

“Mystery” 1 Corinthians 4:1

Introduction: Mystery

1. Mystery: Introduction, What is it?
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Conclusion:

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Most of us love a mystery, trying to figure out who did it. There is something in us that wants to solve the mystery. But once it is solved, it is a real mystery? Once solved it is hard to go back to a mystery book and read it again, the mystery of the mystery is taken out and it is just not the same. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 4 uses the term mysteries, more than one mystery. Paul speak of himself and other pastors as stewards of the mysteries of God. Steward meaning that of a manager, one who dispenses. So the mystery really belongs to God, to Christ, but Paul and other pastors give it out.

Martin Luther helps us out when he writes, “The preachers he calls stewards of these mysteries because they preach Christ, the power and the wisdom of God, yet in such a way that, unless you believe, you cannot understand it. Therefore, a sacrament is a mystery, or secret thing, which is set forth in words, but received by the faith of the heart.”¹

So the mystery that St. Paul refers to is the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is the forgiveness of sin, because of Christ Jesus' death on the cross. So why would this be considered as a mystery? St. Paul names this earlier in his book when he says:

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14, ESV)

Along with the Gospel, Luther notes that the sacraments are also part of the mystery, hence St. Paul uses the term mysteries in the plural, meaning more than one. This doesn't mean that there is more than one Gospel, but that God attaches His Gospel, His word to water, bread and wine, in a mysterious way.

The sacraments are a mystery, because its power is the Gospel, the Word of God. In baptism we have water, that now cleanses us from sin, not with soap, but at the promise and command of God.

In the Eucharist we have bread and wine by the power and command of God now the body and blood of Christ.

This is truly a mystery because many doubt the power and efficacy of the sacraments. There are even Christians who deny that baptism is anything more than just water. Their focus is upon the confession of faith of the individual, instead of the mystery and power of Christ. In one essence they take the mystery of our baptism.

¹Luther, M. (1999). *Vol. 36: Luther's works, vol. 36 : Word and Sacrament II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (94). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

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Likewise with the Lord's Supper the Eucharist, some Christians also want to take the mystery out of the sacrament, by denying that bread and wine are the real body and blood of Christ, given for the forgiveness of sin. Their focus is upon their remembering of Christ, instead of Christ's remembrance of them and His giving of Himself for the communicant.

These teachings of Scripture are considered a mystery because they are part of the Gospel of Christ, and it is beyond human understanding, they must be received by faith, as scriptures reminds us.

Lutherans describe this in the Augsburg Confession Article 5: To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe. Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external⁴⁹ word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.²

This is exactly what the mystery is all about. It is about Christ's work given for you.

But our sinful nature will not give up so easily. We continue to doubt the mysteries of Christ, when we see the imperfections of the stewards handling it. When pastors are not perfect, we see their imperfections, and our natural mind wants to start to doubt that what they are handling, the Gospel, Baptism, and the Eucharist, are really things of God and not things of man. It begs the question, Why would God who is perfect, want to communicate His precious Word and Sacraments, through the hands of sinful humans? Again this is a mystery. But like the previous mysteries we note that this is for humans. Besides what human is perfect, but Christ alone. Christ has no other choice in this matter, He works through humans, whom He has called, who are struggling with sin in similar ways that you also struggle with sin.

This is why the Augsburg Confession also has article 8 which says: Likewise, although the Christian church is, properly speaking, nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even public sinners remain among the righteous, the sacraments—even though administered by unrighteous priests—are efficacious all the same. For as Christ himself indicates [Matt. 23:2–3*]: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. . . .”³

²Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord : The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (40). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

³Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord : The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (42). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

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The result of this is to remove doubt from you regarding the sinfulness of the steward who is handling the mysteries of God, because the power of the mysteries is not in the steward but in Christ alone. The mysteries are gifts of God, not of human origin, but for human consumption and benefit. The steward is the one who administers the gifts of God. It is not because of the pious nature of the steward that gifts of mystery of God are effective of even given. It is Christ who gives the mysteries its power for all people, which includes even the steward, who needs to receive the same power and grace from Christ Jesus.

So we put our trust in Christ uses the mysteries to guide us, His sheep. As our stain glass visually presents Christ as the Good Shepherd, who leads us and feeds us with His mysteries, His Word and Sacraments. Christ also calls pastors, under-shepherds administer His mysteries for the benefit of all people, all sheep. This is all designed by God, to give us this faith, trust and to keep us in this relationship for all time for eternity.

These mysteries need to remain mysteries. We should not try to reason our understanding upon them for they actually embody Christ, for your benefit.

Even though we are to read the Scriptures, we will not solve the mysteries, but leave them as mysteries, because through them we have life and life eternal, for these mysteries are Christ Himself, given for you. Amen.