

A sunset over the ocean with a sailboat silhouette. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and long rays of light that reflect on the water. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and dark blue. The water is dark with some ripples.

Know the Mysteries

Bible Study

July 4, 2015

The Church of God, International (Philippines)

Today, we start a new Bible Study series entitled “Understanding the Mysteries of the Bible.”

This will be a three (3) parts series,
and today, we will discuss the first part, entitled:
“Know the Mysteries”

To people at large, the Bible is undoubtedly considered a Good Book. To the professing Christians it is a Holy Book - it is the Word of the Living God in print.

People sense that there is something in the Bible for them. People want to know, and they deserve to know what the Bible has for them.

But most of them do not read the Bible. They are confused, and even mystified. They can't understand it, and can't make sense of its messages.

Thus, a lot of people are frustrated and give up reading it because they find the Bible difficult to understand.

Others have simply relegated the translation and interpretation of the meanings to clergymen and the institution, whose explanations are likely erroneous because they too do not fully understand the Scriptures.

Still others, trying to make sense of the Scriptures interpret them according to their own personal understanding.

No wonder Christianity is in a chaotic state right now. Each Bible reading community has its own interpretation and understanding of the Bible.

The Book

Since the invention of printing, the Bible has been translated into about 1,850 languages and distributed in 150 countries.

For the past two decades, an estimate of more than 500 Million Bibles have been distributed around the world.

The American Bible Society estimates it has distributed more than 3.0 Billion Bible, in whole or in part, since its founding in 1816.

Through the efforts of the Wycliff Society the Bible has been translated into nearly every language on earth.

There are Bibles for women, Bibles for Children, Bibles for parents, Bibles for beginners, Bibles for serious studies, Bibles for Asian, Bibles for African Americans, and so many more variations, translations, revisions, editions, and so many versions.

Yet, despite its wide circulation, people do not seem to understand, more so - comprehend its message.

In fact, some people do the exact opposite of
what it says.

The interesting question is why?

From this little book, wars had been fought,
people ostracized, persecuted, thrown in jail,
tortured and killed.

And out of this book came thousands upon thousands of theological teachings.

With all the controversies and disagreements stemming from this one book called The Bible, one wonders, can all these people be reading the same Book?

Today, we will try to make sense of all these
and help you understand the Bible a bit better
when you read it.

Why the Difficulty?

Some say that the Holy Bible is a book that is not only difficult to read but even more difficult to understand, that it is shrouded in mystery.

The Holy Bible has the distinction of being known as a book of mysteries. It is this “perceived” mysteriousness of the Bible that has caused so much confusion and error.

Consider for a moment what many claims it contains:

1. Mystery of Christ,
2. Mystery of the Holy Trinity,
3. Mystery of the church,
4. Mystery of the gospel,
5. Mystery of salvation,
6. Mystery of man
7. Mystery of the Kingdom of God.

Thus, the natural conclusion of many is that the Holy Bible is indeed an enigmatic book that cannot be fully explained or understood by the readers.

Interpretations

You might wonder why there are so many interpretations of the same Holy Bible.

Each church denomination has its own understanding and explanation of the Scripture.

The reason for that is because theologians consider the Bible to be a mystery. Each church is trying its best to unravel the truth. And therein lays the confusion.

We do not treat the Holy Bible as a mystery book. We think of the Bible as the living word of God plainly written for our instruction.

2 Timothy 3:14-16

- (14) But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,
- (15) and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
- (16) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

We believe the truth is found within its writings and can be plainly understood.

We do not consider the Holy Bible as a mystery book. We look at the Bible as a book on history, prophecy, current events and revelation.

We read the Scriptures as revelation of truths.
What can be known about God and His
purpose and will for creation is made known
to us through the Holy Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 2:9-11.

- (9) However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”—the things God has prepared for those who love him—
- (10) these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.
- (11) For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Puzzle and Mystery

Let's discuss a little about puzzle and mystery,
and the difference between these two.

Both puzzle and mystery refer to something that baffles and perplexes. But there are distinctive differences between the two.

PUZZLE applies to a problem that challenges one's ingenuity for its solution. A Puzzle is a problem that can be solved if you have enough clue, patience and intelligence.

We love puzzles because we are intellectually challenged by it. Take for example the crossword puzzle, rubik's cube, sudoku, etc.

There is always a right answer to a puzzle, but only if you properly read and understand the clues.

Mystery, on the other hand, applies to what cannot be fully understood by reason, intellect and explanation.

A mystery usually does not have an absolutely right answer, not because of lack of information but the excess of it

Take for example the mystery of life. No scientist or academe can adequately explain how life came into being.

There are theories, but no one knows for sure
– no one knows the truth. The question of life
is a mystery to Science, though not to
Theology.

The Book: What the Dog Saw

In his book entitled 'What the Dog Saw', Malcolm Gladwell wrote an article about 'Open Secrets'. Here, he wrote about the difference between a puzzle and a mystery.

Puzzles require keys that need to be discovered;
whereas mysteries require judgments based
on vague uncertainties.

Puzzles give us too little information.
Mysteries give us too much.

According to an article written by a national-security expert Gregory Treverton, Osama Bin Laden is a puzzle, and what happens after his capture or death, is a mystery.

“Osama bin Laden’s whereabouts was a puzzle. We couldn’t find him because we didn’t have enough information.

The key to the puzzle will probably come from someone close to bin Laden, and until we can find that source, bin Laden will remain at large.

Bin Laden was found and killed. The puzzle was solved. There is an answer and a solution to a puzzle once the information are properly collated and understood.

The problem of what would happen in Iraq after the toppling of Saddam Hussein was, by contrast, a mystery.

It wasn't a question that had a simple, factual answer. Mysteries require judgments and the assessment of uncertainty, and the hard part is not that we have too little information but that we have too much."

The Iraq situation continues to be a mystery confounding many security experts. No one expected the ISIS to emerge after the fall of Saddam Hussein. And what will happen to ISIS is the new mystery.

Gregory Treverton is a really smart guy. During the Clinton administration, he had a government job. Now he works for the RAND Corporation. He's considered an expert in national security. Earlier this year, Gregory Treverton wrote an essay about the difference between a puzzle and a mystery.

Twenty years ago, experts in national security were looking at the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, all of our questions were along these lines:

“How many missiles do they have?”

“Where are those missiles?”

“How accurate are those missiles?”

As Treverton points out, these questions have an answer. Even if we don't know the answer, we can be confident that an answer does exist. The Soviet Union has a certain number of missiles. They are located in one place or another. The information is out there. We just have to figure it out.

Every puzzle has an answer.

Puzzles can be solved.

Precisely because there's a right answer, it's rewarding to grapple with a puzzle. We do puzzles for fun.

There's a crossword puzzle in the newspaper every day of the week. And below the crossword puzzle, there is a sudoku puzzle and a word jumble.

Every puzzle can be solved. That is their appeal.

Puzzles allow us to fill in the empty spaces with confidence. We can rearrange things, until they make sense. It will make sense. We just need to figure it out.

A mystery, on the other hand, comes with no guarantee. When it comes to mysteries, we may never know the answer with any certainty.

In a mystery novel, you know there will be an answer. Whether it's Sherlock Holmes or Nancy Drew, someone will get to the bottom of things. They are not really mysteries, rather literary puzzles.

But when Treverton uses the word, “mystery,” he is trying to describe a situation where the answer is inherently elusive.

Remember, he's speaking in the context of military intelligence. Instead of counting missiles, we are now confronted with questions like "What will the terrorists do next?"

Who knows? Even the best experts don't know for sure. They can't know. We could gather lots and lots of information, and still have no idea of what the terrorists will do next.

Information doesn't solve the problem. When you're faced with a mystery, more information is not that helpful. (This was evident during the attack on the twin World Trade Center towers and the invasion of Iraq.)

After the damage is done,
then we're back on the
familiar ground of solving
puzzles. After the terrorists
strike, we can ask questions
that may, or may not have
definitive answers.

We can ask, “How did these guys get into the country? Who trained them? Who gave them money?”

We can find answers. And we do. After something happens, we can fill in the blanks. Before it happens, we are faced with a mystery. We just don't know.

As a people, we're pretty good at solving puzzles. But when it comes to mysteries, we don't really know what to do.

This is a huge mistake. It's a mistake to treat a real mystery as if it were a crossword puzzle. Strategically, it's always a mistake to think you've solved a mystery.

We like to solve puzzles. We're good at it.
Because we are so good at it, we are tempted
to use these familiar tools when faced with a
mystery.

What will happen when we signed the Bangsamoro Basic Law - BBL? Until it happens, that question frames a mystery. There is no existing answer waiting to be found through careful study.

We will sign the BBL as if we knew the answer. We said, “We will have peace in Mindanao and the region will become prosperous. The Muslim rebels will lay down their arms and be subjected to civilian rules.”

We thought we knew the answer to the puzzle.
But we don't. There are too many scenarios
at play and we won't know until it actually
happens.

Applied to Faith

Again, why is the Bible so difficult to read?
Why did God inspire the authors to write a
difficult book that is shrouded in mysteries
that no one understands?

It is really amazing to contemplate that the most widely read book is also the most misunderstood book of all times.

There is a reason behind it and that reason is because people consider the Bible as a mystery book more than a book of revealed knowledge.

Most of us are familiar with the stories of Noah's Ark, The Ten Commandments, Samson and Delilah, David and Goliath, The Fall of Jericho, The Battle at Ai, and of course the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Beyond these beautiful stories, the rest seems to be incomprehensible.

Who can understand the Scriptures?
The Bible, they say, is not for everyone.

That is why to a lot of people the Bible is a mystery; to others incomprehensible. The Gospel in the Bible is not for everyone – because to many it is foolishness.

1 Corinthians 1:18

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18,

“For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God.”

So, who can understand the Bible? The answer is: The People of God. Yes, reading and understanding the Bible is second nature to God's called out ones – the true Church.

If a church cannot adequately explain the Bible to you, then you ought to seek out one who can.

Romans 16:25-27

- (25) Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,
- (26) but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—
- (27) to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

1 Corinthians 1:30

(30) It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

The wise in Christ will understand the wisdom of God written in the Bible. We can understand the Bible in a way no other people can comprehend. Why?

Because God has revealed His mysteries to the saints, His people, through His church.

Colossians 1:26

(26) the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

The understanding of the Scripture is given to
God's people through the Holy Spirit.

Luke 8:10

(10) He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, ““though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’

Summation

When one reads the Bible, he/she should read it with the notion that the truth is knowable. One should approach it as a puzzle rather than a mystery.

It is a bad excuse for preachers to hide their ignorance of the Scripture under the cloak of mystery. Anything they cannot explain, they classify it under mystery.

Often, people are intimidated by the Bible or worse, pre-conditioned to believe that the Bible contains lots of mysteries, thus cannot be understood.

For us, we believe many of the so-called mysteries are knowable. Most had been revealed.

John 14:26

Jesus said: “When the counselor comes he will reveal all truths.”

Nothing is shrouded in mystery because Jesus has made all known to the saints all the mysteries and wisdom of God.

In the next part of this Bible study series, we will try to differentiate puzzles from mysteries and solve a few puzzles along the way.

The two “mysteries” we want to resolve are

(1) What is the Nature of Man?

(2) ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’

Is the composition of man and the identity of Jesus Christ a puzzle, or a mystery?

The Nature of Man and the Nature of Christ are not mysteries, they are puzzles. The truth about man and about Christ can be known.

The puzzle can be solved and the truth known.
God has revealed it in the Scriptures and to
made known to His servants and the church –
the assembly of the saints.

Join us next time,
in Part Two of this Bible Study Series:

The Nature of Man

August 1, 2015, Saturday