

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD

BY RON KANGAS

In our reading and studying of the Word of God, it is easy to make two serious mistakes. The first is the error of taking things for granted, assuming that we already know the meaning of the particular text under consideration. The second is thinking that in our personal spiritual experience we presently possess the reality about which the text speaks. In light of this, we should realize that it is a great mercy from the Lord to humble ourselves before God and His Word, to open our mind, heart, and spirit, and to confess that we do not know, that we need the Lord's unveiling and the Spirit's enlightening. It is also a mercy to acknowledge the great disparity between what we read in the Scriptures and what we are in our person and living. If this is our attitude, then we can be poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3)—that is, empty in the depths of our being and ready to receive something fresh from the Lord through the Word—and also pure in heart (v. 8)—that is, seeking to know the Lord and to do His will for His glory.

It is crucial to have such a spirit and attitude in considering the subject of this essay—stewards of the mysteries of God—a subject that involves God and His economy and us and our ministry. Regarding this, Paul says, “A man should account us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, furthermore, it is sought in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:1-2). What are the mysteries of God? What does it mean to be stewards of these mysteries? What is the relationship between the stewardship of the mysteries and God's eternal economy? Why is it so important that a steward be found faithful? To what extent is the stewardship of the mysteries of God being carried out today? How can one avoid the pitfall of being a religious worker but not a faithful steward? These are some of the questions that will be explored in this broad presentation of the mysteries in the New Testament in relation to the ministry of the apostles, the new covenant ministry that desperately needs to be recovered among God's people today. God's people are suffering both from an ignorance of the mysteries of God and from the lack of faithful stewards, those who know the divine mysteries and who

live and minister them for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. There is an urgent need, therefore, to have a clear view of the mysteries of God revealed in the New Testament and of how we may become faithful stewards of these mysteries for the glory of God and the building up of the Body of Christ.

The New Testament uses the word *mystery* to speak explicitly of a variety of mysteries: the mystery of God (Col. 2:2), the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:3-6), the mystery of God's will (1:9), the mystery of the indwelling Christ (Col. 1:26-27), the mystery of the kingdom (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11), the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:9), the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16), the mystery of God's wisdom (1 Cor. 2:7), the mystery of the faith (1 Tim. 3:9), the mystery of the resurrection and transfiguration of the believers (1 Cor. 15:51-53), and the great mystery (Eph. 5:32). The New Testament also mentions two negative mysteries—the mystery of lawlessness (2 Thes. 2:7) and the mystery of the apostate church, “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT” (Rev. 17:5). In addition, the Bible speaks of other mysteries, for example, the mystery of eternal life with all its functions within the regenerated believers. Although these mysteries in the Word are not designated as such by the use of *mystery* in relation to them, they are mysteries nonetheless. In an article of this length, selected mysteries will be discussed in relation to the economy of God. According to the revelation in the New Testament, God's economy is God's plan and arrangement, according to His heart's desire, to dispense Himself in Christ into His chosen and redeemed people as their life, their life supply, and their everything for the purpose of making them His corporate expression—the Body of Christ in this age and the New Jerusalem in the coming age and in eternity.

The Mystery of the Universe

The universe with its incredible vastness is a mystery. All thoughtful people realize that the universe is a mystery, and throughout the ages philosophers have pondered the deep questions concerning the mystery of the universe. How

did the universe come into being? What is the purpose, the meaning, of the cosmos? Many scientists have spent their lives trying to account for the existence of the universe; others dream of a unifying theory that will embrace all the fundamental laws and principles of the universe. Eventually, astrophysicists may develop a beautiful theory to explain the origin and expansion of our seemingly infinite universe, but they cannot tell us the meaning of the universe. This mystery can be known only by divine revelation and spiritual enlightenment.

In Romans 16:25 Paul speaks of “the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages.” In Ephesians 3:9 he says, “To enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things.” From eternity, before the creation of the universe, there was a mystery, a hidden purpose, concealed within God. He created all things, yet through the ages He did not disclose His purpose in creation. He is truly a God who hides Himself (Isa. 45:15). Although God created all things, prior to the time of the apostles He did not reveal His hidden plan, His eternal intention, the desire of His heart, His good pleasure, for the fulfillment of which He created the universe. Eventually, the hidden mystery—the mystery which had not been made known in previous ages and generations—was revealed to the apostles in spirit (Eph. 3:5). The Lord opened His heart and made known to the apostles the mystery hidden deep within His being. The mystery was hidden in God throughout the ages, but now as believers in Christ we may be enlightened and thus become able to see this mystery. Apart from exploring the revelation of the mystery as it is found in the New Testament and apart from being enlightened through the apostles’ teaching, we cannot fathom the mystery of the universe.

There must be a meaning to the universe and to all created things. The meaning of the universe is the mystery of the universe, and the mystery of the universe is simply God Himself. A universe without God is an empty universe, a vain universe, a universe devoid of meaning and purpose. Without God the universe is worthy only of weeping and lamentation. “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). This is the universe without the true and living God. Those who, experientially, dwell in a universe without God live in a meaningless universe. One such dweller, a winner of the Nobel Prize in physics, suggests that, at most, scientific knowledge can take us beyond the level of farce and bestow upon human existence something of “the grace of tragedy.” Without the speaking of the God who hides Himself and without the revelation of God’s hidden purpose, the universe is in fact empty, absurd, and dead.

Although God is hidden, His power and characteristics are nevertheless made known through His creation. “For the

invisible things of Him, both His eternal power and divine characteristics, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being perceived by the things made” (Rom. 1:20). The universe declares the eternal power of God and manifests the characteristics of God, but not the being, or Godhead, of God. The Greek word (*theiotēs*) rendered “divine characteristics” denotes God’s attributes, the special characteristics as the outward manifestation of God’s nature. These characteristics include glory, ability, majesty, light, life, beauty, and orderliness. Only a God of beauty and orderliness, we believe, can create a universe characterized by beauty and orderliness.

The universe, of which God is the meaning and the mystery, was created according to God’s will. “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created” (Rev. 4:11). God has a will according to His good pleasure (Eph. 1:5), and because of this will, with His plan and purpose (3:11), He created the universe and all things. If we would know the meaning and plumb the mystery of the universe, we must know God and God’s will.

God is a purposeful God, a God of purpose. Having a will according to His good pleasure, the desire of His heart, He created all things for His will that He might fulfill His purpose. If we consider Revelation 4:11 in the context of the New Testament as a whole and of the book of Revelation in particular, we will see that the will of God, which became His purpose in creation, is to produce and build up the New Jerusalem, His eternal habitation for His satisfaction and expression (21:2, 10). The will of God is the New Jerusalem, and the divine intention to have the New Jerusalem was the secret, the mystery, hidden in God. God’s intention in creating the universe will be completely fulfilled and manifested through the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the will of God and the meaning of the universe.

The Mystery of God’s Will

This brings us to another New Testament mystery—the mystery of God’s will. Paul mentions this mystery in Ephesians 1:9: “Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself.” We may suppose that the phrase *the mystery of His will* means primarily that God’s will for us is inscrutable and that His way with us is beyond our understanding; therefore, we should confess that God’s will for us is a mystery and simply trust Him to do what is best for us. This is a self-centered approach to God’s will, an approach which leads to asking, “What is God’s will for my life, and what does He want for me?” instead of asking, “What is God’s will concerning Himself, the will according to which He created the universe?” God’s will is mysterious because

it is related to the mystery that was concealed within Him until He chose to make it known to the apostles and then through the apostles to us. God's will has a mystery, the mystery hidden through the ages but now made known. A will is an intention, and God's will is God's intention, which is intimately related to the desire of God's heart. For this reason, the will of God with its mystery is according to God's good pleasure.

The book of Ephesians, which was written from the divine point of view, reveals the will of God. Paul charges his readers, saying, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (5:17). Sadly, many believers are foolish in the sense of not knowing the will of God according to Ephesians. Lacking in spiritual understanding, some suppose that the will of God is for us to be materially prosperous, even wealthy, and then be taken away from the earth to spend eternity in a marvelous mansion in heaven.

As revealed in Ephesians, the will of God is to produce and build up the church, the Body of Christ, for His corporate expression by dispensing Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people, constituting Himself into them by working Himself into their being and mingling Himself with them to produce a corporate entity. This corporate entity is the house of God and the fullness of God. Central to this understanding of God's will is Paul's prayer in chapter three. He prayed that we, the believers, would be strengthened with power by the Father through His Spirit into the inner man (the regenerated human spirit indwelt by the divine Spirit) so that Christ may make His home in our hearts (vv. 16-17). As a result, we corporately become the fullness of God, His expression for His glory. This is a matter of God in Christ building Himself into our being to make us His corporate expression, initially as the Body of Christ and consummately and eternally as the New Jerusalem. This is the mystery of God's will. This is what God wants, and it is for this that we were created and redeemed.

The Mystery of Human Life

Since the universe is a mystery and since the will of God is a mystery, it is not surprising that human life in the universe created by God according to His will is likewise a mystery. Human existence is inherently mysterious because it is intrinsically connected both to the mystery of the universe and the mystery of God's will.

The vast majority of human beings, including most preachers of the gospel and teachers of the Word, do not know the meaning of human life, the purpose for which we were created. To Christians and unbelievers alike, human life—their life—remains a mystery. They simply do not know why they exist. To say that we are here to be saved and go to heaven merely begs the question, avoiding the issue of God's original intention in creating humankind. The common notions that we were created because God wanted someone to love or because He wanted to have fellowship with us are woefully superficial and inadequate. If we would understand the mystery of human life and thereby know the meaning of human existence, we need to realize that we were made in the image of God, that we were designed to be vessels to contain God, that we have a spirit with which to contact and receive God, and that we should live a corporate life for the expression and representation of God.

Genesis 1:26 says, "God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." Verse 27 continues, "And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." The word *image*, which is of crucial significance, indicates expression. For humankind to be created in God's image inwardly and according to God's likeness outwardly means that human beings were created for God's expression. In particular, since Christ is the image of God (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4),

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for us to be created in the image of God means that we were created in the image of Christ for the expression of Christ. To be a proper and normal human being is to be a person who expresses God in Christ. This is the meaning of human life.

Humankind was created not only in the image of God to express God but also as a vessel designed by God to contain God. God's chosen and redeemed people are vessels of mercy, in order that God "might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:23). We should not only express God outwardly—we should be filled with God inwardly. For this filling we need to receive the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity to such an extent that we are permeated and saturated with God. Since we were made to contain God, it is human (not religious) to need God and to be filled with God. Since human beings are vessels to contain God, the only way to be truly human is to be filled with God as our content.

The human vessel is actually a tripartite being, composed of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23). With the body and its organs and senses we contact the physical realm; with the soul and its faculties we contact the psychological realm; and with the spirit and its functions we contact God and know the things in the spiritual realm. To insist that there is no difference between the soul and spirit or to propagate the notion that the spirit is merely the soul functioning in relation to God is to misaim concerning the truth and to teach erroneously. Yes, a human being is a complete unit, but this unit contains major parts, two of which are the spirit and the soul. The function of the human spirit is to contact God, receive God, contain God, digest God, and assimilate God. The function of the human soul is to express God. If we would contact God by exercising the spirit, our spirit must be regenerated, that is, born of God to have the life and nature of God by believing into the Son of God (John 3:15, 3-6). If we would express God through our soul, we need to experience the transformation of the soul from one degree of glory to another by beholding the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face and by being renewed in the spirit of our mind (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2). Those who deny the existence of the human spirit or who fail to exercise their regenerated spirit have God only as a doctrine, not as a reality. Those who do not experience the metabolic transformation of their souls express themselves, not the Lord, the pneumatic Christ, who dwells in their spirit (2 Tim. 4:22; 1 Cor. 6:17).

Concerning the human spirit, two verses are of central significance and particular importance. Zechariah 12:1 says, “Thus declares Jehovah, who stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him.” Because the spirit of man is the organ for contacting, receiving, and containing God, it is ranked in importance with the heavens and the earth. God treasures the human spirit, and we should treasure our spirit as God does. Moreover, because the human spirit is ranked with and related to the heaven and the earth, it is the organ in which and by which we understand the meaning of the universe and of our existence. Only when we exercise our spirit and live in the spirit do we sense that our life has meaning, for only in the spirit do we know God’s will and our relationship with it.

The second crucial verse is Proverbs 20:27: “The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, / Searching all the innermost parts of the inner being.” Since the Spirit of God also is a lamp (Rev. 4:5), the believers in Christ have two lamps within them—the Spirit of God and the regenerated human spirit. These two lamps shine and enlighten our inward parts so that we may have a thorough knowledge of ourselves and the meaning of our existence (1 Cor. 2:11). Only when these two lamps—the Spirit in our spirit—shine within us can we fathom the mystery of human life.

Apart from the regenerated human spirit, we are in darkness and our existence is meaningless.

Because God’s will is to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ, He created humankind as a corporate entity. Consider Genesis 5:1-2: “When God created Adam, He made him in the likeness of God. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name Adam.” Here we have humankind as a corporate entity created in God’s image for His expression. Hence, we have a social nature and an inborn longing for a corporate life. Although we are distinct persons, we should not live an isolated, individualistic, independent existence, for such a living is contrary to God’s purpose in creation and our nature by creation. God made us in His image as tripartite vessels to contain Him personally and to express Him corporately. This is the meaning of human existence, the mystery of human life.

The Mystery of God—Christ

We have pointed out that the universe itself declares the power of God and the characteristics, the special features, of God. Thus, sinful human beings can perceive the invisible things of God through the visible things created by God. However, these visible things cannot manifest or make known the person of God, that is, the Godhead of God. What is exhibited in and by the universe as God’s creation are the characteristics of God, not the person or Godhead of God. It is only in Christ and through Christ that we can know God in His person and Godhead.

Just as the mystery of the universe is God, so the mystery of God is Christ. In Colossians 2:2 Paul speaks of “the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ.” To say that Christ is the mystery of God is to say that Christ is the definition and explanation of God. Christ is the embodiment and expression of the unknown God, and therefore He is the declaration of God. Because Christ is God’s definition and explanation, apart from Christ we cannot find God or know God.

The fact that Christ is the mystery of God indicates that if we would know God, we must know Christ, for Christ is God’s unique definition and explanation. The universe is a mystery, and the eternal, infinite, immeasurable creating God is also a mystery; He is a God who hides Himself. Therefore, God is a mystery, and Christ is the mystery of this mystery. In Christ, by Christ, and through Christ as the mystery of God, the mysterious, hidden God is revealed and made known. Christ, the Word of God and the only begotten Son of God, has explained Him (John 1:18). Everything of God and everything concerning God is in Christ, the embodiment of God. Embodied in Christ as the mystery of God is all that God is, all that God has, all that God has done, and all that God is doing and intends

to do. Since God is in Christ and revealed by Christ, the only way to have God is to have Christ. If we know the Christ who is the mystery of God, we know God and we can even be in God. But apart from Christ we cannot be in God, we cannot be one with God, and we cannot experience and enjoy the reality of God. As the mystery of God, Christ is the key that opens to us the intrinsic being of God. In Christ we know God, we are brought into God, and we are one with God.

The Christ who is the mystery of God is both the infinite God and a finite man. For God to be infinite means that He is free from all limitations and that everything that belongs to His being is without measure or quantity. As the infinite God, Christ is self-existing and ever-existing—the great I Am (John 8:58, 24, 28). As the infinite God, Christ is eternal and immortal (Micah 5:2; 1 Tim. 6:16). As the infinite God, Christ is unchangeable, immutable (Heb. 1:8-12; 6:17). As the infinite God, Christ is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. As the infinite God, Christ is unlimited in all His attributes. As the infinite God, Christ is the effulgence of God's glory (1:3). What a mystery that Christ, the infinite God, is also a finite man! Thus, He is the wonderful God-man. As a finite man, Christ in the flesh was limited in space and time (John 7:6). As a finite man, Christ in the flesh was neither omnipotent nor omnipresent. As a finite man, Christ in the flesh was limited in knowledge (Matt. 24:36; Luke 2:40, 52; cf. John 7:15; Mark 6:1-3). As a finite man, Christ in the flesh had a natural, human life (John 10:11, 15, 17). As a finite man, Christ in the flesh could be put to death (1 Pet. 3:18). As a finite man, Christ in the flesh did not manifest the glory of His divinity but concealed it within the shell of His humanity (John 12:23-24). Through His incarnation Christ brought the infinite God into the finite man. God is infinite and man is finite, yet in Christ the two became one. This is truly wonderful and mysterious.

The Christ who is the mystery of God is the complete God manifested in the flesh. The Bible reveals not only that Christ is the infinite God but also that He is the complete God. For Christ to be the complete God means that He is the Triune God. He is not merely one-third of God—God the Son; He is the totality of God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. In the incarnation Christ is God manifested in the flesh. *In the flesh* (1 Tim. 3:16) means in the likeness, in the fashion, of man (Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7-8). He was manifested in the flesh not only as God the Son but as the entire God—the Father, the Son,

and the Spirit. For this reason the New Testament does not say that the Son of God was incarnated; rather, it says that God was manifested in the flesh. This means that the entire God and not only the Son of God was incarnated; hence, Christ in incarnation is the entire God manifested in the flesh.

The principle is the same in John 1, where we are told that the Word, who is God, became flesh (vv. 1, 14). God, who the Word is, is not a partial God but the entire God—God the Son, God the Father, and God the Spirit. The New Testament indicates, therefore, that the Word, who was in the beginning, is the entire God. This Word who became flesh—God manifested in the flesh—is God's definition, explanation, and expression in the flesh.

In this wonderful One dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. In Colossians 2:9 *all the fullness of the Godhead* refers to the entire Godhead, to the complete God. Since the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. That all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the Triune God is embodied in Him. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is therefore not only God the Son but also the entire God. Since Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all embodied in Him. Moreover, this fullness of the Triune God dwells in Christ

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in a bodily form. The word *bodily* in Colossians 2:9 implies the physical body which the Lord put on in His humanity and indicates that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ as the One who has a human body. Prior to Christ's incarnation, the fullness of the Godhead did not dwell in Him bodily, but as the eternal Word. But from the time that Christ became flesh and was clothed with a human body, the fullness of the Godhead began to dwell in Him bodily, and this fullness will dwell in His glorified body eternally (Phil. 3:21).

The Christ who is the mystery of God is the all-inclusive Christ. This Christ is the Word, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the God-man, the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of His substance, the centrality and universality of God's economy, the Creator and also the Firstborn of all creation, the firstborn Son of God, the reality of every positive thing in the universe, the reality of all the divine attributes and the human virtues, the Redeemer and the Savior, our salvation, everything in the new covenant, the portion of the saints, our life, everything to the believers,

everything in the church, and the One who has the preeminence in all things. It is through Christ that we know God and can enter into God to become one with God and mingled with God for the corporate expression of God.

The Mystery of Christ—the Church

“That by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have written previously in brief, by which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:3-4). Here Paul speaks not of the mystery of God but of the mystery of Christ. Whereas the mystery of God in Colossians 2:2 is Christ, the mystery of Christ in Ephesians 3:4 is the church. God is a mystery, and Christ, as the embodiment, expression, and explanation of God, is the mystery of God. Christ also is a mystery, and the church, as the Body of Christ for His expression, is the mystery of Christ. As the context of Ephesians 3 makes clear, the mystery of Christ is the church. Thus, the expression *the mystery of Christ* is not only a designation of the church but also a title of the church.

The mystery of the universe is God, the mystery of God is Christ, and the mystery of Christ is the church. However, these actually are not three mysteries; rather, they are three stages of one mystery. God is revealed in Christ, and Christ is expressed in the church. God is in Christ, and Christ is in the church. If we want to know God, we must contact Christ, and if we want to contact Christ, we must come to the church, the corporate expression of Christ. The church is a corporate, organic entity that issues out of Christ as the mystery of God. From this we see that the church is the product of the mystery, the continuation of the mystery, and even a mystery within a mystery. In keeping with the principle of the proper begetting, mystery produces mystery. Christ, the mystery of God, has brought forth the church, the mystery of Christ. Here we have a threefold mystery, a mystery in three stages. The church is the mystery of Christ, who is the mystery of God, and God Himself is the mystery of the universe.

By the command of the eternal God, this threefold mystery “has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit” (Eph. 3:5). The word *spirit* here denotes not the divine Spirit but the human spirit of the apostles and prophets, a spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit of God. The regenerated human spirit is a mingled spirit, the human spirit mingled with God’s Spirit. Such a mingled spirit is the unique means by which the mystery of Christ is unveiled, not only to the apostles and prophets but also to all believers in Christ. We must have the same spirit to see the same revelation of the same mystery. If this mystery is to be made known to us through the Word, we need to realize that in this matter our mind is inadequate. The revelation does not come to our mind—the revelation comes to our regenerated spirit. This is why Paul prayed that the Father

would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him (1:17). Our spirit mingled with the divine Spirit is the organ in which the mystery of Christ is revealed.

In Romans 16:25-26 Paul speaks of

the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages but has now been manifested, and through the prophetic writings, according to the command of the eternal God, has been made known to all the Gentiles for the obedience of faith.

This mystery, which was kept in silence but which has been revealed in the New Testament age, is mainly of two aspects. The first aspect, revealed especially in the book of Colossians, is the mystery of God, which is the all-inclusive Christ, the Head of the Body. The second aspect, revealed in the book of Ephesians, is the mystery of Christ, which is the church, the Body of the Head. Together, these two mysteries—Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ—are the great mystery (Eph. 5:32). The Christ who is the mystery of God and the church who is the mystery of Christ are one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), one organic entity. This is the great mystery.

The Mystery of the Indwelling Christ

In Colossians 1:26 Paul speaks of the “mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints,” and then, in verse 27, he goes on to say that this mystery is Christ in us, the hope of glory. Here we have the revelation of the mystery of the indwelling Christ. In his writings Paul strongly emphasized the truth of the indwelling Christ: “Christ is in you” (Rom. 8:10); “Jesus Christ is in you” (2 Cor. 13:5); “Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20); “until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). It is indeed a mystery that the all-inclusive Christ actually dwells in us.

Thoughtful students of the Word may wonder how the resurrected and ascended Christ, the One who has been enthroned and crowned with glory and honor, can be in us. Contrary to the clear teaching of the Scriptures, some claim that Christ is in us “in the Holy Spirit” or “through the Holy Spirit.” Such an assertion is not only unclear; in effect it denies the truth that Christ is both at the right hand of God in the heavens and also in us. Consider Romans 8:34 and 10. On the one hand, verse 34 says, “It is Christ Jesus who died and, rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” On the other hand, verse 10 says, “If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.” Consider also Colossians 3:1 and 1:27. On the one hand, in 3:1 we read, “If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where

Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.” On the other hand, in 1:27 we read of a Christ who is in us. For Paul, who wrote according to both revelation and experience, Christ was both in the heavens and in the believers. However, those who have neither revelation nor experience may have trouble believing and teaching that Christ is both sitting in the heavens and dwelling in us subjectively. Thus, they may assert the former but ignore or explain away the latter.

If we would be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, we must know the mystery of the indwelling Christ. The Christ who is sitting in the heavens is the exalted Christ with a glorified body. The Christ who dwells in the believers is the pneumatic Christ, who is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Because the Lord (who is Christ) is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17) and because we have a human spirit, the Lord Spirit (v. 18) can, and does, dwell in our regenerated spirit. The Lord is with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). Paul went even further to utter the tremendous words recorded in 1 Corinthians 6:17: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” When we believed into Christ (John 3:15) and thereby entered into an organic union with Him, He and we were joined to become “one spirit.” To speak of Christ dwelling in us is to speak literally, not symbolically. *Christ actually dwells in us.* The Lord is the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit who dwells in our spirit. This is the marvelous mystery of the indwelling Christ.

The Mystery of Godliness

Of the many other divine mysteries in the New Testament, the last one we will consider here is the mystery of godliness. Paul speaks of this mystery in 1 Timothy 3:15-16:

I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh.

It would be a mistake to assume that *godliness* here refers only to piety. Godliness refers to godlikeness, and this involves the appearance, the expression, and the manifestation of God. In brief, godliness is the manifestation of God. The church of the living God is the house of God, and in 1 Timothy godliness denotes the living of God in the church, that is, God as life lived out in the church. This

mystery of godliness is the mystery of God becoming man so that man may become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead for the producing and building up of the church, the Body of Christ, as the corporate expression of God in Christ. The church of the living God is the house of God, which is the mysterious manifestation of God in the flesh.

If we study 1 Timothy 3 under the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, we will see that the church is the manifestation of God in the flesh. God’s manifestation was first in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh. Christ is the manifestation of the entire Triune God in the flesh. Verses 15 and 16 indicate that not only Christ Himself as the Head is the manifestation of God in the flesh but also that the church as the Body of Christ is the enlarged manifestation of God in the flesh. Both Christ and the church are the mystery of godliness, the manifestation, the expression, of God in the flesh. The manifestation of God in the flesh began with Christ when He was on earth, and now this manifestation of God in the flesh continues with the church. The church is the increase, the enlargement, and the multiplication of the manifestation of God in the flesh. A local church that is cared for according to Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 1—3 will become, as the house of the living God and as the Body of Christ, the continuation of Christ’s manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the mystery of godliness—Christ lived out in the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is God

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manifested in the flesh in a wider, a corporate, way according to the New Testament principle of incarnation, the principle of God working in and through His redeemed and regenerated people and expressing Himself through them.

Stewards of the Mysteries of God

The mystery of the universe, the mystery of God’s will, the mystery of human life, the mystery of God, the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the indwelling Christ, the mystery of godliness—these are the mysteries of God. God has committed these mysteries to faithful stewards who know the economy of the mystery and who carry out the stewardship of the mystery. In Ephesians 3:9 Paul speaks of the “the economy of the mystery.” Consummately, the mystery is the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh. In order for such a mystery to be realized for God’s good pleasure, there must be an economy—the economy of the mystery. The Greek word rendered “economy” is *oikonomia*, which may be literally translated “house law,” denoting household management or administration and implying distribution.

God has a household, the church composed of His children, and for this household He has an administration.

In simple terms, the divine economy is the divine plan. God, who is the mystery of the universe, has a mysterious intention, and that intention is to dispense Himself in Christ, the mystery of God, into His chosen and redeemed people so that they may become the church, the mystery of Christ, the mystery of godliness in a corporate sense. Related to this great mystery is a plan, an economy, the economy of the mystery.

We need to see that the economy of the mystery depends for its fulfillment upon the stewardship of the mystery. As one who had received this stewardship, Paul could say, “I am entrusted with a stewardship” (1 Cor. 9:17). “You have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you” (Eph. 3:2). “Of which [the church] I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you” (Col. 1:25). It is of utmost significance that the Greek word for “stewardship” in these verses is *oikonomia*, the word for “economy,” “administration,” “dispensation.” The economy and the stewardship are actually one. With God *oikonomia* is a matter of economy or plan; with the apostles *oikonomia* is a matter of stewardship. The economy of God became the stewardship which God gave to the apostle Paul. Thus, the stewardship of God is according to the economy of God, and the stewardship of the mystery is according to the economy of the mystery. This means that the economy of the mystery has thus become the stewardship of the mystery. With God there is the economy of the mystery; with the apostles there is the stewardship of the mystery. Since the apostles represent all the believers in Christ, we must say that the stewardship of the mystery has been committed to us. What an awesome responsibility we bear!

The stewardship of the mystery is carried out by the stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). In Luke 16:1 the Lord Jesus indicates that the believers, saved by the love and grace of the Triune God, are His stewards, to whom He has committed His possessions. In 1 Peter 4:10 Peter tells us that we should minister the gift we have received as “good stewards of the varied grace of God.” In 1 Corinthians 4:1 Paul regarded himself and his co-workers as “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” The Greek word rendered “stewards” in these verses is of the same root as the word translated “economy” and “stewardship”; this word denotes a dispensing steward, a household administrator, one who dispenses the household supply to its members. The apostles were appointed by the Lord to be such stewards, dispensing the riches, the wealth, of the processed and consummated Triune God into the believers for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem.

Here we are dwelling on the fact that the economy of God is the economy of the mystery, that the stewardship of God is the stewardship of the mystery, and that the stewards of God are stewards of the mysteries of God. The economy of the mystery, the stewardship of the mystery, and the stewards of the mysteries are essentially connected and intrinsically related. The dispensing ministry of the stewards, that is, the new covenant ministry of the genuine apostles, is specifically a matter of the dispensing of God’s mysteries into the believers for their spiritual understanding and spiritual experience. Paul knew these mysteries by revelation in spirit; therefore, he could minister the revealed truth of the mysteries of God to God’s people for their enlightenment. Furthermore, Paul experienced these mysteries to such an extent that they were wrought into his being and became his constitution; therefore, he could dispense the experienced reality of these mysteries into God’s people for their growth and building up. And he did all this with the faithfulness required of stewards.

Sadly, the general situation among ministers and Christian workers today is drastically different. Few know the mystery of God, and even fewer fulfill the stewardship of the mystery for God’s mysterious, corporate manifestation in and through the church as the Body of Christ. This situation is especially tragic in view of the fact that the present age, the age of grace, the age of the church, is the age of mystery. The seriousness of the present condition among the vast majority of Christians is compounded by the realization that we are living at the end of the age of mystery (Rev. 10:7). For God’s people who are living in the age of mystery to be deprived of the revelation and experience of the mysteries of God is a grievous loss, yet this is the actual condition of countless Christians. Who knows the mysteries of God? Who is experiencing and dispensing the mysteries of God? Where is there in practicality the mystery of godliness—the enlarged, corporate manifestation of God in the flesh? There is an urgent, even desperate, need for faithful stewards, those who know, experience, and minister the mysteries of God.

If the stewardship of the mystery according to the economy of the mystery is not carried out by the stewards of the mysteries in this age of mystery, when will this stewardship be carried out? For the sake of God, who is the mystery of the universe, for the sake of Christ, who is the mystery of God, and for the sake of the church, which is the mystery of Christ, God’s people need to be recovered to the truth and experience of the mysteries of God in God’s economy. Only when the children of God receive the dispensing of the divine mysteries through faithful stewards of the mysteries of God can the economy of the mystery be fulfilled for the good pleasure of the Triune God, who, with the mystery of His will, is the mystery of the universe. 