

TWO MYSTERIES OF THE LAST DAYS

Revealing the
Mystery of God
and the Mystery
of Iniquity

Steve Highlander
an Emmaus Road Publication

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Two Mysteries of the Last Days

Revealing the Mystery of God and the Mystery of Iniquity
by Steve Highlander

The Bible tells us that two “mysteries” will be revealed in the last days. It also tells us that every man, woman, and child, including yourself, will be eternally impacted by one of these two “mysteries.” And, while the “mysteries” have been in operation for a long time, both will rapidly become more apparent and ultimately come to completion before the end of the world as we know it. Do I have your attention?

To understand the end times, a person must understand how these two *mysteries* play out in the last days. A failure to understand these Biblical revelations has led to many false doctrines concerning the last days.

However, these mysteries are not just theological banter or great sermon material; the unfolding of these mysteries will impact every person, and every person will have to yield to one of these two mysteries. The world and the Church both stand at a crossroads today. Choices have to be made—if they have not been made already.

Defining a Mystery

We need to get a correct understanding of this word in a biblical sense. The word MYSTERY in the bible MUSTERION in Greek and means something that is purposely hidden for a while that it might be revealed at a

specific point in time. The New Testament writers tell us about several *mysteries*.

Understanding Mysteries

Proverbs 25:2 tells us, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”

As we continue in the study, let us keep in mind that the *mysteries* we are studying were hidden but were revealed to the apostles and prophets and are rapidly being revealed to us and will come to completion in the last days.

In Mark chapter four, Jesus’s disciples asked Him why he spoke in parables. He replied that to them (the disciples), it was given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Like it or not, God has chosen to be somewhat exclusive. The things of God are not something a person can decide for themselves they want to understand and acquire. God is the author and the Holy Spirit the guardian of God’s truth. Jesus revealed some spiritual things in parables that some people just couldn’t understand. Is God unfair? Can a person blame God because they wanted to know His wisdom and couldn’t learn it for themselves? Not at all; after all, God is God, and He can do whatever He wants without having to answer to men (who are not gods). However, on the fairness issue, isn’t God being a little calloused by speaking to people in terms they could not understand? Again, the answer is no, and that is why. God desires us to understand His wisdom and purposes fully; however, He knows that man’s intellect will get in the way. Jesus told Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is

flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

God is not interested in men understanding and serving Him in a fleshly manner. He is interested in man understanding and serving Him in the power of the Spirit. That is why God reserves the right to reveal His plans and purposes to whom he will, by His Spirit. Then men cannot control the truth as they tried to do for hundreds of years during the period known as the Dark Ages. I find it interesting that a period in history, governed by a worldwide church system that claimed to represent God, would be called the “Dark Ages.” Yet this system kept the Word of God from the common people and killed those who wanted to set the Church free from the tyranny of man’s religious bondage. This religious system has never disappeared either but continues today.

The truth is available to every man, woman, and child. God is not stingy or unfair; He simply reserves the right to reveal it Himself rather than making it a matter of intellectual learning. While God did hide some things for a time, we must understand that, as disciples, we have the mind of Christ and can know and understand the deep things of God. This is a familiar passage of scripture but reread it carefully in the context of our study. Once again, Jesus told Nicodemus, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of heaven.” Men have tried to make this say, “Unless you are born again, you can’t go to heaven.” But that is not what Jesus said. He said you could not SEE (understand, comprehend) the kingdom of

God. The first step toward revelation is being born again. The natural man CAN NOT receive the things 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. 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. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.” I Cor. 2:6-16 NKJV

As we move closer to the last days, the Word of God tells us that things will be opened and revealed that were not opened from the time they were written. People—trying to teach something that God Himself said we couldn't understand until a predetermined time—have created much confusion.

“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase....Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things?” And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.” Daniel 12:4, 8-9.

In Ephesians 3:3, Paul tells us that God REVEALED the mysteries to him. Keep in mind that a mystery was something spoken (written) yet spiritually hidden by God until such a time chosen by God to be revealed by the Holy Spirit. Paul also knew that he could not simply teach, in man's wisdom and methods, what it took the Spirit of God to reveal to him. That is why we find him praying for the Ephesian church that God “may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Ephesians 1:17). You and I must pray for the same spirit of wisdom and revelation for ourselves and those around us. Paul could help us understand some things he had seen, but it would still take the Spirit of God to reveal them personally to each individual.

A Look at the Two Mysteries

“...the *mystery* which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” Col. 1:26-27 (italics mine)

Here, in plain language, Paul declares the greatest revelation of all time. God’s purpose throughout history was to bring man to a place where God could put the Spirit of Christ in him and give him a glorious existence for all eternity. The fullness of the mystery of God will result in a person totally yielding himself to the Spirit of Christ within.

That is one of the mysteries with which the world will have to deal. The other is the exact opposite.

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work....” II Thes. 2:7

While the mystery of God is readily defined, the mystery of iniquity needs to be clarified. There are several words in the Bible for sin: sin, transgression, trespass, iniquity, etc. Each word carries a different idea with it. The term “iniquity” in the Bible means self-will or lawlessness. So the mystery of iniquity is the mystery of self-will.

The fullness of the mystery of iniquity will result in a person completely yielding to the spirit of iniquity (self-will), which is the spirit of the antichrist.

Remember that a mystery was something that was going to be revealed. With this thought in mind, we understand then that in the last days, the root of self-will (iniquity) will be revealed and come to completion in the world, just as surely as the mystery of God (which is Christ in you) shall be displayed in its fullness and come to reality.

As we might have expected, these two mysteries are diametrically opposed to each other, which means that every single person will have a choice as to which mystery he or she will ultimately yield. There is no middle ground for those that live in the last days. As we move into the period known as the “Great Tribulation,” each person will be forced to make a decision. The Book of the Revelation reveals a significant truth., Those who took the mark of the beast were forever barred from the book of life. Events of the last days give no middle ground; either you walked with God or did not. There was no fence to sit on, no comfortable church where you could go to hide the fact that you were not serving God. The purpose of the last days was to make a generation of people decide who they would serve: God or self. Through the ages, that has been the question, but the answer will be black and white in the last days.

The Time Frame of the Two Mysteries

You have already discovered several things about the two mysteries. First, they are opposed to each other, one is of Christ (which means “anointed”), and the other is of the antichrist (or “against the anointing”). Second, you have discovered that every person will have to yield totally to

one mystery or the other. We also know that these mysteries are already at work and are already partially revealed, yet not in their fullness or finality. Both mysteries began before time and have emerged in history to battle throughout the ages. Sometimes you see them clearly. The first glimpse of them is in Satan's fall from heaven. **"You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you."** Eze 28:15

Next, we see them locked in a battle for the souls of men in the Garden of Eden, as Satan tries to get God's crowning creation to exert the same self-will (iniquity) he did.

God wanted man to voluntarily grant Him the right to sit on the throne of his life. God gave Adam every good thing, but the choice of who would rule Adam's life was up to Adam. When the time came, he chooses self-will (iniquity) over faith and obedience to God, and the result was catastrophic to Adam, his family, and the world.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God's chosen people wrestling with obedience and faith or self-will. When iniquity became too severe, God sent judgment to bring the people back to His rule and authority.

Two thousand years ago, we saw the battle emerge into human history once again as Jesus came to undo what Adam had done and to complete what Adam had left unfinished. In I Corinthians 15:45-47, Jesus is referred to as the Last Adam and the Second Man.

Satan was on the scene to tempt Christ with the same thing: INIQUITY or self-will. We find the record of that

battle in Matthew chapter 4. Jesus, of course, did not yield to that spirit as Adam had, and, as he neared the end of His ministry, was able to say that Satan was coming but had nothing in Him.

Jesus would—at last—grant God access to the throne of man’s heart. Jesus was what God desires for you and me to become: flesh and blood. He was filled with, and obedient to, the Spirit of God. In Christ, God had total access and free reign to work out His will in a person. Through faith in Christ, that access extends to humanity. Adam’s failure is not greater than Christ’s victory. Christ won the battle for us, and the mystery of God, “Christ in you,” is now a reality.

Satan fought hard for the souls of men. Now, the real issue is not so much sin and salvation, as it is submission to God or self-will. Many people want God, but they want Him on their own terms. They want Him in such a way as not to have to change very much about their lives. It may be religious, but it is still self-will or iniquity.

When we yield to God, the issue of salvation takes care of itself. For the most part, people have an awareness that they need to be right with God. Man has a *religious hole* in his being that yearns to be filled. Men set about trying to do better or work their way to a right relationship with God. God confronts this with His truth that no one is good enough, or ever will be good enough, to earn salvation. The very issue of salvation starts by dealing with self-will. Do I continue to try to do things my way (self-will/iniquity), or do I yield to God’s authority, truth, and grace?

For the last 2000 years, men have struggled between self-will and submission to the Spirit of Christ. At times individuals and groups have won the battle through the Spirit of the Lord. At other times iniquity prevailed through the flesh. However, in the last days, the two mysteries will be fully revealed and come to completion. Of necessity, this will require every person alive at the time to yield totally to one of the two mysteries.

That brings us to today and a time in the near future. I do not know anyone who knows the Bible who does not believe we are rapidly approaching the last days. The Bible is clear on the timing of the completion of the mysteries. Both mysteries are operating today and racing toward complete fulfillment at a future date. Let's look!

“The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.” Rev. 10:5-7

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work...And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” II Thes. 2:7 & 8.

The seventh angel sounds somewhere near the end of the tribulation period. And, of course, we know that the

destruction of the antichrist will occur at the same time. So we have a clear time frame for the revealing and completion of these two mysteries.

The Seventh Angel and the Last Trump

We looked at Rev. 10:5-7 above. There are several things in this passage of scripture that we will need to look at closely. In verse six, the angel swears that there will be no more delay. In 2 Thessalonians chapter two, we also find that something is hindering the full and complete manifestation of the spirit of iniquity for a time. Taken together, we understand that God holds the key to the end of these mysteries. Satan might have a time, but we need to remember that The Book of the Revelation was *“the revelation of Jesus Christ,”* not the revelation of the devil!

Next, we discover that, until the seventh angel prepares to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God (Christ in you) will continue to work. Notice the wording: **“In the DAYS (plural) of the voice....”** That was not an event that would take place instantly but instead over a period of time. Notice also that the angel was speaking. It is significant that throughout the Bible, the trumpet was used spiritually to indicate a prophetic message and, more specifically, the voice of God Himself. It must be considered that the seventh angel is to bring a prophetic message to the Church to prepare it for the last days. This prophetic message would also in line with the other mysteries either revealed or partially revealed throughout the church age. As we have already seen, Daniel, to whom God revealed things about the last days, was told to seal

up the words until “the time of the end.” I believe God has some hidden mysteries yet to be revealed to the Church—reserved for the final days and the final battle.

We know that the number *seven* in the Bible refers to God’s perfection and completion. This was the 7th angel. It is fitting that this angel sounds the final trumpet and closes *the mystery of the ages*.

Now, an astute observer might be questioning something. Some people believe that Jesus is coming to rapture the Church before the tribulation starts. How then can the mystery of God be finished toward the end of the tribulation? Good question. This issue is too important to dismiss lightly. Let’s take what we know and look at several scriptures.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” I Cor. 15:51 & 52

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” I Thes. 4:16-17

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will

appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Matt. 24:29-30

Notice some familiar words: mystery, trumpet, shout, angel.

Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture use these verses as proof texts. Indeed, Christ will come back, the dead will rise, and we will be changed. However, the time frame given could not be before the tribulation because it is at the “*last trumpet*.” Now we need to ask a question. How many trumpets will there be after the last one? Obviously, none! If we apply this verse to a pre-tribulation rapture and call it the last trumpet, how could the seventh—and last—trump be sounded seven years later? These verses coincide exactly with Rev. 10:7.

These two verses describe a *resurrection*. We call it the rapture, but it should be called the resurrection. Does the Bible give us the timing of the resurrection? Yes! In John 5:28 -29, Jesus tells us that there are two resurrections: the resurrection of life and the other called the resurrection of damnation. In Rev. 20:4-6, we discover two resurrections. One corresponds to the resurrection of life is called the “*first resurrection*” and occurs after the tribulation period; the second one, corresponding to the resurrection of damnation, occurs 1000 years later.

Now here is another question. How many resurrections will there be before the first one? Obviously, there will not be any before the “*first one*.” How could this verse,

detailing a resurrection of all dead believers, come before the first resurrection spoken of in chapter 20 of the Revelation (which specifically included those killed in the tribulation)? There are many more verses that demonstrate no room for a pre-tribulation rapture in the end-time scenario described in the Bible. However, the second coming of Jesus is not the primary topic of this study.

If you are reading this and believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, you will have to reconcile these verses. I stress the point because a pre-tribulation rapture usurps the completion of these mysteries during the time frame indicated in the Bible. No matter how cherished a doctrine is or who teaches it, we must allow the scriptures to speak for themselves.

God has a plan to thoroughly reveal Himself in and through a people before the end comes. Those same people will be used to destroy the works of Satan in the battle of the ages. The issue will be submission to Christ or continued self-will.

How Will the Mysteries be Revealed?

As already noted, a Biblical mystery carries the idea that something was hidden for a time, then revealed. We have also discovered that the mysteries will continue to operate until they come to completion in the last days. Both the mystery of God and the mystery of iniquity are at work in the world system and people.

Its outworking in the world is evident. People live their lives without regard to God at all. Or they pay token homage to Him but still walk in self-will, never yielding to His plan and purpose for their lives.

As Christians, we have to struggle with both of these issues. We inherited a sinful nature from Adam, but we also received the Spirit of God through Christ. There is then, within us, both a nature that cannot sin (I John 3:9) and a nature that cannot please God, no matter how hard it tries (Romans 8:7-8). Because of that, we also have both mysteries working in us. These mysteries are not just doctrinal but have the power to affect and change us.

I will assume that you are a Christian since you are reading this book in the first place.

(If you are not a Christian, you need to stop putting God off and receive the forgiveness of your sins and respond to His love and grace offered through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.)

As Christians, we know we struggle with the issues of obedience and self-will. Regularly, our flesh nature wants to do things to which we must say “NO!” As we yield to the mystery of God— Christ in us—we become more and more like Jesus. However, if we are not careful, our old nature can, and will, re-assert itself and produce self-will or iniquity. As much as we like to think that we are free from all of this, we must admit that we are not yet.

God has provided for our total victory over the flesh, but we have not yet seen it fully manifested. However, the Bible tells us that one day there will be no more delay; the

seventh angel will speak, and you and I will experience the fullness of Christ in us. That is, however, contingent upon us continuing to yield to the Spirit of God.

Likewise, the mystery of iniquity is at work in the world and in Christians, that power that pulls us away from God's will to do our own will. Just like some will yield to the Spirit of Christ and experience the fullness of His power and glory, some will yield to iniquity and find themselves totally immersed in self-will. "Certainly, he is not talking about Christians?" you might be asking yourself. Yes, unfortunately, I am talking about Christians.

We need to look at several passages of scripture in the light of our study. These passages will make a lot more sense now that we understand the two mysteries and the last days.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Matt. 7:21-23

We need to pay serious attention to the words of Jesus here. Jesus was not dealing with the world; he was talking to people who claimed to be actively serving Him. He started this passage by saying not everyone who called Him "Lord" was going to get in. They were very proud of their accomplishments. They even did everything they did in "Jesus's name" Most people would look at this group

of people and say, “What a great church they had! Prophecy, casting out of devils, and my, what great things they did for God.”

However, Jesus was not the least bit impressed. In fact, he was rude. There wasn’t even a “good effort” or “nice try” Why is this? Have you ever stopped to comprehend what Jesus was telling us?

It is readily apparent in context with our study.

Jesus was dealing with the issue of obedience versus self-will (iniquity). He started by saying that not everyone who called Him Lord was going to make it, but those that DID the WILL of His Father. Talk is cheap, and actions speak louder than words in Jesus’s kingdom.

Notice He calls them “*workers of INIQUITY*” (self-will). These people were not doing God’s will; they were doing their own will in Jesus’s name. And, as already noted, Jesus was unimpressed.

Here is the danger presented by the mystery of iniquity in the life of believers and the Church. If we are not careful, we can delude ourselves into thinking we are doing great things for God when God has not told us to do any of them. God simply isn’t interested in us doing something for Him; He is interested in obedience.

Another verse is relevant here.

“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” II Tim. 2:19

Notice how this verse lists the very things that Jesus told the people in Matthew chapter seven. Jesus said to them that He never knew them and that they were workers of iniquity.

Many people who are in the Church today will face the power of this mystery. Some will overcome, but many will not.

The Day of Christ and the Man of Sin

There are two more verses that we need to consider in this regard.

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” 2 Thes. 2:3-4“

And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” Matt. 24:12

If you read these two verses in the context, you will find many similarities. Both refer to the end times. Both talk about many people being deceived by lies. Both speak about a coming apostasy.

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul tells us “that day” shall not come except two things happen first. However, before we discuss them, we should figure out what *day* he is referring to. We simply need to read verse two to discover

he is talking about the “*day of Christ*” or the second coming of Jesus.

Here Paul tells us there will come a “*falling away*” or apostasy and that the “*man of sin*” will be revealed before the second coming of Christ. The apostasy and the revelation of the “*man of sin*” go hand in hand. (Keep in mind that this passage talks about the mystery of iniquity and that a mystery was something that would be revealed.)

The word apostasy is “apostisis” which means “a departure from the truth.” The only people who could possibly depart from the truth are those who had believed the truth in the first place. Paul tells us that many shall turn away from the truth to iniquity or self-will in the last days. When this happens, the “*man of sin*” (the old nature of sin and self-will within us) is exposed for what it is. We keep the “*man of sin*” covered and hidden with many things, including religion, good works, self-control, and even deceit. There is coming a day when the masks will be removed. In that day, we will discover who has submitted to Christ and who has yielded to the spirit of iniquity.

The GREEK word “Revelation” is “apokalupsis” from which we derive the word “apocalypse.” It means to disclose, reveal, or manifest. Another word picture would be to *take the cover off* or to reveal something previously concealed. It ties in perfectly with the meaning of the word mystery—something hidden to be shown in its proper time.

Jesus Christ will be “revealed” at the end of the age. Likewise, the *man of sin* will be uncovered at the same time. The nature of iniquity must be brought entirely into the open and revealed before it can be completely destroyed.

Notice what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 24. It was the overabundance of INIQUITY (self-will) that caused the love of people to grow cold. *The word translated ‘love’ here is ‘agape’ or the God kind of self-sacrificing love.* Notice how, as self-will increases, self-sacrificing love decreases. The two mysteries are incompatible. A person must yield to one or the other.

It is necessary to take a detour here and discuss the *man of sin—the son of perdition*. Many people teach this is the antichrist, and of course, the antichrist will be the ultimate fulfillment of the son of perdition. However, we cannot afford to overlook the fact that each of us has a *man of sin* residing in us that must be conquered and crucified by the Spirit of God.

The word perdition simply means “destruction,” So we are talking about a “son of destruction.” The word carries with it the idea of a loss of well-being, of something that was wasted or ruined. That is a perfect word to describe someone who “falls away” or goes into apostasy. This same word is used elsewhere to describe people who turn back from the truth. **“Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”** Heb. 10:38-39

This passage, and others, refers to men who go into perdition or destruction. Those people ultimately give in to the spirit of self-will and allow that spirit to overcome and control them. Judas was called the son of perdition, though he was hand-chosen by Jesus and ministered with Him for over three years.

People who teach the pre-tribulation doctrine use 2 Thessalonians chapter two as a proof text. They teach that the “man of sin” in verse three and “that Wicked” in verse eight both refer to the antichrist. However, a problem occurs when you try to reconcile the verses. They also teach that verse seven refers to the Holy Spirit who is taken out of the way in the pre-tribulation rapture.

Verse three says that there must first come a falling away and the man of sin (antichrist) be revealed before the day of Christ (rapture). Verses seven and eight say that the antichrist cannot be revealed until after the rapture. If Paul was trying to teach a pre-tribulation rapture in this passage, he just contradicted himself in the space of five verses.

The Mysteries Revealed

In the last days, things will happen that have never happened before. The two mysteries will rapidly grow in strength and power as they head to the final confrontation of the ages. The last book of the Bible is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The word “revelation” means an “uncovering.” Jesus will be revealed or uncovered to the world in the last days. Likewise, those that follow Christ will be revealed or uncovered with Him. In Romans

chapter eight, Paul tells us that the whole creation groans and travails waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. The word translated “manifestation” is the same word used for the revelation of Jesus Christ: APOKALUPSIS. We must ask ourselves when the sons of God will be manifested or revealed to the world. Probably at the same time, Christ is manifested and revealed to the world. And that would be the time dealt with in the book of THE REVELATION (APOKALUPSIS) OF JESUS CHRIST!

Just as Jesus Christ and those who submit to Him will be manifest to the world, the antichrist and those who ultimately yield to the spirit of iniquity or self-will will be manifest to the world. That is precisely why understanding these two mysteries NOW is so important.

Submission or Self-Will?

Jesus told us we must “take up our cross” and follow Him. The cross had but one purpose in the world: to kill the flesh. Something died on the cross every time. When your will is in opposition to God’s will, a “cross” is formed, and somebody’s will is going to die on the cross. Yours or God’s!

Every day we make a multitude of choices regarding our will or God’s will. However, the day is coming when every person will have to make a definitive choice. What makes us think that we can make a decisive and irreversible decision tomorrow if we cannot make a small decision to submit to God today?

Self-will (iniquity) is not a small matter. It does make a difference in how we respond to Christ daily. Each act of submission causes our spirit being to grow stronger as we become more Christ-like, and each act of self-will grieves the Holy Spirit while bolstering our own independence.

I have to admit, submitting to Christ is an uphill climb, and it is not easy. Taking up your cross and obeying God is not fun. Allowing God to work deeply in your life, changing the very core of whom and what you are, can be painful.

In His last hours on earth, even Jesus dealt with the very issue at hand: His will or the Father's. And it was in the context of the cross and our study that the battle raged. As Jesus reached the garden of Gethsemane, the pressure of what lay ahead caused Him to sweat great drops of blood. One final test of obedience lay ahead—one last opportunity to see whose will would prevail. Satan had one final shot at the champion of mankind. Adam had failed! The Jewish nation had failed! Now all Satan had to do was get this Jesus to exercise His own will over His Father's will. All humanity hung in the balance. Satan had failed at the beginning of Christ's ministry, but now, when the stakes were highest and the personal suffering the greatest, he would see if self-will (iniquity) would ultimately prevail. Reread the story.

“Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me. “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to

Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done” Matt. 26:38-42

Do you see the real issue? The real point of battle throughout the ages is crystal clear here in the garden? Adam had failed to submit to God’s will, now Jesus must face the final test if He was going to win salvation for the world. It was the issue of self-will or submission to God’s will. It was that victory that wrought salvation for us all. And it was that victory, conquering the flesh and the spirit of iniquity that Christ gives to us. In a garden, man lost the battle, and it was in a garden that a man recovered what had been lost.

In reading the context, we find that Jesus had just told Peter that he would deny him. A statement which Peter vehemently denied. When Jesus returns from praying the first time, He finds all the disciples asleep but expressly speaks to Peter about the weakness of the flesh.

Peter battled this issue time and again. We see it when Jesus asks the disciples who He was. Peter replied that he was “the Christ the Son of the living God.” However, just a few verses later, we find Peter rebuking Jesus for saying He had to suffer and die.

The Victory over Iniquity

Like Christ, you will have to make choices when the cross looms in front of you. Jesus did not come to that place unprepared. He had three and one-half years of experience in yielding to the Father to draw on. Likewise, if you practice submitting to God in the everyday things of life, you will have confidence and faith in God that has been tempered in the fires of reality. That final cross, that final test, will not catch you unprepared.

Humanity could never overcome the flesh on its own. However, Jesus did! That same power is now available to you and me through faith. God has given us the tools with which to work. Jesus bought the right for the Spirit of God to dwell inside of a man or woman. God sent the Spirit to do that very thing. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. The Spirit of God empowers us with the same power Christ had. Where is our excuse for continuing to live in sin and self-will?

In Romans chapters six through eight, the Word of God declares that the cross dealt with the old nature of sin and iniquity. Paul tells us that we are to *“reckon ourselves dead to sin”* The issue is no longer the power of sin to bind us; it is the power of choice. We can choose to walk in the Spirit or to walk in the flesh.

Defeating the Mystery of Iniquity in Your Life

While we all have a “man of sin” to deal with, the Bible does not leave us in despair. Paul is clear, particularly in the book of Romans chapters 6-8, that God not only

forgives our sin but gives us victory over sin. He declares in Romans 6:14: **“SIN SHALL NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER YOU.”**

God has given us several spiritual disciplines to implement in our lives to overcome this sinful nature.

Reckon Yourself Dead to Sin

In Romans chapter 6, Paul gives us some spiritual instruction on overcoming sin. In verse six, he states, **“knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him [Christ].”** Paul’s first admonition is for us to KNOW something. The word *know* here indicates an absolute sense of knowing. It means that something is sure and plain and clear to us. In other words, if we are not sure Christ has defeated the old flesh nature, we will never overcome either. Not only must we know it assuredly, but we must also place our faith in it. Knowledge alone does not suffice. It is faith in God’s word that releases its power into our lives. Are you convinced that Jesus has the power over your flesh? Or does your past experience cause you to doubt that real constant victory is possible?

Paul goes on to say in verse 11, **“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

The next principle Paul admonishes us on is RECKONING. This word means to *“take an inventory.”* It is a mathematical term and one from which the word logistics is derived. It means to keep an account. Paul tells us we’re to add up the situation and account for the fact that

we have died with Christ and are therefore dead to sin. This reckoning is based on faith in God's word, not self-effort, and certainly not on past experience.

The next principle is not to let sin reign in our bodies. Backed with the knowledge of what Jesus did for us and standing in faith in that word, we make a mental and spiritual reckoning with the assurance we can overcome and say no to sin. Too many people try to overcome sin with carnal self-will. All that does is make a person self-righteous. Overcoming sin through the power of the Holy Spirit results in humility, not arrogance. Self-will is iniquity, even if we are trying to use it to be moral or religious. God is not interested in our self-will or self-effort. He is interested in us yielding to His Spirit that He might produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit in us.

Take up your Cross

“Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Luke 9:23

Ah, the cross. We sing about it. We preach about it. We wear it around our necks, dangle it from our ears. We print the cross on tee shirts and bumper stickers. We assume we can Christianize just about anything by putting a cross on it. However, do we take up our cross and carry it? Christians love to use the cross as a symbol of what they believe. However, I don't think this was what Paul had in mind. *Christians were not meant to wear the cross; the cross was meant to wear the Christian.*

Stop and consider something. Other than using it to kill a person, what did the Romans use the cross for? Do you know? Absolutely nothing! So, when Jesus said, **“take up your cross and follow me,”** He really only had one thought in mind. The end of your spiritual journey would result in the death of your flesh nature. The power of the cross is tangible in the life of a believer. Again, it is not self-will, but rather a reckoning in faith that Jesus’s death and resurrection power are available to us. Indeed, we must say “no” and guard our lives against temptations, but we are not left to our own effort and strength when faced with sin. The power of the cross is available through prayer. Appeal to it, apply it, accept it, and yield to it.

Walk in the Spirit

For far too long, the Church has fostered a false idea. That is the idea that if I quit sinning, I will be spiritual. We have emphasized the power of sin more than the power of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:16, Paul reveals a startling principle. One we often overlook because of the false impression we get from our preaching.

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Reread that verse. Paul did not say, if you quit sinning, you will become spiritual; he said, if you get in the Spirit you won’t sin. Wow. Somehow, we have adopted a philosophy that getting in the Spirit involves overcoming sin FIRST. Yet, the Bible holds out precisely the opposite idea. The only way to overcome sin is to walk in the Spirit. That means you can become spiritual even with sin in your life.

Do you see the importance of this? Too many Christians struggle to overcome sin with carnal effort and spend their entire Christian lives trying to get good enough. Some finally give up. Others settle for a compromise so they can have at least some feeling of righteousness. Still, others resort to religious legalism—a list of rules—but leave the more significant issues of pride, judgment, and self-righteousness untouched.

The only way to overcome iniquity (self-will) is by yielding continually to God’s Spirit in you. Paul tells us in Romans 8:14, **“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”** Being Spirit-led does not seem to be an option but rather a defining trait of genuine Christians.

We have already discussed the conflict between *agape love* and *iniquity*. *Agape* is *self-sacrificing love*, and *iniquity* is *self-will*. Notice both involve SELF. Iniquity resides in the flesh, *agape* in the Spirit. As noted earlier—one increases, and the other decreases proportionately. They cannot co-exist at the same level for long. Much of Romans chapters six through eight discuss the conflict that rages inside of us. Paul assures us that we have the victory through Jesus Christ

Spiritual Orchards – Cultivating Love

Going back to Galatians chapter five, we discover another contrast between the *“works of the flesh”* and the *“fruit of the spirit.”* Paul often used contrasting words to make a point. Here he uses the words *works* and *fruit*. Works require effort. Fruit grows naturally when properly tended. You’ll also notice this is the *fruit of the SPIRIT*. It is not

produced by the flesh and therefore is not carnal. Nor is it emotional; it is SPIRITUAL love. It is, in fact, agape love. Tending to the things of the Spirit will cause the fruit of the Spirit to grow in your life.

We discussed several of the verses earlier concerning the end times and the apocalypse. These verses tell us that love would grow cold because of iniquity. The solution to this is continually walking in the Spirit of God. Love is produced as a fruit of the Spirit. You cannot manufacture this love. It is spiritual. It only comes as a result of the Spirit's operation in your life. The more room the Spirit has to work, the more of the fruit of the Spirit will be produced. Any good fruit tree will produce more and better fruit the older and more mature it gets. Likewise, the older and more mature a saint becomes, the more and better fruit will come out of His life.

Sometimes it is good to do a bit of personal fruit inspection. (Oh, I know it is more fun to inspect other people's branches but humor me here a bit.) Run through this list and be honest with yourself. How much fruit is there in your life in these spiritual qualities? Go ahead, rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 in each virtue listed in the following verse.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control)...” Gal. 5:22-23

How did you do? If you are like the rest of us, some areas were better than others. These are not things you can

work harder at producing. These are things that are only produced by walking in the Spirit.

Do you need more joy? More faith? A touch more self-control? While we must work with the Spirit, Self-effort alone will not give you more Spiritual fruit.

Conclusion

The sum of the matter is this: Two mysteries are operating in the world today. They are on a collision course in these last days. Every person on earth at that time will have to yield to one or the other. Now is the time to be walking in the Holy Spirit and overcoming that “*man of sin*” residing in us. To think we can exert self-will now and then suddenly yield to Christ when the stakes are highest is silly. The scriptures repeatedly tell us that the last days will produce tremendous spiritual pressure and that many Christians will fall away in iniquity.

By applying the spiritual principles and appropriating the spiritual power available to us, we can guard our spirits against the mystery of iniquity. The result will be incredible. God is preparing a people to walk with Him in power and glory as the world gets darker and darker. The Book of Revelation is clear. That multitudes of people will be saved in the tribulation time. You can be a part of this end-time harvest of souls if you yield now.

I commend you to the Word of God, the blood of Jesus, the grace of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit on your journey from this day forward.