

The Mystery of the Faith

The MYSTERY of the FAITH



DISCOVERING OUR PLACE IN GOD'S COVENANT

By Fred Handschumacher

Revision F

I want to thank my loving wife, Linda Sue, for the hours of proofreading she invested in the book. I'm also indebted to Jim Golden for his excellent cover design and graphics—and to Bill Kellers for his advice on how to write my first book. God will not forget your labor of love in helping to make the story of God's Covenant available to His Church.

I also wish to thank Kris & Gayle Swenson of Word Afire Ministries, Pastors Bob and Jeanne Miller of Montgomery Faith Fellowship, Michael Kendall of Family Restoration Network and Richard Sonnenberg for their words of encouragement about the importance of this material. God knew I wouldn't be able to finish this work without your help!

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OPENING COMMENTS

Early in life, I was fascinated with science and technology. To the dismay of my parents I enjoyed taking things apart to learn how they work. I grew up in the generation who pioneered America's space program and successfully landed on the moon. It was part of the culture—and still is.

A friend in high school introduced me to the claims of Jesus Christ and I became a Christian. Occasionally it's necessary to look beyond the earth to find an analogy that enables us to discover the extraordinary benefits and blessings of Christ. Nothing on earth compares with the truth of Calvary. In Isaiah 55:8-9, God tells us...

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Surprisingly, Christ's crucifixion and what it provides is still a “mystery” to many Christians. The Bible tells us that we are destined to reign with Christ. The Bible calls believers in Christ—Godly “kings and priests” (Revelation 1:6 and 5:10). Our earthly life is the training ground for this calling. We begin learning the basics of how to “reign” here on earth. We are to “reign in life.” We are not to live in poverty, sickness and defeat as many churches believe and teach. The Holy Spirit is our instructor in these matters. (Romans 5:17, I Corinthians 2:12-13, I John 2:27)

The Bible refers to the Christian as an “alien” in this world. Our physical body does not represent who we really are. We are “spiritual” beings. I Corinthians 5:17 declares us to be “new creatures in Christ.” We change from being a mere human being (before we believed in Christ) into a “creature” that is indwelled by God's Holy Spirit--something that never existed before Christ's crucifixion and the day of Pentecost. Christians look like everyone else on the outside. The difference is on the inside where no one can see. Many think this kind of talk is symbolic. It is not. The disciples witnessed Jesus' Divine nature when He diminished His physical body for a few moments in the story of the “transfiguration” (Matthew 17:1-5). Jesus said the world will not receive us because we are not of the world.

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In the following pages we'll discover why this is more relevant today than ever before.

I am concerned about Biblical truth. My curiosity about how things work did not go away the day I accepted Christ. I began to take a close look at some popular religious beliefs. I compared them to the standard of the Bible and discovered that something important was missing. Why did Jesus die the way He did? Did God have a “hidden” agenda at the cross? Why doesn't faith work today as it did in the first century church? Why isn't answered prayer more common? After looking for the answers in my church, it became apparent that few people knew the answers to these questions.

The “Eastern” culture (where the Bible was written) is based on a different mentality than the one we see in America today. This cultural mindset is inter-woven throughout the writings of the Old and New Testament—it is the language of “blood covenant”. The Pauline revelation (the revelation God gave to Saint Paul) is a detailed portrait of Christ's covenant. Paul's revelation turned his theology upside down and became his sole passion in life. The modern church with its religious thinking fails to interpret covenant language properly. For this reason the spiritual principles associated with Christ's crucifixion is mixed with religious ideologies that vary from congregation to congregation. Why do you think we have so many denominations that call themselves “Christian”, yet teach a different gospel message? These variations cause great confusion. The reference for Bible truth is many times missing, explained away or redefined. This reference is deeply rooted in the ancient institution of the blood covenant. This missing “covenant mentality” cheats us out of the many benefits of the most monumental event in human history.

RELIGION VS. CHRISTIANITY

“The Mystery of the Faith” is written primarily for Christians. However, if you're a person outside Christianity you can gain information of eternal value. You will discover that Christianity is the most incredible transaction in the universe—and it has no equal. Most people are exposed to religion rather than true Christianity. America is full of religion that has been given a “Christian” label. Contrasting religion and Christianity confuses people because the two terms are commonly believed to be the

same. Actually, Religion and Christianity are diametrically **opposed** to each other. Religion (as used in this book) teaches man's ideas about God rather than what God says about Himself. It leads you in a direction of "earning" God's favor and acceptance through a system of good works. Religion is grounded in man's obedience to a code of conduct or traditional beliefs. It always seeks to downplay or discredit God's grace and the many benefits of Christ's salvation—while, at the same time, claiming an unswerving allegiance to these things. A religious person always attempts to gain God's acceptance through spiritual **performance**.

Christianity is not "religion." The term, "Christian Religion" is a contradiction. However, a majority of believers tend to embrace religion as their method of relating to God. They attempt to earn God's acceptance through performance rather than through faith in Christ alone as the New Testament teaches. Performance-based Christianity (a counterfeit) makes us feel like we are contributing something when we "keep all the rules and do the right things." Its foundation is in spiritual pride and subtly makes us feel real good about ourselves. Leaning only on faith in Christ forces us to die to ourselves and to admit that we are helpless, bankrupt and unable to contribute anything toward our salvation. True faith in Christ destroys our pride by replacing what "I" can do with what "Jesus" has done. **Authentic Christianity places man in a position of receiving what God has already provided.** God takes the burden and initiative for salvation and puts man in a place of "rest" (Hebrews 3:7 through Hebrews 4:11). God gives salvation to man as a **free**, unmerited gift (Romans 5:15-21). In Christianity, God reaches down to man because He loves him. The cross is a demonstration of the extent of His unconditional love.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus contrasts the popular religious teaching of His day with spiritual truth from his Father. In Matthew 15:1-9 we see an example of this. First, Jesus tells us what God said...

"FOR GOD COMMANDED..."

Next, Jesus tells us the accepted religious teaching of the day...

"BUT YOU SAY..."

Jesus used the contrast between the accepted religious teaching of man and the Word of God as an effective form of instruction. In this book, I

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have spent considerable time contrasting popular religious thought with God's Word. Some may feel that I should stay with a more "positive" approach. One of my goals in this book is to discuss spiritual truth while exposing religious philosophies that keep believers in bondage. I accomplish this by exposing the philosophy and not by attacking individuals, churches or denominations.

I did not write "The Mystery Of The Faith" to be read as an adventure story or novel. It's a study guide on New Testament salvation in the light of what Jesus called, "the new covenant in My blood". I have generously quoted the Bible, which should be the foundation for everything taught in the Church. I extensively use Scripture to demonstrate that the truths being shared are not just good ideas. In most cases, I quote the entire Scripture. In no way can I take credit for all the truths presented in this study. Many insights are only a continuation of the unveiling of "The Mystery of the Faith" which others pioneered years before I was born. I owe a great debt to those who persevered to rediscover the prominence of the new covenant in Christ's blood within the Christian faith. Many early preachers and teachers faced slander, persecution and death from the religious community for violating dead traditional beliefs with a fresh perspective from the Holy Spirit. The persecution continues today. All Scripture quotes are from the King James and the New King James Version of the Bible.

The material presented in this study may offend traditional and denominational beliefs. **As we discuss the subject of a covenant made by blood, we are in no way advocating that anyone should go out and practice this rite today except to participate in the covenant Jesus Christ has already initiated. It is never to be confused or compared with the perverted practices of the occult or ceremonies connected with witchcraft and Satan worship.** Our study centers on the missing and distorted perspective of the blood covenant in the Christian faith. The Bible has much to say on this subject. Today some theologians and Christian "apologists" redefine or minimize the role of the blood covenant within the Church. We'll discover the damage this philosophy continues to cause and how it effectively destroys Biblical faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

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“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)

We are living in the last days before the Second Coming of Christ. I believe “The Mystery of the Faith” is a needed resource in a world where religion has made real Biblical faith hard to find, just as Jesus said.

Following Christ’s crucifixion the New Testament declares that eternal life is granted as a free gift. We totally agree with this clearly stated Biblical fact. However, some might think that we are advocating a false belief called “Universalism”. Universalists believe that because the Bible calls eternal life a “free gift”—this means that God gives it to everyone regardless of whether they want it or not—or whether they have faith in Christ or not. Universalists have good intentions. And, I’ll admit that God’s free gift of eternal life is about as close to Universalism as you can get—without crossing the line. Yet, the New Testament teaches that eternal life is a gift that God freely gives anyone who places their faith in Christ—however, we must trust Christ first. This means that eternal life is not a “universal” benefit given to everyone. It is given only to those that choose to believe on Christ.

For those that want to know what we believe in modern theological terms, we are:

- Non-denominational
- Evangelical
- Full Gospel
- Trinitarian
- Dispensational
- Pre-tribulational
- Pre-millennial

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INTRODUCTION

"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 was kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27 NKJV)

There are probably few words as intriguing as the word "mystery." Thousands of "mystery" novels are written and read by millions. Murder mysteries that invite the viewer to try and guess "who done it" are among some of the most popular movie and television programming. It's popular because it arouses curiosity and a sense of excitement. Just when you think you have the whole plot figured out, there's a surprise ending. Until the end, you never quite know "who done it." While this surprise ending is expected in well-written novels and movies, it is not a good thing when talking about the spiritual life of the Church. Our Heavenly Father wants us to understand everything He's done—and he wants us to know it now!

Many church-going people only understand the Bible and its message within the framework of what their church teaches. Among Christians there is a vagueness that is sometimes associated with the cross of Christ. Many readily tell you that Jesus had to die on the cross for the sins of humanity, to bear the penalty for our disobedience. Scripture is quoted to back up their position, but they cannot articulate what really happened at the cross because they are never given this information—mainly because their church leaders were never taught it in seminary. The cross of Christ is a mystery and the Gospel is the revelation or the unveiling of that mystery.

Have you ever wondered, "Why doesn't God do the same things today that He did in the early Church?" If you asked this question of most clergy they subtly place the blame on God rather than their doctrine. Usually you hear something like, "Yes, God did miracles in those days but He doesn't

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work that way today—the dispensation (or age) of miracles is over." The reason you hear nonsense like this is a lack of knowledge about **"the mystery."** We have a lot of religious knowledge about God and about Bible facts but little real knowledge about the mystery of Christ. And yes, it's still a mystery to many of us today. The reason we don't see God do the same things today that He did in the early Church is that, in many cases, we don't preach the same gospel they preached and we don't have the same faith they had.

In Ephesians chapter 5 starting in verse 25, the apostle Paul is giving instructions on how husbands are to love their wives. As he continues in verse 30, however, Paul gives us a glimpse into what the **"mystery"** actually is. Let's read that whole section in verses 25 through 32...

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church."

(VERSES 30 THROUGH 32 ARE IMPORTANT)

*"For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, **and the two shall become one flesh.**' THIS IS A GREAT MYSTERY, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."*

Paul states here that everything he said about the relationship between a husband and wife is a direct reflection of Christ and the church. He called this a **"great mystery."** In verse 31 Paul quotes the famous scripture about husbands and wives from Genesis 2:24. The key phrase in this scripture is, "and the two shall become **one flesh.**" Paul contrasts the man and the woman becoming one flesh with the great mystery of Christ and the church. This **union** of two people in a marriage covenant is directly related to the mystery of Christ and the believer. In the following study we will learn the

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real meaning of covenant union, what it means culturally, how it has been distorted by religion, and how this distortion is disastrous for the Christian believer. **The salvation that Jesus purchased for us was never meant to be fully understood outside the framework of the blood covenant.** Attempting to understand the Gospel of Christ without a covenant mentality opens the door for doctrinal conflicts that cause confusion and division among believers.