

GOD *REVEALED*



Part 8
A Mystery Revealed

God Revealed, Session 8
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All Bible references and quotations, unless noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

God Revealed: An Overview

God Revealed?

Who is God? How can we know God? If we believe we have come to know God, how do we know we have found what is truly God? How can we be sure that we simply didn't have some personal emotional experience?

All civilizations around the world have possessed an awareness of the existence of God. These civilizations have expressed their awareness through varieties of ritual, prayer, and service. Some civilizations have produced written texts containing conclusions about what they believe God to be. Religious expressions are evidence of a common awareness of God's existence. However, which expressions are true? Even if we only take the three major world religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and not the thousands of other religions, we are still stuck with the problem of reconciling these three religions and their expressions. All three of these faiths believe in God's existence and that God can be known. They do not agree on foundational points about God's character, what God is doing, and what God desires of people. While God may be known, it doesn't seem that knowing God is simple and straightforward.

How can we know that proposed knowledge of God is true? How could we know this knowledge is truly of God? It seems to me that we should ask a few questions of any religion proposing to possess knowledge of God.

1. For what purpose have humans been created?
2. Why are there evil and suffering in the world that ruin and interrupt our happiness, potential, and destiny?
3. Where did evil come from?
4. Can people overcome evil and find their purpose? Can we find happiness?
5. How can we know that the answers to these questions are true?

Why Read the Bible?

For thousands of years, the Bible has provided cultures around the world with substantive and convincing answers to these persistent questions. When read as intended, readers find a strong connection with its message to their experience. However, the Bible's misuse has been many peoples' negative experience, including...

- the support of racism and chauvenism
- its use as a science textbook
- the support of genocide
- justifying homophobia
- the elevation of religious authorities above legal authority
- twisting its message for fraud and personal gain
- justifying paying women less for the same work as men
- the support of unjust wars, and many other evils

This series seeks to correct much misuse by clearly unfolding the Bible's primary message. We're going to let the text speak for itself and let the text challenge us with its conclusions. To do this, accurate interpretation is necessary. Contrary to common assumptions, accurate interpretation is not only necessary, it is quite possible. It simply requires a set of skills no longer taught in most school experiences. This series will help us learn these skills.

God Revealed will unfold the message of the Bible according to the original authors' intents as expressed in the text. To do this, we will use the authors' literary devices and structures that guide us to their intents. Using this approach, we will see how the Bible's books, characters, and events contribute to that overarching message. In this way, we will come to an accurate understanding of the Bible. As a result, we will know the Bible's contributions to the answers above and let it, rather than someone's misguided agenda, challenge us to know God.

A Mystery Revealed

As we have seen in the Old Testament and in Jesus' own words to his disciples, the coming of the Promised Child was expected by Israel. Additionally, the death, burial, and resurrection of the Promised King at the hands of his own people were also expected. Jesus even states that the proclamation of the testimony of his death, burial, and resurrection to the nations was included in the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:44-49). And yet, Jesus told his disciples at his last supper with them that there was much he needed to teach them, but that they were not ready for it at that time. The Holy Spirit would teach them upon His coming (John 14:26, 16:12-13). This session looks at these things that were unrevealed in the Old Testament and not taught by Jesus during his time on earth but were revealed by the Spirit to the apostles of Jesus. As we will see, they are of profound importance in completing the work of Jesus in building his church and kingdom as he continues to fulfill the promises made to Adam and Eve, Abraham, and David.

Study the Scriptures

Colossians 1:13-2:8

Romans 8:9-10

Colossians 3:1-4:6

Ephesians 1:1-6:24

Titus 1:1-3:15

Think Through the Questions:

1. Summarize what you believe to be the “mystery,” as used by the apostle Paul.
2. Describe the roles that God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit play in the work of building the household (family) of God.
3. Describe the purpose and function of the church in God's purposes.
4. How does God work in the lives of individuals to include them in His eternal purposes?
5. What should a properly ordered church be doing to carry out the purposes of God in the world?

Commentary

As Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit revealed things to Jesus' followers after he ascended into heaven. Of all the New Testament, the letters of Paul explain these things in the most detailed and thorough way. Generally, these new revelations explain how God was now working with both Jews and Gentiles to accomplish His purposes, but there are two primary ideas contained in these revelations. Paul uses the term *mystery* as a broad term that holds these two ideas together.

The first aspect of the *mystery* is that God would no longer deal especially with the Jews in the hopes of the Jews being a light to the rest of the nations. God was now going to deal directly with all other nations of the world. Through Jesus Christ, God abolished the separation between Israel and the nations that existed through the Law of Moses. How did Jesus do this? The answer is found in the gospel. The Law of Moses demanded justice for sins and the Law provided atonement for sins through animal blood sacrifice. The animal sacrifices never truly covered the sins. They simply provided a substitute until a suitable sacrifice could be made. Jesus Christ, who was the completely faithful and righteous Son of God, became the perfect sacrifice as a man on behalf of all humanity. As Jesus took on the death that we deserved, we took on his righteousness and faithfulness, which we did not deserve. In this, Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses and appeased its demand for atonement. But on a higher level, the primary intent in the Law of Moses was to direct its readers to believe in the Promised Child, who would once for all destroy evil, including the evil within humanity. Once Jesus came, the Law's purpose was complete. To fulfill the Law of Moses, one simply needs to believe in Jesus. With the Law of Moses (which separated Jews from the nations) fulfilled and the Law abolished, Gentiles could fully come to God through belief in Jesus Christ. God places His Spirit within those who believe, Jew or Gentile, and this was a *mystery*. Never before did God reveal that the nations would experience the indwelling Spirit of God. The Scriptures taught that the Gentiles would be included in God's blessing. The Scriptures had even taught that the Promised Child would serve as king over all the nations of the world. But the Scriptures did not reveal that the nations of the world would receive the Spirit of God in them. It was this indwelling Spirit of Christ that gave the nations of the world, including Jews, the hope of future glory. The indwelling Spirit of Christ provided the hope

of future glory because the Spirit would accomplish in believers the same thing the Spirit accomplished in Christ—bringing life to our dead bodies and overcoming sin.

With the Spirit of God indwelling those who believe in Jesus, another aspect of the mystery emerges as a direct result of this indwelling. As God was no longer dealing just with Jews, the people of God expanded into what the Bible calls the *church* or the *household of God*, made up of all nations. As we saw in the last session, Jesus stated that he was going to build his church, and that this church would be his family. This family found its identity in God the Father, Son, and Spirit and its mission was to overcome the forces of death. God established a plan for His family in order for it to accomplish its purposes. Paul claimed that one of his primary responsibilities was to explain and instruct God's family in God's plan. The importance of the church functioning according to God's plan cannot be overstated. Paul explains that through the church, God's manifold wisdom is to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This is the realm of the heavenly beings in which the eternal purposes of God are being worked out. Remember that the Promised Child's purpose was to smash the head of the serpent, who brought death and evil to the world. This serpent is the heavenly being known as Satan and he commands a force of evil spiritual beings, called demons, that work to dishonor God. When the church functions according to plan, God's beauty, truth, magnificence, glory, justice, mercy, love, and all His other characteristics explode into the heavenly realm. This gives honor to God and shames those spiritual beings whose purposes are evil, deceptive, and twisted. When the church fails to operate according to plan as a result of believing lies and disobeying God, it fails to reflect God's wisdom and truth. Therefore, it fails to project the honor of God throughout the heavenly realm. This honors the evil spiritual beings because they are being effective in hindering the purposeful functioning of the family of God. When the church operates according to plan, life prevails against deception, sin, and death. When the church fails to operate according to plan, deception, sin, and death prevail.

God's family is called the household of God, the church. The term Paul uses in the original language to describe God's plan is the Greek term *oikonomia*. This word is made up of two words, *oikos* and *nomos*. *Oikos* means "house" or "family." *Nomos* means "law" or "order." The plan of God for his church is then understood to be a

“household law,” or a “family order.” Paul understood his responsibility to properly order God’s family, the church. This order then provided the way of life for the church in order for it to fulfill Jesus’ purposes in overcoming sin, deception, and death. This plan can be seen in four interdependent spheres of responsibility.

The first sphere is that of the individual. Followers of Jesus are called to set their minds on the things of God and the Spirit and engage in a lifelong process of growing in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. As they grow in the things of God and learn to walk in the Spirit that indwells them, disciples increasingly take on the characteristics of Jesus Christ, namely love, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, forgiveness, and peace. Disciples also stop participating in acts associated with sin and death, namely sexual immorality, anger, covetousness, slander, bitterness, obscenity, and lying. In this way, God’s family increasingly enjoys a life increasingly characterized by peace, harmony, and unity.

The second sphere is that of the family. As the deception of the serpent immediately and profoundly affected husbands, wives, and children, God’s work of overcoming evil and death provides the means for families to enjoy harmony and peace. Husbands are called to love, cherish, and nourish their wives, sacrificing themselves for the building up and protection of their wives. Contrary to man’s negligence in the garden where he lazily stood by and let his wife disobey God’s law, husbands are to take initiative in leading and guarding their families from deception, sin, and death. Wives are called to orient their lives around their husbands as his helper in a spirit of honor and respect for him. Contrary to woman’s actions in the garden where she disregarded the instruction of her husband and sought to be like God, wives are to follow their husband’s lead and help him in his efforts to build a family characterized by the grace and power of God through His Spirit. Together, husbands and wives model godly behavior and instruct their children to believe in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in order to produce a strong and faithful next generation.

The third sphere is that of the church. Jesus commands that all of his followers are to be initiated into a local church through baptism. Local churches are physical expressions of the spiritual reality of God’s family. The church is literally a gathering, and God’s family must be gathered and ordered as a family. All followers of Jesus have a role in

the local church as members of God's family. First, just as individual families, God's family has men appointed by the Holy Spirit that serve as leaders of the church. These men, called elders or pastors, equip, guide, and protect the church so that the church accomplishes God's purposes of overcoming deception, sin, and death. Deacons are men and women that lead by assisting the elders in equipping and strengthening the church towards unity and effectiveness. Mature men and women are to serve as examples and helpers for those who are younger in the faith, helping them to carry out their roles as husbands, wives, and parents. Through the broad spectrum of gifts, ministries, and effects given by the Spirit to each local church and the intentional equipping of everyone in the church, the entire church grows to maturity and increased effectiveness in demonstrating the wisdom and glory of God to the heavenly realm.

Finally, the fourth sphere is that of the world. Every person in the local church has existing and ongoing relationships with people in the world. Those people include other family members, employers, employees, neighbors, and civil authorities. Jesus calls us to lives of humility, consideration, submission, and hospitality towards these people as a means of showing them the same grace and kindness God demonstrates to His family. God's people are to be zealous in their efforts to meet pressing needs and to do good in the world. In this way, the knowledge and grace of God spreads beyond the church into neighborhoods, workplaces, and cities. This lifestyle of the church creates attractiveness in the world which will lead to some coming to believe in Jesus Christ, drawing them into the family of God. This lifestyle honors God, demonstrates His truth and wisdom to the heavenly realm, and breaks down the power of deception, sin, and death in the world through the Spirit of God working in the church. As churches become increasingly mature, they are to support the work of those whose responsibility it is to take the gospel to new places and start more churches. In this way, the kingdom of God expands through the preaching of the gospel and the establishing of churches, as we saw in the last session.

Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

The following quote comes from *Life in the Father's House* by Wayne A. Mack and David Swavely.

The Church of the Living God

The emphasis in this second description of the church falls on the words “of the living God.” The church proceeded from God and belongs to God. This divine Originator and Owner of the church is the God—the only true God. And in contrast to the temples of dead pagan idols, Paul says that this church is of the living God. So at all times, He is personally and actively involved in its operation and enterprises.

Throughout the New Testament, God makes it clear to us that the church is His dearest creation and possession. In fact, each member of the Holy Trinity is repeatedly portrayed as treasuring it above all other earthly institutions.

God the Father has revealed His love for the church by His sovereign election of it before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5; Rev. 13:8) and in the promises He gave to Abraham and the other patriarchs, many of which have been fulfilled at least partially in the New Testament church (Acts 2:39; Gal. 3:6-9). The Father paid the ultimate price for the church by sending His beloved Son to die (John 3:16; 1 John 4:14), so that it is said to have been “purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). He participates continually in the fellowship of the church (1 John 1:3), and it acts primarily for the purpose of bringing Him glory (Eph. 3:21).

The Son of God “also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25; cf. Titus 2:14). He laid down His very life for His sheep (John 10:11-16). Therefore God has made Him “the head of the church” (Eph. 5:23; cf. 1:22), and it is repeatedly called “the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12; cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). Jesus has promised to be personally present when the church meets to enact His process of loving discipline (Matt. 18:20) and when it goes forth to carry out His command to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). The church is also where His beloved ordinance of Communion is observed regularly in commemoration of His death (Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Realizing the Importance of the Local Church

Finally, the Holy Spirit initiated the New Testament church at Pentecost through marvelous signs and wonders (Acts 2:1-4) and confirmed the inclusion of the Gentiles by a repeat performance (Acts 10:44-48). He brings each member into the body of Christ through His miracle of regeneration (1 Cor. 12:13; John 3:6-8) and guarantees their eventual glorification (Eph. 1:13-14). In fulfillment of the promises of Christ in John 14, the Spirit empowers the members of the church, indwells them, and illumines their minds to the truth of the Scriptures, which He Himself produced through the prophets and apostles (vv. 16-17,26; cf. 2 Peter 1:21; Heb. 2:4). He also works to promote unity and peace in the body (Eph. 4:3) and provides the various spiritual gifts that enable it to function properly (1 Cor. 12:7-11).

First Peter 1:1-2 mentions all three members of the Trinity when it says that the churches throughout Asia Minor were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, “that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.” The entire Godhead is deeply and intimately involved in the origin and operation of the church. Therefore, we who would be “called sons of the living God” (Rom. 9:26) must be involved in His church. And no doubt the stern warnings of the book of Hebrews apply today to those who would spurn such involvement: “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in anyone of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12) and, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). We would do well to remember that this jealous living God is the One to whom the church belongs.¹

Think Through the Issues

Grace, truth, love, compassion, peace, and unity are to be strong, identifying characteristics of local churches. Yet, in the 2000 year history of the church these characteristics have not necessarily been dominant. Oppression, discrimination, ignorance, strife, division, and abuse have unfortunately defined the church experiences of many people throughout the centuries. While there certainly have been many churches that have possessed righteous qualities throughout history, many people have been turned away from Jesus because of the

Dinner Table Discussion Guide

Meal 1: Mystery

As a family, discuss with each other those things you would like to ask God that are not revealed in the Bible.

Meal 2: The Indwelling Spirit of God

Read Ephesians 1:13-14

1. What is a guarantee?
2. Why do you think God gave us His Spirit as a guarantee until Jesus comes to set up his kingdom?
3. How can we have confidence that we will always belong to Jesus?

Meal 3: The Family of God

Read Ephesians 2:18-21

1. Why is our family so important to us?
2. Why do you think that God's family is important to us too?
3. What does the Holy Spirit do to make us a part of God's family?

Meal 4: God's Plan for His Family

Read Ephesians 3:8-12, 5:22-6:4

1. What jobs did God give Paul to do?
2. Why was it important for the church to follow God's plan?
3. What jobs has God given each of your family members to do?
4. Why is it important for each of us as a family to follow God's plan?