



Peninsula City Church

Behold Our God!

The Mysterious God

Michael Podhaczky

13th August 2017 the PM Service

Contents

The Mysterious God.....	3
An Introduction	3
1. God is mysterious and can be known in part	3
2. How can we better know the mysterious God?.....	5
Some concluding thoughts	6

The Mysterious God

An Introduction

Q. Have you ever stopped and thought about the mysteriousness of God?

As people, we can tend to love a mystery, the elusiveness of the unknown and the journey of discovery. There are so many who read mystery novels or watch movies with mystery and intrigue as a major theme. We also attempt to look into the mysteries of space, the world of the microscopic, push the boundaries of art and creativity, etc. But it has been said that,

“We live in a world that tries to explain everything — from how our minds work to whether there is a God. But, says Tanis Taylor, we should leave some room for mystery.”¹

Les Lancaster, professor of transpersonal psychology at Liverpool John Moores University has said that “A sense of mystery is intrinsic to the human mind.”² By way of definition of mystery, it has been said that it is, “Something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain.”³ Another word that can be used here regarding mystery is ineffable. It is something that is, “Too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words.”⁴ But we still love mystery, so, it could be said that “The need for mystery is greater than the need for an answer.”⁵ This is why,

“The concept of mystery has played an important role in Christian theology. The best theology has always maintained that the known must be balanced by the unknown.”⁶

1. God is mysterious and can be known in part

Q. What does it mean that God is mysterious?

When was the last time that you spent time meditating on the magnificent mysteriousness of God? It has been said that “Comparatively few who occasionally read the Bible are aware of the awe-inspiring and worship-provoking grandeur of the divine character.”⁷ I love wrestling with concepts and matters like the mystery of God. This would also seem to be the same for Paul the Apostle. It has been said that of the 28 times the word mystery has been used in the New Testament, Paul has used it 21 times.⁸ God is the absolute Reality, but He is still a mystery beyond comprehension. In this reflection within these pages, I will struggle to highlight some specs as to the mysteriousness of God. Then close by suggesting how God’s mystery helps us to realign our hearts toward Him and others humbly.

So, what is meant by, God is a mystery? The definition of mystery has been given as “Something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain.”⁹ Another word that may be used here is that of ineffable that is something, “Too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words.”¹⁰ So from a theological perspective,

¹ “Why mystery matters.” <https://www.psychologies.co.uk/self/why-mystery-matters.html> (7th August 2017).

² “Why mystery matters.” <https://www.psychologies.co.uk/self/why-mystery-matters.html> (7th August 2017).

³ “Mystery.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mystery> (1st August 2017).

⁴ “Ineffable.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ineffable> (1st August 2017).

⁵ “Quotes.” <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/52574-the-answer-is-never-the-answer-what-s-really-interesting-is> (7th August 2017).

⁶ Moyter, S. “Mystery.” In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Walter A. Elwell (ed.). (Basingstoke, UK: Marshall – Pickering, 1984), 741.

⁷ Pink, Arthur W. *The Attributes of God*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975), 9.

⁸ Moyter, “Mystery,” 741.

⁹ “mystery.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/mystery> (9th August 2017).

¹⁰ “ineffable.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/ineffable> (9th August 2017).

“Ineffability refers to the transcendent (supremely supernatural and divine) characteristics of God that cannot be adequately expressed in human language. Though we can apprehend (catch something of a glimpse of) God, we cannot fully comprehend Him.”¹¹

Although Heleseth and Huffman point out that, seeing God as a mystery does not mean that it is a problem. Graham Cole on this matter said, “Mystery, as I use the term, is an epistemological¹² claim about an ontological¹³ reality.”¹⁴ It has been said that,

“Now the expected redefinition of the term in modern theology. Ineffable does not mean the inability to speak about something. Ineffability means it is impossible to have exhaustive knowledge about God and speak about it. There is some confusion in his definition. Apprehend means to see an object but not analyse the object discursively. Comprehend means to see an object and think about it discursively. Comprehend does not mean to know something exhaustively. All persons operating on less than exhaustive or infinite knowledge in all things.”¹⁵

One of the greatest mysteries that exist is that of God. It has been said on this matter that,

“The God revealed in Scripture and worshipped by Christians is infinitely mysterious. That is, it is impossible for any of us to fully comprehend God due to limitations placed upon us by both our own finite, depraved minds and by God Himself, who has revealed only what He has chosen to... Scripture clearly teaches us that our God is indeed ‘mysterious,’ transcending finite comprehension.”¹⁶

God is immeasurably mind blowing and mysterious in every way. Over the centuries we have tried to bring God down to our level of understanding and have only succeeded in making caricatures (distortions) of Him. For example, Thomas Aquinas said in one of his statements on the matter in the *Summa Theologica* “Because we are not capable of knowing what God is but only how God is not, we cannot contemplate how God is but only how God is not.”¹⁷ So, God is ineffable and as Norman Geisler has said,

“Theologically, ineffability refers to the transcendent characteristics of God that cannot be adequately expressed in human language...this is not to say that God can be expressed perfectly, completely, and comprehensively. He cannot. This is what is meant by ‘ineffable.’ Although God can be apprehended, He cannot be comprehended... Ineffability follows from infinity and transcendence.”¹⁸

For all of God’s mystery, He has let us know something about Himself. But even then we struggle to open our hearts, minds and spirits to behold our God. Scripture has mentioned this struggle for us to know Him as we should really. We can have glimpses, but it is still a mystery.

“The LORD, our God, has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that He has revealed to us, so that we may obey all the terms of these instructions” (Deut 29:29 NLT).

¹¹ Heleseth, Paul Kjoss. & Huffman, Douglas S. “What is the Biblical Worldview?” In *Christian Contours: How a Biblical Worldview Shapes the Mind and Heart*. Douglas S. Huffman (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011), 70.

¹² Relation to “The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion.” “epistemology.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/epistemology> (7th August 2017).

¹³ Relating to “The branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.” “ontology.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ontology> (7th August 2017).

¹⁴ Cole, Graham A. *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 43.

¹⁵ “The Ineffability of God?” <https://craigcfisher.wordpress.com/2013/12/19/the-ineffability-of-god/> (7th August 2017).

¹⁶ Kilgore, William. “Our Mysterious God.” <http://www.ukapologetics.net/myst.html> (7th August 2017).

¹⁷ McVey, Chris. “Dominican Values: Alive to the Real and the Possible.” In *The Dominican Approaches in Education*. (2nd Edn). Gabrielle Kelly, and Kevin Saunders (eds). (Hindmarsh, SA: ATF, 2014), 129.

¹⁸ Geisler, Norman L. *Systematic Theology*. Volume Two. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 245-246.

“Can you solve the mysteries of God? Can you discover everything about the Almighty?” (Job 11:7 NLT).

“Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand His decisions and His ways!” (Rom 11:33 NLT).

One of the great mysteries of God’s nature is the Trinity. Regarding Augustine’s teaching on this mystery has said,

“In writing *De Trinitate* Augustine had three main objectives. He wished to demonstrate to critics of the Nicene creed that the divinity and co-equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are rooted in Scripture... Augustine’s approach was that of faith seeking understanding of the mystery of one God as Father, Son, and Spirit. He held that one can know God’s existence and attributes by human reason (Rom 1:20) but not God as Trinity. The New Testament tells of the Persons and of their oneness. As a divine mystery, this is humanly incomprehensible. Some understanding, however, is possible by reflection on what Revelation implies. Augustine inferred that the one God is three Persons in such a way that they are one divine Being, yet distinct from one another and dynamically within one another.”¹⁹

However, although this is an amazing mystery, it needs to be said that everything relating to God’s nature and character is a mystery. So, is there any way that we can know about the mysterious God? The answer to this is yes this is a way, and it is found in Jesus Christ.

2. How can we better know the mysterious God?

Q. How does God’s mystery help us to realign our hearts toward Him and others humbly?

Within this context of God being a mystery, but He has revealed something about His nature and character. He has done this in creation, conscience, and in history. However, the most helpful way that He did this was through Jesus Christ. He then gave us the Bible to help explain something about Jesus Christ, but the greatest revelation is Jesus Christ. On this, it has been said that,

“The God who is ineffable in mystery, transcendent and hidden, beyond every and all efforts of finding out is found out in the divine humanity of Jesus Christ without ceasing to be the divine mystery.”²⁰

Jesus Christ as God knew God the Father before He even came to earth. What this means is that As God the Son, He is uncreated, eternal and in every way co-equal with the Father; except that He is not the Father, but the Son. So, the pre-existence of Jesus Christ is the foundation of historical biblical Christianity. This is revealed when Jesus Christ says to the Father,

“Now, Father, bring Me into the glory We shared before the world began” (Jn 17:5).

John’s introduction to his gospel records the truth that Jesus Christ had come to bridge the great gulf between the invisible, mysterious God and humanity. Jesus Christ did this by becoming a human being Himself. Remember that no one had ever seen God the way that he or she was about to see Him (1 Tim 6:11-16, especially verse 16). Consequently, as the only-begotten Son, Jesus had come to reveal or declare (exegete) the Father proclaiming something regarding what He is like (John 1:18; see also John 14:6-11). Coming as a human, Jesus Christ brought the mysterious and invisible and the visible together in one place. He was wholly God and wholly

¹⁹ Clark, Mary T. “*De Trinitate*.” In “*The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*.” E. Stump. & N. Kretzman (Eds). (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 91.

²⁰ Jinkins, Michael. *Invitation to Theology: A Guide to Study, Conversation & Practice*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 38.

human, at the same time in the one person. So, verse 18 is the climax of John's introduction.²¹ John then took the rest of his gospel to explain the introduction and verse 18. Other than here in John's gospel, the word 'declare' (exegesis) is only used in the following places in the New Testament: Luke 24:35; Acts 10:8; 15:12, 14; 21:19.

For Jesus, to exegete, the mystery as to the Father was to show what He is really like. The term exegesis (exeg'e'sis) means to lead out, to draw out, make the sense clear or to make known what one is reading. So, Jesus Christ, in His taking on a human body (the incarnation), brought the Father out from being mysterious and invisible into view for all to see and know.²² Or as Rudolf Schnackenburg has highlighted, Jesus Christ was,

“...speaking of things hidden in God, tidings of the divine glory.”²³

Or as Jesus Christ pointed out,

“Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I (Jesus Christ), who was sent from God, have seen Him” (Jn 6:46).

So, if Jesus Christ had seen the Father, it was only suitable that He exegeted the Father to the world in the way that He knew Him. In other words, Jesus Christ planned to “lead out, to explain, to rehearse the facts, to recount a narrative”.²⁴ Kenneth Wuest has put it this way, “that One (Jesus) has fully explained Him (the deity of God the Father)”.²⁵ Therefore, Jesus Christ came to explain and tell the story (narrative) of the mystery of the heavenly truths concerning the Father. He did this so that the world may see, understand and then believe.²⁶

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. Have you ever stopped and thought about the mysteriousness of God?

When talking about God, we need to keep in mind that He is a mystery. It has been said that,

“Anything that we perceive of God can only be a radiance of His presence and not God as He is Himself.”²⁷

If someone were to ask you, “What is the mysterious God like?” how would you answer them? It could be answered by saying we can know something about Him because “He is like Jesus”. Remember that Jesus Christ had come to exegete the Father to the world, to explain the truth about the Father. The more Jesus said and did the more that those around Him saw what the Father was like. So, it could be asked,

- How does the Father love? Like Jesus.
- What are the Father's mercy and righteousness like? Like Jesus'.
- How does the Father see us? Like Jesus saw the world around Him.

²¹ Morris, Leon. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament. The Gospel According to John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 112.

²² Wuest, Kenneth S. *Golden Nuggets from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 85.

²³ Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel According to St. John*. Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament. Vol 1. (New York: Herder, 1968), 279.

²⁴ Rienecker, F. *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1980), 219.

²⁵ Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*. (Iowa Falls, Iowa: Riverside, 1961), 210.

²⁶ Thiselton, Anthony C. “Explain, Interpret, Tell, Narrative.” In *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Vol. Colin Brown (Ed.). (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency, 1975), 573-573.

²⁷ “The Deep Mystery of God.” <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/500/article/deep-mystery-god> (7th August 2017).

- How can I get to know and talk to the Father? Like the people did with Jesus.
- Etc...

So, John recorded Jesus Christ's declaring (exegesis) of the Father to the world. What a powerful and life changing truth if it can be grasped. However, not everyone was able to see and grasp this truth. Clare Hay in her article "The Absolute Mystery of God" says that,

"Augustine in his writing explored the depths of the mystery that is God. In this prayer, you are invited to contemplate on this mystery and at the same time reflect upon the ideas and images of God that we meet in everyday life."²⁸

Augustine closed his prayer with the following line,

"Mysterious God in our restlessness we search for You, we desire You, and we are confident in Your assured presence, now and forever. Amen."²⁹

So, in light of what has been said, two questions that you may want to reflect on are,

- How does the idea that God knows no limits impact on His mysteriousness?
- How do the reading and studying the Bible and meditating on God's mystery revealed in Christ help us to realign our hearts toward Him and others humbly?

²⁸ Hay, Clare. "The Absolute Mystery of God." www.echoingtheword.com/prayerideas/prayerideas5-2.doc (7th August 2017).

²⁹ Hay, Clare. "The Absolute Mystery of God." www.echoingtheword.com/prayerideas/prayerideas5-2.doc (7th August 2017).