

# The Mystery

## Romans 16:17-27 (The End)

*Romans (no. 45 in the series)*

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*Video and audio versions available online:*

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/romans-1617-the-end-the-mystery/>

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*This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!*

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## Song

I will rejoice in the simple gospel.  
I will rejoice in you Lord.

## Prayer

And so, Lord God, I will rejoice in you and the simple gospel but it does seem like something separated us. And I want to know you Lord, I do. So, Father, I think that's true of my friends here to. Would you help us to understand how it is that we could know you? It seems we've run into some problems in that department. So, Lord God, would you preach your Word to us, in Jesus' name, amen.

## Message

In Romans 16, Paul is wrapping up his letter. He's just presented the most thorough systematic theology in all of Scripture and told everyone to greet one another with the Holy Kiss—when, it's like he's just compelled to issue a final warning.

### **Romans 16:17-18:**

**I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions**

[*dichostasia*=*dis* (twice)+*stasis* (what is). It means to take “what is” and divide “what is” from “what is.”] **and create obstacles** [*scandalon*: scandals] **contrary to [or beside] the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them** [divide yourself from them, nicely]. <sup>18</sup> **For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites** [*koilia*: belly, or womb], **and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.**

You may remember that everything appeared to be in a beautiful state homeostasis in the Garden of Eden, when, with smooth talk and flattery, the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God know that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil.” So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and... a delight to the eyes and to be desired to make one wise she took its fruit and ate.<sup>i</sup> She put it in her belly and everything started to divide and die.

**Romans 16:19-20:**

**For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.<sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.**

Beware of those that cause divisions, beside the doctrine you’ve been taught. Paul caused some divisions, didn’t he? But maybe was trying to divide with the dividers? Jesus caused some division; “Don’t think I came to bring peace but a sword.” And yet he is the Prince of Peace, revealing the God of peace, who will soon crush Satan—the divider—under our feet. Truth in Love causes division, in order that there would be no more division; it divides us from division.

But don’t we all just love division? it’s Super Bowl Sunday and no one will be satisfied with a tie. There must be a winner and a loser. And yet all the members of each team will say, either “We lost as a team” or, “We won as a team.” There are those that love football because they love to see members of a team work as one. They love the communion. And there are those who love football because they love to see one team torment another team. They love the division. And maybe each of us are both.

Paul writes “Beware of those that are in it for the division.” And it might be worth asking, “Which is ultimate reality, the division or the communion?” Along about the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Greek Philosopher Parmenides said, “If we can we agree that what is, is and what is not, is not, then it follows that what is cannot be divided and cannot change. For, if what is were to be divided, what is would have to be divided by what is or by what is not. If what is is divided by what is, then what is wouldn’t be divided. And if what is is divided by what is not, then what is is not divided for what is not is not. Therefore, what is, is undivided.<sup>ii</sup> And what is cannot change, for what would what is change into but what is not? And so, if you are divided, and you do change, you must be what is not—that is, I am not.<sup>iii</sup>

Creepy huh? But Common sense, (that is my experience of this world), would tell me that I am and I do change. In fact, I’m a bit worried that I might become I am not. For in this world, it seems that everything dies. The Hebrews claimed that God is one and does not change; He is “I am.” And yet God does seem to move with his people. He doesn’t do “nothing.” Actually, God does everything that’s anything, and he does it with his Word. Solomon wrote “whatever God does endure forever, nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it.” And yet Common sense would tell me that I do do what God does not do, and my do do is evil.

It was the Early Church that taught that “I am that I am,” God, is undivided and unchanging, and yet he constantly moves, for God is a dance of three persons and one substance called love.<sup>iv</sup> God is a trinity: one communion of undivided, unchanging, yet ever self-sacrificing persons. God

is Love and in him is Life. Life is a Homeostasis—many persons or things, and one substance<sup>v</sup> And Paul just wrote, Romans 16:17, “Beware of those that cause *dichostasis*, division.”

But it’s Superbowl Sunday and don’t we all love division? Aren’t we all trying to exalt ourselves, glorify ourselves; that is, win? And isn’t that because life is a competition? And so, we believe that we’re all being tested, and judgement is coming? And so, it’s only natural to divide and conquer—it’s common sense. In fact, isn’t that what it is to be a Christian? And isn’t that why we go to church? To gain more knowledge of Good and evil in order to make the right decisions, pass the test, and win the game, while the losers lose and forever suffer? –it’s common sense.

In Seminary I learned that American fundamentalism and evangelicalism grew out of Scottish Common-Sense Theology at Princeton Seminary at the turn of the last century.<sup>vi</sup> I don’t know how true that is, but I know that in America, in particular, the church has adopted the ideas of the Enlightenment to battle the challenges of the Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment people began to argue that the only things that are real things are things that can be comprehended by us—that is known by common sense. So, when the critics said, God is incomprehensible, we began to say “Well we can comprehend him, and if you’re smart you’ll be able to comprehend him too; If you’re smart enough, you’ll take more knowledge of Good and evil—and we’ll help you take it, so you’ll choose correctly, pass the test, join our team, and enter the kingdom—it’s just common sense.”

During the enlightenment, the World said, “Life is the survival of the fittest.” It was actually nothing new, it was just dressed up and called “science.” The World said, “Life is the survival of the fittest.” And we began to say, “Well, we’re the fittest, and we’re going to beat you.”. And that’s actually nothing new, it’s just human religion. It’s common sense—we think life is beating our neighbor. But maybe common sense is nonsense. If everything is comprehensible to you, you’ll find that nothing is worth comprehending. You may gain billions of facts, but none of them have any meaning. It’s like gaining knowledge of the Good, but everything dies, and nothing is worth knowing, for all you know is evil.

Well, Paul writes “The God of Peace—Shalom is a communion of many things in one thing—the God of Peace, will soon crush Satan (the Accuser, the Slanderer, the Great Divider) under your feet.” How bizarre is it, to argue that what Paul really means is that there will be an endless division, between those who win and those who lose, those whom God saves and those whom he doesn’t save, those for whom he is a blessing and those for whom he is an endless curse? And how bizarre is it that we have called the proclamation of this eternal division, the Gospel? (I get that there is a chasm that the rich man cannot cross, but we seem to forget that Jesus came to level every chasm and that’s not bad news; that’s good news; that’s the Gospel).

**Romans 16:20b-22:**

**[16:17: I appeal to you brethren to watch out for those who cause divisions...] the God of Peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. <sup>21</sup> Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. <sup>22</sup> I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.**

Now, in case some of you just thought, “Hey I thought Paul wrote this letter!”—it’s important to know that, just like many in ancient times, Paul used an amanuensis—someone who dictated and edited his thoughts. Critics will often argue that some things attributed to Paul, weren’t actually written by Paul, and I find most of their arguments to be just silly for, among other things, Paul often used an amanuensis.<sup>vii</sup>

**Romans 16:23:**

**Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.**

Now that’s where the letter ends in some ancient manuscripts.<sup>viii</sup> But most manuscripts include this last paragraph. The paragraph has the marks of a liturgical confession, as if everyone would read this out loud together, after the rest of Romans was read to them in a worship service. And so, it makes perfect sense to me, that Paul may have originally sent the letter from Corinth to Rome in 56 AD. And then, years later having arrived in Rome and added this doxology, thinking to himself—“Erastus and Quartus greet you,” is hardly the Grand Finale that the letter needs, I’ll sum it all up in a doxology:

**Romans 16:25-27:**

**Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and [that is] the preaching of Jesus Christ [probably a subjective genitive, so not just “preaching about Jesus,” but “Jesus’s preaching through Paul”], according to the revelation [apocalypsis] of the mystery [mysterion] that was kept secret for long ages [chronois aioniois: “in times eternal”]<sup>26</sup> but has now been disclosed, and [te: and also] through the prophetic writings, has been made known to all [the] nations [ethnos: gentiles, peoples], according to the command of the eternal [aionios] God, to bring about the obedience of faith [trust]—<sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forevermore [literally: “into the ages”] through Jesus Christ! Amen.**

That’s a “doxology,” for it’s a statement of *doxas*, glory—glory, not given to men, but glory given to God as worship. And in the middle of this doxology, which is revealed in the Gospel, is this amazing word “Mystery.” I would suggest that we have such a hard time believing the Gospel—the Simple Gospel: “God is salvation”—we have such a hard time believing the Gospel and then giving glory to God, because something in each one of us hates mystery. You see, “common sense” is basically just the opposite of Mystery.

“Mystery is not the absence of meaning” writes Dennis Covington, “but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend.”<sup>ix</sup>

“The whole secret of mysticism is this:” writes GK Chesterton in his book, *The Romance of Orthodoxy*, “The whole secret of mysticism is this: that a man can understand everything, by the help of what he does not understand.”<sup>x</sup>

Every little child is a mystic, for no little child understands, his or her father, but if they trust their father, he will help them understand. Every little child is a mystic & those that believe they have grown up are not. We've all been tempted to think we're grown up and have no Father.

Scripture refers to mankind as our mother—we are all called the sons of men<sup>xi</sup>. And the Greeks referred to the earth, as our mother—and that makes sense because we're all made of dust and return to dust; the earth is dust and our parents are dust, but we all wonder, “Is there more to this than dust?” God is not male or female, but he is called our Father, and to a little child mother is familiar, but fathers is often mysterious. We all wonder, “Where did I come from? My parents? yes; the dust of the earth? yes; but it seems that there's something in the dust—a mystery.<sup>xii</sup>”

The origin of the Greek word, “mystery,” is a mystery<sup>xiii</sup>, but by the time of Paul, we know that it had powerful connotations. To the Greek Philosophers it referred to the realm of What is that mysteriously interacts with the realm in which we live and move and have our being—the land of shadows—that is the realm of “what is not.”

To the Greek People it often referred to the Mystery Religions, in which participants would go through mysterious rituals that re-enacted the life of the gods—the idea being that one was saved by communion with a god, such that their story, became your story.

To The Hebrew mind, the Greek word Mystery, would've been closely tied to the idea of the Holy. God is Holy and abides in the Holy of Holies—his temple.

And to all minds, Hebrew, Greek, and American, “Mystery brings up a powerful set of questions: Where do I come from, Why am I here, What or Who is my source?<sup>xiv</sup>”

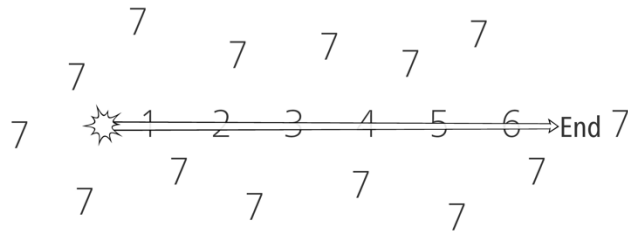
So, Paul writes “God is able to strengthen you by my gospel, the preaching of Christ, the revelation of the mystery, kept secret in times eternal, but now disclosed by the command of God, that you would trust.” We don't trust, for we hate mysteries and love common sense. In other words, we all love the illusion that we are in control. Mysteries must be “made known (revealed);” mysteries are not knowledge that you can simply “take.” Jesus uses the word “mystery” once in the gospels, and that's in reference to the parables of the Sower and his Seed. John uses the word four times in the Revelation. Paul uses the word twenty times to describe at least three realities, that are also one reality, that in my experience very few believe. So, because of common sense, which is nonsense, we don't believe the Gospel.

I can't fully comprehend or explain these mysteries, but we've been pointing to these mysteries all the way through Romans. And if you dared to believe these mysteries, I think you might trust the ultimate mystery, and actually do what God, our father, is asking you to do.

# The Mystery

## 1. Of Time and Eternity (Rom. 16:25, Rev. 19:5, 1 Cor. 15:51, Eph. 3:9)

The first is the mystery of time and eternity. Common sense, (that is our experience of this world), tells us that time is like an endless succession of moments that can't be reversed or transcended. The Greek word for that idea is "Chronos." It's where we get words like chronological. And for the last several hundred years we were told by scientist that this is the only time that there is. And so modern versions often translate Romans 16:25, as saying that the mystery was kept secret for "long ages," which we think of as a long time because that's the only way we've been trained to think about time. But Paul doesn't write "long ages" or "long time," he writes "*chronois aioniois*,"<sup>xv</sup> which literally translated is "in times eternal."



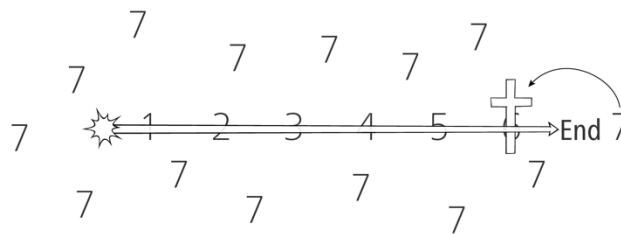
And that's why I've shown you this picture for 15 years and wrote a book on Genesis One titled The History of Time and the Genesis of You. I think this is how Scripture views time, and how we've been told we can't view time, but now, even physicists are saying— "Yup, that's time." Scripture, the Jews, and the early church, viewed time, beginning to end, as 6 or possibly 7 ages of chronological time, just like the days of the week, just like the 7 days of creation, the 7 seals, 7 thunders, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls. They viewed all of time as 6 or 7 ages of Chronological time, within this reality that Scripture calls "eternity,"

In Greek "*aion*" is a noun that clearly means "age." But "*aionios*" is an adjective for which there is no English equivalent. So "*aionios*" has to mean something like "of the age," and we translate that as eternal or eternity.

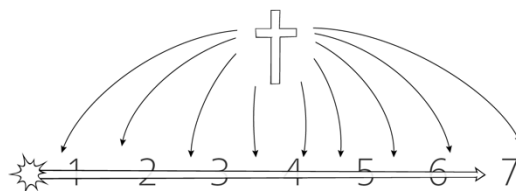
In Hebrew thought there are 6 or 7 ages of chronological time, but another age is coming which is thought of as an endless 7<sup>th</sup>, sometimes represented as an 8<sup>th</sup>, which is a Sabbath that never ends for it is the end—when and where everything is good, and it is finished.

Jesus is crucified on the 6<sup>th</sup> day (the day God makes Adam in his image). And he is resurrected on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, which is the endless 7<sup>th</sup> day, the day that everything is filled with the End, who is the Beginning, who is Jesus—the Life, Eternal Life. That doesn't mean endless chronological time, but our liberation from time for all chronological time is filled with eternity.

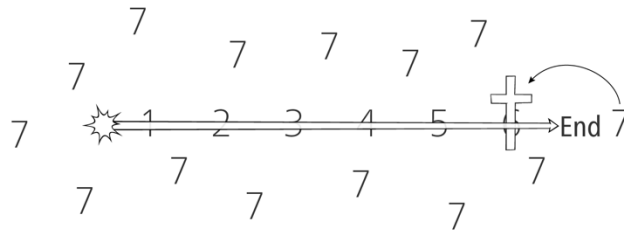
In Revelation 19:5, a messenger that looks like Jesus swears and oath, that in the days of the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet, sounded by the 7<sup>th</sup> angel “Chronos will be no longer, and the mystery of God will be fulfilled.” In 1 Corinthians 15:51 Paul writes “Behold, I tell you a mystery, we shall all be changed in a moment at the last trumpet.” We get confused about when that is, and come up with all sorts of silly maps because we don't believe that it happened at the cross, and it's happening all the time, for Jesus is the edge of time an eternity.



Paul taught that the end of the ages, was the moment that Christ put away sin with the sacrifice of himself.<sup>xvi</sup> So, eternity invaded temporality at the cross, or maybe we should say that the cross revealed that eternity is invading temporality all the time.



Whatever the case chronological time is the realm of “what is not.”



Even Einstein claimed that space and time are a stubbornly persistent illusion. Chronos is a temporal illusion, “what is not.” And eternity is the manifest presence of what is “I am that I am.” Through a few crazy experiences, I’ve learned that satan absolutely hates this chart and I understand why. Common sense would tell you that you must write your own story. But the mystery of time and eternity reveals that your story is already written, and yet you can write it, and live it, or maybe dance it, with God when you commune with him, right now.

The mystery of time and eternity reveals that in reality everything is good, and it is finished. Which means that death and hades are like an illusion in space and time, and just as the Lord says, Revelation 21:5, “Death will be no more.” “Christ abolished death” writes Paul “And brought immortality to light.”<sup>xvii</sup>

Satan traps us in death by convincing us that we alone are the author of our story. And yet, that story is just an arrogant illusion, a shadow. In reality there’s actually no space for evil, for God is the creator of all that is, and all that he creates is good, and he creates all things with his Word. Through his Word he is filling all things with Himself, so in reality there is no space for Satan, for all things are filled with “I Am.”

## The Mystery

1. *Of Time and Eternity* (Rom. 16:25, Rev.19:5, 1 Cor.15:51, Eph. 3:9)
2. *Of Good and Evil* (Rom. 11:25, 2 Thess. 2:7, Rev. 17:5-8, Col. 2:3, 1 Tim. 3:16)

And that brings us to the second mystery, the mystery of Good and evil.





*"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena*

And that's why I keep showing you this picture—not because I'm into the artist, but because he's painted what Scripture so clearly describes. Common sense would say, "That's impossible. How could all of humanity be staring at Jesus on a Tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. We've sent archeologists to Mesopotamia, and they found no Garden of Delight." I wrote a book about this titled "God and His Body" and hope to write another titled "The tree in the middle of the Garden."

In Romans 11:25 Paul wrote, "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers, a partial hardening has come upon Israel." Common Sense would say, "No, they just made a bad choice." But the Mystery says, "No, it was God's choice, they've been hardened they've been consigned to disobedience (to evil)." In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul calls this the mystery of lawlessness, with which the man of lawlessness (the imitation Christ, the antichrist) steals the throne in the temple and is revealed in his time. Lawlessness is a mystery, for the Law is God's Will and Word through whom all things are created, and yet evil is that which God does not will and his Word does not do, Evil is that which is not. So, the Good is what is, and the evil is what is not.

In Revelation 17:7 The angel shows John the harlot who rides the beast. And the angel says, "I will tell you the mystery. The beast you saw, was, and is not, and is about to rise from the pit and go to destruction." In other words, the lawless one exists in the past, and in the future, but is not now, which is the place where eternity touches time. The beast exists in your anxieties and fears but is not here and now.

In Romans we learned that you are the temple and in the depths of your temple there is a garden, that is the holy of holies and it contains a tree.

In Colossian 2:3 Paul tells us that this is a mystery, but that "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." On the tree is the knowledge of Good and evil. (Jesus is like a pinata). And on the tree is eternal life—for Jesus is the life. He is our husband, and we are his bride, and just like Paul told the Ephesians, "This is a great mystery, and I am saying it refers to Christ and his church (his bride who once rode the beast and was a whore)."

The liar tempted the woman, who is all of us, to take the fruit of the knowledge of Good and evil to make herself in the image of God. That's just common sense, isn't it? She saw that the fruit was good for food, a delight to the eyes and to be desired to make one wise. So, she took the fruit... everything died... and the antichrist, her ego, was formed, for immediately she began to hide in shame; she was divided. It's utterly ironic, but by taking the law, we actually make ourselves lawless.<sup>xviii</sup> And that's what half of Romans is all about, the revelation that no one will be justified by works of the law, the mystery of lawlessness: What is not.

But the other half of Romans is all about the mystery of godliness: What is. 1 Timothy 3:16 "Great is the mystery of godliness." God is "What is" and God is a communion of Love that is Life. Common sense would tell us that death is the absence of all Life, as if What is might truly become What is not. But Christ died, which would mean that the Life died, and yet according to Scripture, Jesus has an indestructible Life.<sup>xix</sup>

So maybe death is not the absence of life, but the division of life, for life is a communion, and so God the son cried out to God the Father from the depths of our isolation, "Why have you forsaken me?" He cried out "Why have you forsaken me?" but not because God is divided, but because each one of us is divided, and he had descended into the illusion that is each one of us—for each one of us has believed that we are divided... from God our Father who is Love.

So, this is a great mystery, "What is" was divided from "What is," by "what is not," and yet "what is not is not, which means our division is a lie. A lie which gets shattered by the truth, when Christ the Truth descends into us, confessing our sin, and trusting Our Father's Grace, waking us from the nightmare, in which we have imprisoned ourselves.

I doubt that I said all of that just right and our words fail, for this is a mystery at the edge of our time and our Father's eternity, but this is my point: We think that we are one and God is two, so we look to the cross and think that God is divided, between the mean God and the nice God, between something called "justice" and something called Love—that's common sense.

The Mystery is that God is One and each of us is two and yet he's making us one in him, for in the garden, Jesus prayed this prayer: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me," all of us undivided.

I know your head hurts but just look at the picture that God has painted.

See: When we take knowledge of God to make ourselves like God, that's evil. But when God gives himself, body broken and blood shed, to make us like himself—what is that? That's the Good, and that's the Life. That's the mystery of Good and evil and how the Good conquers the evil.

Colossians 1:2 and 4:3: That's the "The Mystery of Christ."

# The Mystery

1. *Of Time and Eternity* (Rom. 16:25, Rev.19:5, 1 Cor.15:51, Eph. 3:9)
2. *Of Good and Evil* (Rom. 11:25, 2 Thess. 2:7, Rev. 17:5-8, Col. 2:3, 1 Tim. 3:16)
3. *Of Christ* (Col. 4:3, Rev. 1:20, 1 Cor. 2:6-10)

Common sense tells you that life is the survival of the fittest. The Mystery is that life is the sacrifice of the fittest, the mystery of Christ. When one person loves in a world that doesn't love, it looks like this.



*Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.*

But when every person loves, all persons become one body—the body of Christ rising from the tomb, having been made in the image and likeness of God. “In the place he was crucified there was a garden and in the garden a tomb.” So, look at this picture that God has painted. Is this the worst thing that ever happened? Or is this the best thing that ever happened?

If this is simply your choice, you're a bastard and you're going to hell, and this is the worst thing that could ever have happened. But if this is God's Choice, this is the revelation of “What is,” in a world of “what is not,” and this is the best thing that could ever have happened. This is Love; this is the eternal judgment of God: Mercy. “He consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all.”

This means that you're not being tested to see what you will do (as if you were the author of your story). God has always known what you would do. You're not being tested to see what you will do; You are being tested that you might see what God will do, does do, and has always done, no matter how he may be tempted, or tested, by you.

You were led into temptation, and consigned to disobedience, that you might put God to the test, and watch him pass the test in Jesus the Christ. That you might see that although we have been divided, he remains undivided, he remains faithful... he remains Love... he remains faithful love, *hesed*.

- That you might see that God your Father is Relentless Love.
- That you might “Justify his Judgement” in the words of David and Paul.<sup>xx</sup>
- That you might freely declare “That is a great judgment!”
- That you might look to the tree and say “Abba.”
- That you might have faith.

Common sense will tell you that faith is your judgment. But the mystery is that faith is the judgement of God in you. “Faith is the hypostasis (substance) of things hoped for.”

1 Timothy 3:9, “the mystery of the faith...”<sup>xxi</sup>

Col. 1:26-27 “the mystery hidden for ages and generations. Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

# The Mystery

1. *Of Time and Eternity* (Rom. 16:25, Rev.19:5, 1 Cor.15:51, Eph. 3:9)
2. *Of Good and Evil* (Rom. 11:25, 2 Thess. 2:7, Rev. 17:5-8, Col. 2:3, 1 Tim. 3:16)
3. *Of Christ* (Col. 4:3, Rev. 1:20, 1 Cor. 2:6-10)
- ... *Of Christ in you: Faith* (Col. 1:26-27, 1 Tim. 3:9, Matt. 13:11-12)

In Matthew 13 Jesus says to his disciples, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to him who has will more be given, but to him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

If what you have, is actually what you have not, then what you have is evil. So, it’s profoundly good that it would be taken away. And how is evil taken away, except by the eternal seed, which is faith hope and love, sown in the soil of this earth, at a tree in a garden? It was there that he lifted his head, cried father forgive them, and delivered up his Spirit, the spirit that has been planted in you as imperishable Seed.<sup>xxii</sup> Common Sense will tell you that you’re a bastard. The Mystery is that the man on the tree is your dad. And the man on the tree is also his son. And the man on the tree is also you.

Romans 8:15 “When we cry ‘Abba Father’ it is the spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”<sup>xxiii</sup> When I started this series 17 months ago, I titled it “Say, Abba,” because of Romans 8:15. And then I planned to preach my favorite sermon to sum it all up.

But as God would have it, during Covid, our guest preacher got sick. I found out just an hour before the service. And so, I preached that sermon, and told one of my favorite stories, which set the stage for the rest of Romans. But I want to tell it again, for I think it reveals the greatest mystery and how the mystery changes the world.

It's a story I heard Fred Craddock tell, that was told to him by an old man when Fred just didn't want to be bothered on the last day of his vacation in the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee. An old man walked into the Blackberry Inn, where Fred and his wife were eating, and just started talking to everyone. Fred thought, "Oh, please let me just eat in peace." But sure enough, the old guy meandered over to Fred's table.

"You folks on vacation?"

"Yes."

"Gonna be here long?"

"No, not gonna be here long."

"What do ya do?"

Fred was waiting for this question. He had an answer that scared folks off: "Well, I'm a professor of homiletics in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta." The old guy lit up. "You're a preacher man! I've got a preacher story for you!" Then he pulled up a chair and sat down.

"I was born back in these mountains. My mama wasn't married. Other women in town liked to spend time guessin' who my daddy was. And I didn't know who my daddy was. My mama worked a lot, and the other kids weren't allowed to play with a boy like me. I'd hide in the weeds at recess, and I ate my lunch alone. The kids used to call me 'Ben the Bastard Boy, Ben the Bastard Boy.' I thought Bastard Boy was my last name." The old man started weeping, then, he collected himself. "I'm sorry," he said. "What I was meanin' to tell you was that there was this church in Laurel Springs, had this preacher with a voice big like God. I knew church wasn't a place for boys like me, but sometimes I'd sneak in and sit toward the back and sneak out before the service ended. This one day that preacher went on, and oh, I just got lost in what he was sayin,' and before I knew it, church was over. The aisles got jammed up, folks were lookin' at me, I was makin' for the back door quick as I could when, all at once, I felt this big hand on my shoulder.

And I heard that voice, big like God: 'Boy!' It was the preacher. He said, 'Boy!' and I froze. He talked so loud everybody would hear. He said, 'Boy, who's your daddy?' It was like a knife in my heart. Then, he said, 'Boy, I know who your daddy is! Let's see now, why, you're a child of...' He paused, and it seemed like forever. It seemed like judgment day. 'Boy, I know who your daddy is. Your Daddy is God. And I say, I see a striking resemblance!' Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, 'Now, you run along and go claim your inheritance.'" The old guy looked up at Professor Craddock and said, "I was born that day." Then He got up and walked out. Immediately, the waitress came scurrying over to the table. She said, "What'd he say? What'd he say?" Craddock said, "Well, he told me a story. Why do you ask?" The waitress looked at him a moment and said, "Don't you know who that is? Why, that's Ben Hooper—the illegitimate boy elected twice the governor of Tennessee."

Well, I think that's what Paul is saying to the Romans. And it's what I hope I'm saying to you. And it's what we're all called to preach to everyone and anyone we meet. I know who your Daddy is. Your Daddy is God. (You don't choose your Daddy; Your Daddy has chosen you.) He subjected creation to futility and consigned all to disobedience so that you would see him have mercy on you, and mercy on all, and then freely, choose him as he has always chosen you.

# The Mystery

1. *Of Time and Eternity* (Rom. 16:25, Rev. 19:5, 1 Cor. 15:51, Eph. 3:9)
2. *Of Good and Evil* (Rom. 11:25, 2 Thess. 2:7, Rev. 17:5-8, Col. 2:3, 1 Tim. 3:16)
3. *Of Christ* (Col. 4:3, Rev. 1:20, 1 Cor. 2:6-10)
  - ... *Of Christ in you: Faith* (Col. 1:26-27, 1 Tim. 3:9, Matt. 13:11-12)
  - ... *& All in Christ: "The Plan for the Fullness of Time."*  
(Eph. 1:7-10, 3:3-12, 5:32, 6:19, Col. 1:24-25)

The mystery is Christ in you and all in Christ. Eph. 1:10 "the mystery of his will... to unite all things in Christ, his plan for the fullness of time." So, stop hiding in the weeds and eating your lunch all alone. It's time to run along and claim your inheritance, which is all things undivided and filled with Love.

The Greatest Mystery is that you can, and you will, say "Abba."

## Communion

For, on the night when all of us were unfaithful, he remained absolutely faithful. And so he took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you. Take and eat and do it in remembrance of me" And in the same manner, after supper and having given thanks, he took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you and do it in remembrance of me."

This isn't Common Sense [Peter holds up the bread dipped in wine]. But maybe this is Common Uncommon Sense—the kind that little children have; This is faith, hope, and love. Receive it and say "Abba." That's what your father has been waiting ages and ages to hear.

## Prayer

And because, Lord God, you are holy, we can say "Abba," we can believe the simple gospel. Jesus—Yahweh is salvation because Yahweh's salvation has descended into us, and we are yours, Lord God. And one day we'll see it, all thy works, just like the psalm says—just like it says right there at the beginning of Genesis—all thy works will praise your name. Thank you that that will happen because it has already happened; it is always happening and soon we will see it happen because you will wake us from our sleep. In Jesus' name we thank you, amen.

## Benediction

We sang, “All thy works shall praise thy name.” But will all the Philadelphia Eagles and all the Kansas City Chiefs be praising his name around 8:00 this evening? Do you think God our Father is great enough and good enough that we might run the race and fight the fight, and get to the end of time and discover that everybody wins? Hard to imagine but what if the thing we were battling all along was evil? And so, we conquered...

- The dark with light.
- The lies with truth.
- The evil with the good.
- And all the division with communion.
- And What is not, with What is, that is I am that I am.

About 25 years ago when the Broncos played the Packers in the Super Bowl, I was driving in the van with my three-year-old son Coleman. It was really quiet and Coleman was thinking really hard. Out of the silence he said “*Dad? Are the Green Bay Packers Evil?*” I said something like, “Oh no, Buddy, it’s just a game.” I could’ve said, “Nothing God made is evil, but we’re all infected with evil, and we’ll all party when Satan is crushed under our feet.”

Whose feet are these? Genesis 3: “The Seed of the Woman will crush the head of the Snake.” Paul knew that verse. So, whose feet are these? Well, that is a wonderful mystery, isn’t it. “Blessed are the feet of them that bring good news!” May you believe the Gospel and preach the Gospel. It’s actually very Good News.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Genesis 3:4-5

<sup>ii</sup> Heraclitus, a contemporary of Parmenides, argued that everything changes, except the truth of constant change—he called this the logos.  
The Hebrews had always argued that God did everything that’s anything with his Logos, his Word; he is One and yet he does move in us.

<sup>iii</sup> Richard Mouw, *Distorted Truth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), pp.65-66

<sup>iv</sup> And it was Paul that wrote, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.”

<sup>v</sup> Life is many molecules communicating with other molecules.  
Life is one cell sacrificing for the next cell.  
Life is each body part bleeding into the next body part.  
Division actually explains the limits of life, it explain death.  
But communion is life itself... any biologist must admit this is the case.

<sup>vi</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p.83-107

<sup>vii</sup> If I just ask someone to proofread a letter to the congregation you might conclude it wasn’t authentic because there were no dangling participles and ridiculous punctuation marks.

<sup>viii</sup> In other ancient manuscripts, what comes next was added at the end of chapter 14... and chapter 15 and 16 immediately follow, or are missing all together.

And so some speculate that chapter 15 and 16 were added by Paul before a copy of the letter was sent to Ephesus, although most seem to think 15 and 16 were intended for Rome, and possibly omitted from later copies that were circulated among other churches.

I think that's all rather cool... and just shows how important this letter was to the early church.

<sup>ix</sup> - Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), p. 96

A mystery is not something unreasonable, but the presence of a reason greater than what our self-centered little brains can contain

<sup>x</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith* (New York: Bantam, 1990), p.28

<sup>xi</sup> Paul tells us that “the Jerusalem Above” is our mother. The Jerusalem above is constructed out of redeemed people.

<sup>xii</sup> A Mystery is not something that you can comprehend; a mystery is something that must comprehend you...

And so, you cannot know a Mystery simply through science—that is common sense—a mystery must come through revelation.

<sup>xiii</sup> Article on Mysterion in TDNTT (Kittel's)

<sup>xiv</sup> Some say there is no answer to those questions, and they go insane.

Some say I comprehend the answer—and it's just common sense—and I suspect they're most insane.

<sup>xv</sup> In koine Greek the adjective takes the number of the noun they modify. So “aionios” is plural in Romans 16:25 for it modifies “times.” This is also true in 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2. So I suspect it should still be translated “eternal” and not “eternals,” which is how it's rendered in most interlinears. I suspect it still means something like “of the age” and not “of the ages.”

<sup>xvi</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:11, Hebrews 9:26

<sup>xvii</sup> 2 Timothy 1:10

<sup>xviii</sup> “The Father's commandment is eternal life (John 12:50,” So when we take the Commandment (knowledge of Good and evil) we take the Life (of the Good), and are unable to fulfill the commandment.

<sup>xix</sup> Hebrews 7:16

<sup>xx</sup> Romans 3:4, Psalm 51:4

<sup>xxi</sup> Hebrews 11:1 “Faith is the hypostasis [*hypo*: under + *stasis*: standing] of things hoped for”—the undivided in you.

<sup>xxii</sup> 1 Peter 1:23

<sup>xxiii</sup> RSV

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I and *my* Father are one –John 10:30 KJV

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; <sup>21</sup> That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. <sup>22</sup> And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.—John 17:22 KJV

So we, though many, are one body in Christ... Romans 12:5 ESV

<sup>7</sup> For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.—1 John 5:7 KJV

<sup>7</sup> For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.—1 John 5:7 NKJV

There are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit (God is Spirit) and the water (Jesus is born of water, incarnate) and the blood (The Spirit is in the blood and offered up at the cross), and these three agree [literally: are in the one].—1 John 5:7 NRSV