

1st Timothy 3: 9 and 10; “Holding the Mystery of the Faith”, Sermon # 39 in the series – “To Honor God in the church”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 18th, 2015, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We are told in 1st Corinthians 4, verse 1, that an elder, one who is a pastor, is a steward of the mysteries of God. The reason that the word “mystery” is used here with regard to the faith of a deacon or any true Christian, is because everything of truth that they hold to, everything of obedience that they are committed to, is a matter of God’s revelation to them; that is, the revelation of God’s Person, and the revelation of His will. A deacon may not be able to teach, or be apt to teach, but it is essential that he hold to the mystery of the faith. Paul is stating here, that in order to help others he should be able to share what has been revealed to him about God’s grace, and the salvation which has become his, by faith. He should be able to convey to the needy person who he is seeking to minister to, and to the watching world, the truth that there is grace enough in Christ to save from all sins, to sustain in the greatest trials, and to strengthen every needy person to do the will of God. He should be able to communicate, by his words and his deeds, that there is truth and grace sufficient for those who need the help of God. So what I want to do this afternoon is to draw out the meaning of this phrase, “holding the mystery of the faith”. I want to set forth both the objective truth and the subjective application to men who would be deacons, and to the rest of us here as well.

1st of all – The Objective Sense – What is it to hold “the mystery of the faith”, objectively, with a pure conscience?

I would like you to turn with me over to 1st Corinthians 2, and we will look at verses 1-8. “And I brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.” “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.” “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” “However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.” “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” Here we see that our coming to know God was based upon someone’s having had to come to us, preaching and proclaiming the wisdom of God in a mystery. God’s wisdom unto salvation and sanctification is hidden wisdom to those whose spiritual eyes have not yet been opened. When our spiritual eyes are opened, we come to understand that God is objective truth personified, but in knowing that, we still perceive that He is not comprehensible to us in His being. He reveals to us, everything we know of Him in the Scriptures; and we find written there that He is One God, One Essence of Being, but that Being or Essence is manifest in 3 Persons; what theologians term the Trinity.

Even though the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, yet the truth of this mystery is found in many places in the Scripture. And the truth of this mystery, we should know, is held by all orthodox Christians. This truth of One God in Three Persons is received by faith, even though it is not comprehensible to us. Matthew 28: 18 – “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’” “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” The Apostles were given instruction by the Lord Jesus that they were to baptize the disciples which they had made, into the One name of the 3 Divine Persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Human wisdom cannot receive this glorious truth of the Triune God, or the things

which have been prepared in salvation for those who love Him. This hidden wisdom of God, ordained before the ages, was that Jesus Christ, the 2nd Person of the Trinity, would undertake our salvation by taking to Himself human nature, and being made in the likeness of sinful flesh, He would live upon this earth as the God-Man. Great is the mystery of godliness; 2 natures in our Lord Jesus Christ's one Person. As our Confession says in Chapter 8, paragraph 2 – “Two whole, perfect and distinct natures, the divine and the human were inseparably joined together in One Person”, without the conversion of the one nature into the other, and without mixing of them together. In the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Nature was joined together with the human nature; brought to exist side by side, and to interact together in perfect harmony in relation to doing the will of God in this wonderful and mysterious way.

A man who would be a deacon and a good Christian should see that there is not only a great mystery in His Person, but also great mystery in His sinless life and His perfect works. How could He be truly tempted and yet not sin? How could He die as a surety, and as a substitute for my sins as well as the sins of many others? How could He take my place in judgment? This is all a great mystery, but one who would be a faithful as a Christian and as a deacon will hold to it, because he knows the power of the gospel to save and to transform his own heart. This text is telling us that there is much that we do not understand completely, about how Christ changes and transforms our hearts by His grace; but nevertheless, the Christian continues seeking those things above, to realize that transformation, and he continues engaging in good works by faith in Christ, in order that God might be glorified in him. Think of what a mystery it was; the revealing of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, as He was revealed to the Apostle Peter and the other Apostles in the Transfiguration in Matthew 17, verse 1.

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.” “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.” And verse 5 says: “While Peter was still speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear Him!” Peter explains this experience in 2nd Peter 1: 16 –19 for us - “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” “For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” “And we heard this voice which came from heaven when were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.”

The Apostles beheld the glory of Christ as it will be when He returns in His Second Coming, that blazing glorious light which lightened His garments and His Person. It was dazzling and spectacular to them. He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun. They heard the voice of the Father, telling them of His perfect pleasure in the Son, and how they ought to listen to Him. Jesus had said to them in Matthew 16: 28 – “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” They had an experience of what it would be like when Christ returned in the glory of His Father with His angels; coming to reward each person according to their works. Do you, dear Christian, desire to have a reward when Christ returns? Then you should begin to labor for Him now. And to begin to labor for Him now will only really come by your seeking to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in accordance with prayer and your abiding in His Word. When you do this, you will begin to look outside of yourself to see how you can help needy people in the local church of which you are a part. This is what it means to hold to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. Your walk with Christ must come to the place where you are more and more realizing that purity of motives and purity of heart are the only sure foundation

which you can labor on. By prayer and faith and holding sweet communion with your Risen, Living Lord, you will find the Word coming to your heart and mind with power. You are sincerely seeking to abide in His Word and you are learning to keep His commandments. Your great desire is that neither your own heart or the Devil's schemes will deceive you. You find yourself praying that you will not be defiled by the world's sensuality or fall prey to the boastful pride of life. You find yourself studying how you can love all men, but especially those of the household of faith. You do not seek personal glory, but you will be seeking to glorify Christ in all that you do and say.

Are you seeking Christ's glory, in your mind and in your heart, as you read His blessed word? When you perceive His glory, that He was so great and yet He came to help poor lost and needy sinners, it should lead you to tangible acts of personal service to Christ. You will seek the highest welfare of people around you when you learn to deny yourself in order to know Christ better. Christ's glory, and the advancement of His kingdom, are most definitely promoted when a person denies themselves, takes up their cross, and follows Him. "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." This is most certainly the work of a deacon. It is not earthly glory that you seek or pursue; it is the spiritual and heavenly glory, of knowing Christ in your heart, that you will find yourself pursuing. When you begin to do this; when you continue to do this, the day of Christ's glory has dawned in your heart. Someday, in the history of this old world, a time will come when many people will together be led by the Holy Spirit to join forces in truth and righteousness, in order to these things in a greater way; to serve Christ by serving others in love. In a coming day, the dawning of the day of the Millennium will come and God's Spirit will be poured out upon Christ's Church, and upon many people in many nations, and Christ's glory will fill the earth. But I would have you ask yourself whether the daystar of beholding Christ's glory in the Scriptures and beholding Christ's glory in your heart has begun for you now, in our day? Because it can if you will receive these truths that I am preaching to you. Someday the Lord Himself shall return, and what shall He say of you? Will He say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." "You have been faithful in a few things, and so now I will make you a ruler over many things?" "Enter in to the joy of your Lord?" If you have been faithful in a few things, if you have to held to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience, then how joyful you will be when Christ returns and you are raised from the dead.

Let us remember that God's prophetic word is confirmed in the Scriptures; and I hope that you will remember that it contains these great prophecies of what the Spirit shall do when He is poured out from on high, upon the dry ground of your heart. (Isaiah 44: 1-5) Let us see, that this not only refers to the future time period of the Millennium, but it can also apply to you as an individual; as you pray and ask that the Lord that He would pour out His the Spirit, His water on your thirsting soul. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5: 6) Will you not receive these promises, and live accordingly, in service to Christ? This is most certainly what a person who serves Christ, is looking to promote. It is Christ's glory, he will find satisfaction in doing just that. It is a mystery; this looking to Christ to be satisfied by Him while you go about to serve others in the church. But there are always needy people whom God would have you to minister to, according to the providential ordering of God in your life. This growing into maturity, and greater usefulness in Christ's service, will become spiritually tangible to the one who has learned the secret of the Lord which is designed specifically for those who fear Him. "Who is that man who fears the Lord?" "Him shall He teach in the way He chooses." "He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth." "The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant."

2nd – A deacon will also hold the mystery of the faith subjectively, with a pure conscience.

Turn back with me to 1st Corinthians Chapter 2 again. This time I want you to look with me at verses 9-13. “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” “For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?” “Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The quote here in verse 9 is taken from Isaiah 64: 4. Many people in our day take it to refer to the eternal state and heaven; the things which God has prepared there for those who love Him. But verse 10 explicitly says: “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” These words are referring to the things which God has prepared for us who have come to know Him; the spiritual things of God’s truth and His grace, the mysteries of the Gospel and the Word of God. These things require that God make a revelation of them to our heart and to our mind so that we can really begin to comprehend them.

Listen to how Isaiah 64: 4 reads: “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him.” “You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways.” This truly is the life of the fruitful Christian and the faithful deacon. He holds the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. And in doing so, he comes to know the reality of rejoicing in all that God has done for him, and all that God is doing for him, and the Church of which he is a member. And he does righteous deeds on this basis; remembering God in His ways. He remembers that God is pure, and that He would have him to be pure in heart and conscience, as he serves His God. 1st John 3: 2 and 3 say: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Let us ask ourselves in closing whether we are sufficiently pure in heart to serve God and to meet with God to give an account of ourselves on the Last Day?

Think about what it says in Titus Chapter 1, verse 15 – “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.” “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” What I believe this is saying is this; if your heart has been purified by faith, in the reception of regenerating grace, by the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit, in your conversion to Christ, you are seen by God as positionally pure, and a definitive work of Sanctification has begun in your soul. The Holy Spirit will continue on, in His good work in you, by showing you how to pursue purity in your experience all through the rest of your life. This is a great mystery of our faith; how we can be seen by God as pure, because of Jesus Christ, and yet be called to holiness. Day by day to learn to avoid those thoughts in ourselves, and those actions coming from ourselves, which would defile our heart and lead us to see our need of Christ’s righteousness and His grace, so that we really will become pure of heart. Our sanctification in Christ is indeed a great mystery as He cleanses us from all of our sins, as we confess them, and forsake them. Let us hold to the mystery of our faith, and pray that we may have the wisdom to see the Holy Spirit’s good working in any candidate who may be put forward to be raised up to the ministry, of serving as a deacon.