", to members of God's Church. To all other people it continues to be a mystery.

In the next chapter Paul spelled out that he was referring to "the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ" (Colossians 2:2).

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of **the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;** (Colossians 2:2)

To Timothy Paul said the following:

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. (1 Timothy 3:16)

Here Paul focuses on six aspects of the mystery of God:

- 1) God was manifest in the flesh
- 2) justified in the spirit
- 3) seen of angels
- 4) preached to the nations
- 5) believed on in the world
- 6) received up into glory

In other words, the mystery which people in the world do not understand is **God's plan of salvation**, the key component of that plan being the sacrifice Jesus Christ brought for all those human beings who willingly submit their minds unconditionally to God. That whole plan of salvation is a mystery. And **that mystery is made more complex by all the false ideas**, all the counterfeit ideas that are so prevalent in the world today.

Now being stewards of the mystery of God implies dealing with that spiritual knowledge in a responsible way. But the disciples were also instructed to preach the gospel, which is a central part of the mystery of God, in all the world (see Matthew 24:14). If they preach in all the world, are they still being stewards, guarding that mystery?

SO HOW DOES THAT WORK?

God takes full responsibility, and God always retains full control over the process. To continue with our analogy, here is how it works.

For us God slowed down understanding that normally requires 20,000 rpm, so that we can understand it with our 3,000 to 7,000 rpm minds. And when we put out the effort, then we are able to understand this spiritual knowledge, which is still a mystery to other people. We can readily assimilate this spiritual understanding.

Then we go out "into all the world" and preach the mystery we have come to understand. In fact, to us it has become perfectly logical and straightforward to understand. We present that mystery with our 3,000 to 7,000 rpm minds.

However, as soon as the words with this information come out of our mouths, so that information is spontaneously changed back to the original 20,000 rpm level. So what leaves our mouths at 3,000 to 7,000 rpm reaches the listener's ears at 20,000 rpm. We ourselves are not aware of this transformation. But this transformation has made the things we are saying **totally inaccessible to our hearers**.

So now it is again completely in God's hands.

If we have 100 people hearing the mystery we are explaining, the only ones who will actually understand something will be those people for whose minds God will slow down this information to the 3,000 to 7,000 rpm level. For all the other people the things we are explaining will be "foolishness" (see 1 Corinthians 2:14).

So God may decide to not slow this information down to 3,000 to 7,000 rpm for anyone in our 100-strong audience. Or God may slow it down for one person, or for two or three or more people. But God controls that process. The information we present is again in the "no man can come unto Me except **it were given unto him** of My Father" (John 6:65) category.

It is God the Father who ultimately guards the mystery of God, by opening only the minds of those people to whom the Father may wish to grant access to understanding. By "opening a person's mind" I mean "slowing down the 20,000 rpm understanding to the 3,000 to 7,000 rpm level" in our analogy for those specific people.

So God has given you the ability to understand the mystery of God, God's plan of salvation for mankind, and God's plan for the Family of God going into future eternity. Guard it! Cherish it! Look after it! And never neglect it!

Frank W Nelte