

Heart-Revelation of 'The Mystery'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The mystery of Christ is a corporate and heavenly experience that reveals the true meaning and nature of Christ as expressed in His Body the Church.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 3:3

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "The Mystery of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the profound concept of 'mystery' as presented in Ephesians, emphasizing that while God has revealed His will and the mystery of Christ, true understanding requires divine illumination. He distinguishes between the mystery of Christ and the mystery of iniquity, highlighting that both involve a supernatural presence in human form. Sparks asserts that spiritual growth comes from recognizing the corporate nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, which is essential for believers to experience fullness in their faith. He encourages the congregation to seek revelation from God to truly grasp their identity and purpose within the Church. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of the Church's heavenly calling and the necessity of unity among believers for spiritual enlargement.

Transcript

"...making known unto us the mystery of his will..." (Eph. 1:9).

"...how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery... my understanding in the mystery of Christ... to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3:3,4,9).

"This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. 5:32).

"...that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19).

We have traced through the letter to the Ephesians this characteristic word - "mystery." What is its meaning?

It has two sides. First of all, "mystery" means something that has been kept hidden, that could not be recognised, clearly seen or understood. It was a hidden matter - what we call a secret; and we are told that God kept this secret, this mystery, hidden from all ages and generations, but now He has made it known. Something which was hidden, a mystery, has now been declared.

But then there is the other side of this, which is perfectly clear also - that even after the secret has been declared people cannot see it unless God gives them illumination about it. Although this is the age in which it is declared, it is still a mystery until God opens eyes and gives illumination. Paul said "by revelation was made known unto me the mystery"; "ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery"; so that it is a matter of the mystery being explained or illumined to our hearts, and it is in our coming to see it that we come to spiritual enlargement. We move towards fulness by way of seeing "the mystery."

Two Mysteries

The word 'mystery' is used in several connections in the New Testament, but there are two major connections. You may say that they include the others. Firstly, there is the mystery of Christ. We read the phrase - "the mystery of the gospel" - but that comes within this, that is a part of the mystery of Christ. And secondly, there is the mystery of iniquity. What does the mystery turn out to be when you look into the New Testament? Well, in each case - the mystery of Christ and the mystery of iniquity - you will find it is an incarnation of a great spiritual and supernatural being entering into man form. That is perfectly clear and simple with regard to Christ. God was in Christ - that is the mystery. In the days of His flesh, no one understood that mystery, it was something hidden. They felt there was something mysterious about Him, something that was different, 'other,' superior. They could not get to the bottom of Him, as we say; they could not quite understand Him. 'There is something about this Man we cannot understand. He is different, He defeats all our attempts at explanation. There is a mystery about Him.' "The world knew him not" (John 1:10). It is the mystery of God in Christ, God appearing in the form of man, God made in the likeness of man.

The mystery of iniquity is the same thing - another supernatural, spiritual being coming in man form; eventually Antichrist. The mystery of iniquity is that there is something in humanity, and heading itself up into a humanity, a man or men, which is not just man himself. There is something about this that is evil, that is sinister, uncanny. You cannot account for it on purely natural grounds. There is a mystery about it. It is an incarnation of a spiritual and supernatural being which is the mystery, whether it be of Christ, or whether it be of Antichrist.

The Twofold Mystery of Christ

But when you come to Christ, you find that the mystery is twofold. Firstly, it is Himself, as we have said; God in Christ personally, so that Christ is God incarnate. But then you find, by what has been revealed to and through Paul, that Christ takes a Body; not a physical body, but a spiritual Body - "the church which is his body" (Eph. 1:22-23); and the Church being His Body again becomes the mystery of Christ; that is, here is God in Christ indwelling a company of people, the elect, the Body of Christ; and the letter to the Ephesians is particularly taken up with that aspect of Christ - that you have here a body of people called the Church, in whom God in Christ dwells. There is a mystery about this people, about this particular Church, there is something here that is supernatural, something here that is spiritual. It is not just a society of people called Christians, a number of people who gather together in the Christian faith and believe certain doctrines. There is something more than that about them. If only you knew it and could understand it, in the deepest and innermost reality of their being they are supernatural; they are not merely natural people, they are not earthly people. There is something hidden within them which you cannot account for on any other ground, and you have to say, 'It is God, it is the Lord.' When you meet these people, when they are gathered together even in a small company, if you move in there you find something extra to the people, something more than what they are; you meet the Lord. There is a mystery about this, and the

mystery of Christ of which Paul is speaking here is not just the mystery of Christ personal, but it is the mystery of Christ corporate, of Christ in His Body the Church.

So Paul is speaking about that mystery, and he is saying, 'Now, this is a heavenly thing, a 'spiritual' thing; this is not something that is on this earth, which you can explain as you can explain other earthly things. This is something heavenly, and you cannot explain that by earthly standards at all.'

That is the statement of the fact, but of course that is the challenge to the Church. Is the Church that? Just in so far as we are actually what we are called to be, that is our spiritual measure. Spiritual measure is what we are as to Christ, what Christ is in us.

The Mystery Known Only by Revelation

Then we come to this other point - it is not the fact that makes us grow; that is, it is not the truth of the Body as truth, the facts stated about the Church as information, that brings us to spiritual enlargement. We can see all this as in the Scriptures, and yet it may never make any difference to us as to our spiritual measure, never result in spiritual enlargement. There are a lot of people who have all the truth of the mystery of Christ and the Church, all the truth of the Body of Christ, but they are very small people. Many of them have it and are still living on Corinthian ground where everything is very earthly and self-centred; and many more are living on Galatian ground where all is very legal. In order for it to mean spiritual enlargement, it has to be on what we will call Ephesian ground.

What is Ephesian ground? It is this. Paul says that there was revealed to him this mystery; it was made known to him. And now he tells these people that he prays for them. They are Christians, there is no doubt about that; but he says that he prays for them "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory, may give unto you (Christians) a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. 1:17-20). All that has to do with the true, eternal vocation and destiny of this Christ corporate. The knowledge of Him is not the knowledge of Christ as a separate person. It is the knowledge of Christ now in all that He means in a corporate way. That is the knowledge he prays they may have; and having prayed thus for them he moves to the matter of spiritual enlargement. He comes eventually to that great point in the fourth chapter - "till we all attain... unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." How do you attain unto fulness? What is spiritual enlargement? It results from the eyes of your heart being enlightened as to the true meaning and nature of Christ as expressed in His Body the Church. The point is that you see it, that it breaks on you by revelation. Then you are at once out of a Corinthian position, out of a Galatian position, out of a merely earthly Church with its ordinances, ceremonies, etc. You are in a heavenly position, and now you are going to grow.

Even at the risk of undue repetition - because of the importance of this matter let me say again that the Apostle says as to himself, and as to those believers of his own day, and as to us, that the way of spiritual enlargement is by the eyes of the heart being enlightened. Paul would never have prayed for that, if it were not the Lord's will that it should be so; and if it is His will, then we can have the eyes of our heart enlightened to know in this way that Paul knew - by revelation.

The Church Heavenly and Corporate

Now, reverting to what I said above concerning the true meaning and nature of the Church, I wonder if you have noticed in "Romans," "Corinthians" and "Galatians" the connection of baptism? In Romans 6 baptism results in walking in newness of life. "We were buried... with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." That is very simple; that is the beginning; through the spiritual meaning of baptism you simply walk in newness of life, you have a new life. When you come from "Romans" into "Corinthians" you find that union with Christ crucified means that the mixing up of the old life with the new has to be dealt with; you have a new life, but, you must not mix the old life in with it. So "Corinthians" teaches that you must live altogether and only in the new life, and not bring in the old with it. See 2 Cor. 5. When you move into "Galatians," Paul says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (3:27). In "Galatians," baptism is the putting on of the new man completely; and to indicate that it is an advance upon the Corinthian position, he follows immediately by saying "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus." You put on the new man. The Corinthian divisions are ruled out; baptism in relation to the Galatian position means that we know no man after the flesh. But still in "Romans," "Corinthians," and "Galatians," it is as though we were living as Christians in a new life unto the Lord here, on the earth.

You come into "Ephesians" and you read - "God... even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" (2:4-6), Now here, the 'us' is corporate. When you come into "Ephesians" you come onto the ground of what I will call a corporate baptism. It has an individual application, but "Ephesians" views the Church as a whole as a baptized thing. It is as though this whole Body of Christ, the Church, has corporately been baptized, and is no longer an earthly thing at all; it is a heavenly Body.

Everything here in this first half of the Ephesian letter is corporate. It was the Church that was foreknown, foreordained, predestinated. It only becomes an individual and personal matter by personal challenge to us in relation to the whole, but it is the Church that is in view, and 'we' who were quickened and raised are a corporate thing; so that, in "Ephesians," baptism sees the Church placed in the heavenlies through death and Divine quickening and raising together with Christ.

It is something very much fuller than just individual Christian life. You may be baptized as an individual, but you must recognize that God never thinks of you just as an individual in that sense; He never regards you just as one isolated person. He looks upon you from the standpoint of the whole Body and says, 'When you were baptized, you were not only baptized as an individual; you were baptized as part of the Church, and in your resurrection you are seen from heaven in your relatedness to the Church.'

Therefore the higher position of "Ephesians" is this - that now, being quickened and raised together with Christ and seated in the heavenlies is a matter of relatedness to other believers, and in that relatedness, you are going to find your fulness. You are never going to find spiritual enlargement just as an isolated, separate individual, but in relation with other believers. "God setteth the solitary in families" (Psa. 68:6), and there is no doubt about it, whether or not you understand or accept the doctrine of it, you can prove very quickly in experience that our spiritual enlargement does come by way of true spiritual and heavenly relatedness with other believers.

That is proved by the fact that it is not always easy for Christians to live together for very long. It sounds a terrible thing to say, but you have a lot of other factors to reckon with. If you were ordinary people in this world, you might get on very well, but being Christians you have to meet the whole force of Satan working

upon any little bit of natural life he can find. So he makes for difficulty between Christians that they would not find if they were not in a heavenly position.

They are meeting forces in the heavenlies. There are the rub and friction and all the cross currents that try to divide Christians but which do not try to divide other people, because there is so much bound up with true spiritual oneness amongst the Lord's people - so much for the Lord, and so much against Satan. Satan is going to break up that spiritual oneness if he can. He knows what that means for him, and the Lord knows what that means for Himself - and hence the special and extra difficulties when it is a case of Christians living together, especially for a long time.

Now what is the upshot? When these difficulties arise we must say, 'It is evidently necessary for me to get a new spiritual position, to get on top of this. If I am not going to give it up and leave, I must come to some spiritual enlargement; I have to know the Lord in a new way, to have more grace, love and patience.' That is spiritual enlargement, and it comes by relatedness. (Of course, that is only one way; there are many others by which spiritual enlargement comes by relatedness.) If only we can keep together in prayer, there is spiritual enlargement.

You want spiritual enlargement? Recognize that your baptism is not only an individual and personal thing but from God's standpoint of fulness it is a corporate thing. You may in "Romans" be baptized individually to walk in newness of life, but when you come to "Ephesians," it is corporate; the Church was baptized, it is a baptized Church; a crucified and risen Church, and a Church in the heavenlies that is of spiritual account; not something here; and there you come into the realm of God's great fulness - "strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:18-19). That is fulness, but notice, that is corporate. We must ask the Lord in the terms of the Apostle's prayer that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened. When we see, it is done. What we need is to see, that we may know the hope of His calling.

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