

Mystery Doctrines

The word “mystery” in the New Testament refers to the doctrine which is specific for the Church Age. It is called “the mystery” because there things were never revealed in Old Testament times.

Paul states in Rom 16:25-26, Col 1:25-26 and Eph 3:3-6 that this mystery is now revealed. Especially in the Ephesians 3 passage, he points out that there is no excuse for ignorance. Ignorance of what the Bible says is the greatest occupational hazard for a Christian believer.

Ignorance of the plan of God causes a believer to make wrong assessments in life, to establish wrong priorities, to make wrong decisions, and fail to solve problems correctly. The many New Testament commands to “*grow in knowledge*”, to “*grow in Christ*”, to “*be edified*”, to “*let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*,” are pleas by the holy apostles to us Christians to overcome our ignorance with knowledge of Bible doctrine.

The content of the mystery doctrine was first prophesied by our Lord Jesus Christ during His life on earth, in John 14:20 and Acts 1:5-8.

None of the following mystery doctrines were known to the Old Testament writers of Scripture:

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit with its results
- The Union of a Christian with Jesus Christ (Positional Truth)
- The new spiritual organization called the family of God
- The unique plan of God with its precisely correct procedures
- The equal privilege and equal opportunity of every Christian to execute God’s plan
- Our portfolio of assets, “*all blessings in heavenly places in Christ*”
- The unique commissioning of Christians as priests and ambassadors

- The indwelling in each Christian of each member of the Trinity

The main job of pastors, teachers, elders is to communicate mystery doctrines. Communicating Bible truth is the primary focus of the command to elders in 1 Peter 5:2 to “*Feed the flock of God which is among you...*”

1 Cor 4:1, “*Let a person regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*”

1 Cor 2:7, “*But we communicate God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden assets which God predestined before the ages to our glory.*”

1 Tim 3:9, “*Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*”

So it is the pastor’s job to uphold the mystery, to inculcate, to repeat and teach the mystery.

Etymology and Historical Context

The Greek word (**musterion**) means “mystery”. This noun had originally been used in reference to the secrets of ancient mystery cults. Paul used it in technical, theological sense to indicate that the Church Age doctrine was totally unknown in Old Testament times. This noun is generally in the plural, referring to a number of doctrines not known in the Old Testament.

This noun was originally used of the ancient fraternities during the 7th through 4th centuries throughout ancient Greece which employed secret doctrines and secret ceremonies. Only those who were initiated into the fraternity knew the mystery doctrine or their secrets.

Some of the famous mystery cults included Elusis adopted by Athens. Isis, the cult of Egypt, spread to Corinth and included as one of its initiates the famous doctor Opulais. The mystery sorority of Dionysus for women only included dancing, drinking, drugs, ecstasies, madness, lesbianism, ritual shouting, and human sacrifice. The mystery cult of Mythis was for men only; the male worshippers

of Sybille castrated themselves in the frenzy of the rites.

The Orphic mystery cults centered around the singer Orpheus; it was adopted as a mystery system called Orphic theology. It emphasized purification, and the means whereby the soul might escape the body and ascend into the realm of the blessed. A tremendous amount of human sacrifice was related to these cults.

The mystery cults of the ancient world were based on Greek, Egyptian, and Roman mythology. Most of these mystery fraternities were related to the gods or goddesses of the underworld like Dimetre, Dionysus, Sybille, Adonis, Isis. They are related to the growth of crops: they die in the winter, come back in the spring. Thus, human sacrifices were offered in the winter so that in the spring everything would come back.

Every Hellenistic fraternity had secret doctrines and cultic rites in which the destinies of the gods were portrayed, and those initiated were supposed to share the fate of these gods.

Therefore, a vocabulary was developed in the Attic Greek.

The Greek word (**muew**) means to be initiated into the mysteries of the fraternity. This initiation involved teaching someone the secrets and doctrines of the fraternity which were never to be revealed to outsiders. So to be initiated meant to learn so as to pass the test, so that you know what your fraternity stood for.

The Greek word (**muste**) referred to those who were initiated, to those who persevered until they

actually learned all the fraternity doctrine.

The word (**mustikos**) was used for the secret rites of the doctrines that had to be learned. So all the doctrines were called (mustikos).

The word (**musterion**) came down into the Koine and is the word used in the New Testament. (**musterion**) refers to the content of the doctrine, the actual principles and points that had to be learned.

(**musterion**) was used to describe the false doctrines of these ancient Greek fraternities. But the apostle Paul took this noun away from the Greek fraternities and gnostic cosmology and gave it, under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, a Biblical definition which stands in the Word of God forever. It now becomes a part of our vocabulary.

While most of the attic Greek words remained in the realm of demonism, false doctrine, cults, promiscuity, human sacrifice, yet our noun (**musterion**) is a Biblical word used twenty-three times in the New Testament. Paul uses it twenty-one times.

Jesus Christ used the noun for the first time when He first presented Church Age doctrine to the disciples in Mt 13:11 and Mk 4:10-11. A parable is a story about some common event designed to teach something. The disciples were trying to understand why our Lord taught in the form of parables. Our Lord answered in Mt 13:11, "*To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [unbelievers] it has not been given.*"

Col. 1:26-27; Rom 16:25-26