

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MYSTERIES

Part II

by Thomas Ice

I am looking at the use of “mystery” in the Old Testament in preparation for looking at how it will be used in the New Testament. All but one use of “mystery” in the Old Testament is found in Daniel, at least based upon a search of the New American Standard translation of the Bible.¹ Job in his reply to Zophar says, “He reveals mysteries from the darkness, and brings the deep darkness into light” (Job 12:22). This usage is similar to what we saw in Deuteronomy. The passage speaks of God as the one who reveals hidden or secret things. It is important that we see the paramount role that God’s revelation of Himself and His plan for history should play in the life of a Believer.

DIVINE VIEWPOINT

Biblical Christianity is a religion (if we can call it one) based upon God’s revelation of Himself to mankind. This is why God’s Word, the Bible should be central in the life of every Believer. Psalm 36:9 says, “For with Thee is the foundation of life; in Thy light we see light.” In the second half of this passage the term “light” is used twice. Both uses are metaphors. The first use of light refers to light of God’s Word or revelation. The second use of light refers to the understanding gained by one who looks at things from God’s perspective. This means that if anyone is to gain proper understanding of things in God’s world then he must start with the light of God’s Word. Psalm 119:130 declares, “The unfolding of Thy words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” This Psalm reiterates a similar point to the one made in Psalm 36:9. The Bible tells us that we come to know truth by God’s gracious revelation of Himself. We can either respond to His Word by submitting in dependence upon it and thinking God’s thoughts after Him, or by rebelling against His light and thinking our own thoughts. Therefore, since humanity is created as a *dependent* creature that is dependent upon God in many areas, so it is also true that we must start intellectually by submitting to God’s Word—“in Thy light we see light.” This is why God reveals mysteries or secrets to mankind so that we can have some absolutes upon which to build our thinking.

There are only two ways of looking at things: God’s way we will call Divine viewpoint, or man’s way which we will call human viewpoint. From beginning to end, the Bible expresses one consistent view of life and addresses every issue of life from that viewpoint—God’s viewpoint on life. Understanding and applying God’s viewpoint leads to life, love, and happiness, but living according to human viewpoint leads to death: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12, 16:25).

HUMAN VIEWPOINT

Within the realm of human viewpoint, people usually attempt to establish truth in two general ways. The **first** approach in attempting to find truth independent of God and His Word is often called *reason* or *rationalism*. In its pure form, rationalism is the belief that the each person is born with certain innate ideas. The rationalist claims that, on the basis of these innate ideas, man can use reason and logic alone to discover ultimate truth. The rationalist does not believe that he must be dependent upon God’s Word in order to think true thoughts about reality. Because rationalists do not think they need God’s Word to think accurately, they replace God’s Word as the starting point with the arrogant assumption that their own logic and reason alone is sufficient for

arriving at truth. What idolatry! However, because the rationalist cannot prove these innate ideas, he is left with an uncertain foundation.

Divine viewpoint does not reject the use of reason or logic—after all, God gave us a logical mind to use—but it rejects the *independent* or autonomous use of reason and logic. The divine viewpoint uses reason and logic *dependently*, starting with God's revelation as a basis for thinking God's thoughts after Him. This use is called *the dependent use of logic*: logic used under the authority of God's Word to maintain consistency of thought in accordance with God's Word. The all-knowing God has already told us through revelation what is true, and dependent logic seeks to apply this truth to every issue in life to see how it does or does not correspond with God's revelation. A person would have to be illogical to start with error, or a mixture of truth and error, to end up with truth. Only when you start with *pure truth* as a foundation can you arrive at the full truth in all of its ramifications. Remember the Psalmist declared, "In Thy light (God's Word), O God, do I see light (truth)" (Ps. 36:9).

Human viewpoint, on the other hand, uses reason and logic as the ultimate authority to determine what is possible and what is not possible. Reason, rather than revelation, is used to determine what can and cannot be, and then these conclusions are imposed on the Bible. Since God's Word contains many secrets that He has revealed, it is impossible for anyone to start with reason and discover what is on God's mind (1 Cor. 2:11). He has rejected the witness of God's Word. This attitude elevates human reason in the position of ultimate authority: human reason determines what is and is not true in God's Word. By putting reason at a higher level than the Bible, reason replaces God and so becomes an idol.

The real conflict is not between using reason at all and not using reason at all, but between *using reason under the authority of God* and *using reason independently of God*. The issue is *the proper place and use of logic*. Human viewpoint uses reason and logic in an idolatrous way, by placing it in the arena reserved exclusively for God's Word--determining what is true. Human viewpoint uses logic idolatrously, placing it in the arena reserved exclusively for God's Word.

The fatal flaw in this use of reason is that it provides *no external, objective criterion* for evaluating its conclusions (because it rejects the Bible as a valid criterion). Ultimately, this position must lapse into some form of subjectivity such as mysticism or emotionalism because reason alone can never establish an objective criterion upon which to determine why one thing is true and another thing is not true.

SUBJECTIVITY

Because independent reason cannot serve as a basis for arriving at truth about God, angels, man, salvation, and the meaning of life, philosophers have searched elsewhere for a solid rock on which to build their views. This **second** human viewpoint approach to truth is often called *experience* or *empiricism*, and is the backbone of the scientific method. Empiricists believe they can obtain knowledge of ultimate truth on the basis of sense perceptions. They claim that by observing, collecting facts, forming hypotheses, testing hypothesis and further testing of sense data man can ultimately arrive at true knowledge about the existence of God, angels, the nature of man, salvation and the meaning of life.

Although the empirical approach—when used correctly—does have a place within the plan of God, human viewpoint once again misuses God's intended purpose for this ability. Through the use of empiricism in science people can make many important observations about God's creation. Empirical observations have helped propel great

advances in industry and technology in the last two centuries. Yet, without a framework that consistently interprets and applies the results of empirical observations, competing and contradictory systems of thought develop. Furthermore, man's experience, even when it is extended through historical witness and instruments to observe the microscopic, is still limited. Only the Word of God provides an adequate basis for consistently evaluating and applying the results of empiricism.

If we rely solely on empiricism apart from biblical revelation, we will not always draw accurate conclusions. A look at the work habits and social behavior of ants provides an interesting illustration. One observer would note that there are multiple mates for any one female. Another person might observe that the ants are industrious workers. Without the biblical framework, human-viewpoint thinkers could take both observations and apply them to human society. In fact, some modern sociologists have done just that in observing the rarity of monogamy in the animal kingdom and suggesting that multiple mates would be a better situation in human life, thereby rejecting the Biblical idea of one mate until death. In contrast to the subjectivity of this approach, the Bible gives us the categories and framework for rightly applying the data discovered through observation. We are to learn from the ants in their diligence, but not in their mating habits (Prov. 6:6–11).

Numerous problems exist with the pure empirical method, but the fundamental problem is a rejection of the complete sufficiency of Scripture. Rather than believing that the Bible tells us everything we need to know about every area of life, the empiricist seeks to find out more. Rather than being satisfied with what God has said on a subject, the empiricist bases his understanding of issues on experiences he or other people have had. This insistence ultimately leads to great speculation about things in God's world. We need to remember that the Bible expressly forbids such speculation because it goes beyond the information contained in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:23). Rather than creating chains of speculative thoughts about things, the person who consistently starts with God's revelation as found in the Bible will be able to think God's thoughts after Him and thus gain great insights into reality. This kind of thought process yields great wisdom for the person who seeks after the Lord and His Word.

King Solomon said, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Prov. 25:2). Earlier Solomon noted concerning wisdom and understanding: "If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the LORD, and discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:4–6). This source was recognized by King Nebuchadnezzar when he said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery" (Dan. 2:47). So it is that the God of the Bible is the source of mysteries! Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Word search results from Accordance Biblical Software, version 11.1.3.