

# *Sacred Secrets*

(1:1-23)

SOMEWHERE back in the halls of eternity past, before the foundation of the world was laid, God conceived the idea of creating man. In His infinite wisdom He knew that man would rebel and lose his rightful place in Paradise, but that did not keep God from creating man because He also devised a plan to redeem man from the consequences of his rebellion.

The knowledge of man's fall and God's subsequent plan of redemption was kept secret from the angelic hosts. They could only watch with amazement as the plan of God unfolded.

In time God called to Himself the nation of Israel. He made a covenant with them, but the true meaning of God's actions was hidden from their eyes. By the time of Jesus Christ, the most learned, religious leaders of the day still had no idea of what God was seeking to accomplish through Israel.

One day Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" And He answered and said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted" (Matthew 13:10, 11). The Greek word Jesus used for *secret* is *musterion*, from which comes our English word *mystery*. It means something once hidden but now disclosed. A murder story is called a "mystery novel" because at the end you will know who did it. You will not be left wondering. Unfortunately, we have come to confuse the word with the bewilderment one experiences *before* the secret is disclosed; but a mystery is that which was once hidden but now is open knowledge. We read:

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the

mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 16:25-27).

What are these mysteries, these "sacred secrets," once hidden but now revealed? You need to know because the Book of Ephesians is based on one of these secrets.

## THE MYSTERY OF ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in (Romans 11:25).

Israel never dreamed she would reject her Messiah. She longed for His coming. Every Jewish mother hoped her son would be the Christ. But God knew that when at last He sent the Messiah, Israel would deny Him. It was one of God's sacred secrets.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATE GOD

. . . that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, . . . For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form (Colossians 2:2, 9).

Israel looked for a great military leader, a political Savior to rescue them from the oppression of surrounding nations; but she never dreamed that her Messiah would be her own

God come in human flesh! Before the foundation of the world God had it all planned out, but it was hidden until the resurrection of Jesus. Now it can be openly declared: The Messiah is none other than God in a human body.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE INDWELLING CHRIST

... that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:26, 27).

The Jews looked for a Messiah to sit on the physical throne of David in Jerusalem, but all along God had intended for His Messiah to sit on the thrones of men's hearts as He lived within them. No prophet ever foresaw this truth. It was another of God's sacred secrets, once hidden in the heart of God but now revealed.

## THE MYSTERY OF IMMORTALITY

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

The Greeks believed that the body was evil and that death set a man's soul free from the prison house of the body. Paul corrects that notion, arguing that one day God will give every man a body that is incorruptible, immortal. Through the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, God revealed the secret of man's immortality.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Here is the mystery that meets us in Ephesians: the mystery of the church. This book reveals three aspects of this sacred secret.

First, it reveals *God's initiative*:

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him (Ephesians 1:9).

We understand what God is doing in the world only because He has chosen to reveal it to

us. He planned it, and He has now disclosed His plan to us. We could not discover it on our own. That we understand what God is doing in human history is entirely due to God's initiative.

Second, it reveals *the Gentiles' inclusion*:

... that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Ephesians 3:3-6).

Here is the most marvelous aspect of this sacred secret: God is taking Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, male and female, slave and free, and He is binding them together in one body. The church is not the exclusive possession of the Jewish people. It has been God's intention all along to bring all men together into one family, redeemed by the blood of God's only Son.

Third, it reveals *the goal intended*:

... and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:9, 10).

What is it that God wants to accomplish through His church? He wants the angels to see just how rich and varied is His wisdom. For ages the angelic hosts watched God move in human history without understanding what God was doing. Now as men are redeemed and blended together as one new humanity, the angels marvel at how God was able to break down all the barriers that separated men for so long.

## CONCLUSION

As we journey through Ephesians, we will discover how to be one body, how to be a fellowship that causes the angels to magnify the holy name of our God. As we live up to what we learn, we make known to our community one of God's greatest secrets, the mystery of the body of Christ.

—Chris Bullard