

# 'TIS MYSTERY ALL!

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Who amongst us has not sung the words of Wesley's stirring hymn,

*'Tis mystery all, the Immortal Dies?*

But have we ever stopped to consider that by definition to be immortal means one cannot die? If words are to mean anything, then to sing of *immortality dying* is not a mystery; it is a flat out contradiction! To speak of one who is immortal dying is actually an abuse of language.

Come to think of it, we Christians are in the habit of appealing to mystery to explain a lot about our Faith. When asked to explain how the one God can be One and yet Three Persons *at the same time* we are asked to accept on faith that this is a mystery. I saw the following Statement of Faith in the Foyer of a very large and well-known church in Auckland, NZ...

THE TRINITY... "Would you like to understand the doctrine of the Trinity? You can't! That's the conclusion of hundreds of theologians for the last 1600 years. The Trinity is a mystery ... Our ordinary, logical skills break down when we try to understand ... It is doubtful the human mind would invent something so opposed to its own capabilities. On the other hand, we still don't understand the Trinity ... We are face to face with a mystery... The concept of the Trinity is ideal for meditation. Because you can't understand it we are forced to go beyond the realm of our comprehension into the realm of God Himself."

So my relationship with the God of the Bible is locked away by the tradition of the theologians into the realm of unexplainable mystery! The minds God created and our understanding are of no value here apparently. The confident assertion that our human minds could not invent such a profound mystery is baffling given this is precisely what our brains can do.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT DEFINITION OF "MYSTERY".

This whole appeal to mystery needs honest investigation in light of how the Bible talks about our Faith in relation to mystery.

Starting with Jesus we learn that, **"to you (i.e. to the disciples) has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables"** (Mark 4:11). Jesus explains clearly to his followers the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Jesus states this is "given" to them. It is the "outsiders" who don't get the mystery explained. It is riddles to them. The mystery is the possession of the disciples of Jesus.

The apostle Paul has a lot to say about mystery. He writes, **"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 years past, but is *now manifested*, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the Eternal God, *has been made known* to all the nations"** (Romans

16:25). What was once a tight secret is now “revealed”, now “manifested” and now “made known” through the Gospel “to all the nations.” Paul knows nothing of an unrevealed mystery as far as his gospel and faith are concerned.

Again he writes, “**For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation...**” (Romans 11:25). Paul is here speaking in context about why his fellow-Israelites have not by and large accepted Christ Jesus. We observe Paul openly tells us this mystery. He informs us! And note; those who are uninformed are wise in their own estimation,” that is to say, they are proud.

Speaking about the Second Coming of Jesus, Paul writes to the Corinthian church, “**Behold, I tell you a mystery...**” ( 1 Cor. 15:51). He goes on to reveal that mystery to our understanding. He tells us what the mystery is. Now we know it and understand it.

In **Ephesians 1:9** the apostle states that, “**He made known to us the mystery of His will**”. God’s will for the Christians is known! Paul also writes in **Colossians 1:26** of, “**The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to his saints.**” Once again the saints know the mystery because it’s been manifested openly.

Each of these examples (and there are others) shows that in the Bible understanding, a mystery is some aspect of our faith which God has revealed and openly manifested. A mystery is something previously unknown but is now made known. **There is no such thing in the Christian Faith as a mystery that is unknown nor unrevealed.** In the NT a mystery is an “open secret” that is given to God’s folk. *God’s mysteries are for our minds to understand!*

The way the NT describes a mystery is thus the complete opposite to what the church today is urged to accept. The modern concept of a mystery being that which is not open to the mind, to reason, to revelation is rather from Greek philosophy. The Greeks could always appeal to the “unreal” world of mystery to “explain” the inexplicable! The Greek mind loved such metaphysics.

To put it the other way round, if the doctrine of the immortal God dying, or the doctrine of God being Three-in-One and One-in-Three were mysteries worthy of our faith, then God would have clearly revealed them to His people in the Scriptures. They would be fit subjects for our minds and for our understanding.

Revelation by definition is mystery unveiled: Once revealed it is mystery no more. If it remains a mystery then it has not been revealed. In the Bible, revelation on God’s side always corresponds to understanding on His peoples’ side. Therefore, the fact that the so-called Trinity remains a mystery to our understanding (despite its supposedly having been revealed by God as necessary to our salvation?) is the strongest argument against regarding it as a revelation from God! If God had revealed it we would understand it. That’s the Bible teaching.

Furthermore, the fact my Trinitarian friends say that “words cannot explain it” means precisely there are no words to explain it. This is because it has not been revealed. Sure, “the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things

belong to us and to our children forever” (Deuteronomy 29:29). From the Bible point of view the “secret things” are not given to us so it’s useless to try and speculate about them this side of Eternity. But the “revealed things” are addressed to our minds and we are to intelligently pass them on to our children.

To say the Trinity is an incomprehensible mystery that must be accepted by faith is to actually replace apostolic faith with what is at best, mere human speculation, and at worst an alternative or replacement gospel for “the Faith once for all delivered to the saints “ (Jude 3).

The apostles’ position was, “For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand” (2 Corinthians 1:13). It’s all on the table. It is written for us to read, and it’s there for us to understand. No mysteries here.

Let’s go back to Wesley’s hymn for a moment. Is it possible for immortality to die? Is this a mystery or pure nonsense? Paul twice writes in the one little letter of First Timothy that God only is “immortal”. In 1 Tim. 1:17 he writes that “the only God” is “immortal” and in 6:16 he puts it slightly differently that God “alone possesses immortality”.

The Bible categorically teaches that ‘the only God alone’ is immortal. The Greek text uses two slightly different words that our English versions simultaneously translate as “immortal”. The word in chapter 1 means “incorruptible”. God by definition is incorruptible because He cannot die. But when Jesus was buried he is described as being in a state of corruption (see Acts 2:27 for example, where, but for his Father God’s faithfulness, Jesus would have been abandoned to Hades (the grave) and would have undergone “decay”).

The word “immortal” in 1 Timothy chapter 6 means “never dying” or “unable to die”. It is therefore axiomatic that God can never die, has never died, nor will ever die. He can never, has never, will never enter a state of corruption and decay. Any other Person is excluded from being the God of the Bible.

Also, in the same sentences (1 Tim. 1:17 and 1 Tim. 6: 16) "the only God" is described as "invisible" and indeed, that He "dwells in unapproachable light; Whom no man has seen or can see." (I note these verses were written after Jesus had died and been raised and ascended up to God's Right Hand.)

Observe the juxtaposition of these two attributes of the Deity: "The only God" is immortal, that is never-dying; and "the only God" has never been seen nor can be seen by any man. We are told this twice in one epistle and of course, there are many other such times this appears in the Bible. But clearly, "baby Jesus" was seen and handled by men (I John 1:1) which means he was very visible; and Jesus died on the cross for our sins which means he was also very mortal.

By definition therefore, Jesus cannot be the only God of the Bible. Otherwise we might as well forget all semblance of Scripture being God’s revelation to us and being addressed to our understanding. Or perhaps we could appeal to, “it’s a mystery!?” (Wanted to see if you are still with me, so just kidding.)

Jesus himself defines God as "(a) Spirit" (John 4:24). After his resurrection Jesus says, "I am not a spirit, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). He encourages the disciples, "Go on and touch me!" Jesus excludes himself even after his resurrection from the category of Deity. He is still a man, a now glorified man, now never to die again, and therefore now immortal. But it was not always so with him. God has granted him immortality. God will also grant all His children this amazing gift one day (1 Corinthians 15:42,49;53-54). So, was Jesus God Who is Spirit or a true man?

Not only so, Scripture also states that the God of the Bible "cannot be tempted" but we know Jesus was a man "tempted in all points like we are" (Heb. 4:15, etc). Was Jesus truly tempted or was it all a pretense? Was he untemptable God or temptible man? We can't have it both ways.

There are many other Scriptural definitions of "the only God" that the category of a "God-baby" or a so-called "God-man" defy and shatter. Either Jesus was "fully God" as Trinitarianism affirms and so could not die, nor be seen by any man, nor be tempted; or Jesus is true man who was seen, was truly tempted, and did die, as my Bible states. The only other option is to appeal to mystery. But then we have to ignore the way the Bible defines mystery as that which is openly known for us all and that our minds can understand. And furthermore, we have to invent our own contradictory definitions for words such as *immortality dying*.

If believing a mystery means I have to accept that which is inexplicable, how can anybody, be they pastor, elder, theologian or Pope, then pretend to explain it to me? They just told me it's incomprehensible but they will explain it! How can they then make that which is incomprehensible a necessary test for my church membership? They just told me there are no words to explain it, but they just used words to explain it. This is *non-sequitur*.

Finally, my dictionary defines "Nonsense" this way: "Words without sense or conveying absurd ideas." How about these words ---

*"Tis mystery all, the Immortal dies.*

Perhaps such mystery is really just nonsense after all?