

How Has God Chosen to Describe Our Faith?

- * What descriptive words are used in scripture to explain our Christian faith?
- * We see many in scripture and we even have developed new ones along the way!
- * One of the most used in the Apostolic writings was the word, *Mystery!*

Ephesians 3:8-9 (NIV)

8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Romans 16:25 (NIV)

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.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8 (NIV)

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

- * Let's consider some descriptive words of our faith and then look at what we have actually made of them! How we have cheapened them!
- * One of the great dangers of our faith is losing the "awe" of our redemption! Remember, God does not need our help in making the Him and His message to humanity *relevant!!* The Holy Spirit can!

I. The first "descriptive word" I want to consider is *MYSTERY*.

A. When we consider "word meanings" we begin to truly understand what the Lord wants us to see about our faith and redemption.

Colossians 1:25-26 (NIV)

25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

Colossians 2:2-3 (NIV)

2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

1. The definition of the word "mystery" is: Something hidden for the purpose of being revealed!
2. Notice, the mystery is not something but rather someone!
3. We can study scripture, theology and history all we want!
4. I absolutely love to study and discuss all three (3)!
5. But the mystery of our redemption is Jesus Christ!!! Let's study Him!!!

B. The enemy of this mystery is fundamentalism! In all forms!

1. It takes a "scientific approach" to scripture and redemption!
2. It seeks to explain our faith! Our faith is confessional in nature!
I confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Beginning and End!
I don't seek to explain how He is the Beginning and End!
3. The Scripture gives us "glimpses" of this mystery without ever feeling obligated to explain it! This is why intellectual individuals struggle at times with this divine faith and life!
4. How was the Word made Flesh? Try to explain the Incarnation!
How did a Virgin give birth? Explain the Trinity! Help me understand the Resurrection!! Explain the Ascension!

C. This phenomenon is somewhat a western Christianity challenge.

1. Few Christians in other parts of the world are "hung up" on this!
2. Jesus had this to say about this:

John 3:7-8 (NLT)

7 So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

3. The sad thing is we have really tried to explain this in vivid detail and specific steps!

II. The next descriptive word I would like to consider concerning our faith is The Cross.

A. We would all consider the cross to be a focal point of Christianity! The very center of our faith.

1. At the cross is where we see the most powerful explanation of WHO GOD IS!
2. The CROSS is the moment when God "recreated the world!"

Isaiah 65:17 (NIV)

17 "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

Revelation 21:1-5 (NIV)

1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

3. Who is God? He is love! He is forgiving! He is merciful!! He is not retributive!

1 Corinthians 2:1-4 (NIV)

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching

were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

4. The Cross of Christ is the demonstration of the Spirit's power!

B. Just as fundamentalism is in direct opposition to the mystery of Christ as consumerism is in opposition to the Cross of Christ!

1. Unfortunately, this has turned in to "Americanism" and has resulted in prideful nationalism!
2. We have devalued "taking up our cross" and following Christ and have chosen instead a steady diet of "self-help fads" that can be found in any "new age" store front shop!
3. The death of the eternal Son of God means more than that!
4. His death provided for new life beyond the borders of America!
5. A "consumer Christianity" has unfortunately become the expression of our faith...at least in western culture!

III. Another word that should define and describe our faith is Diversity!

Revelation 5:9-10 (NIV)

9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

- A. This is a continuation of what we were just saying concerning the cross verses consumerism...but goes a step further!
1. One of the great hinderances in the Body of Christ is determining just "who is a part!"
 2. Have you restricted your "brothers in Christ" to a narrow and almost exclusive group?
 3. Have you and your ideas, interpretations and beliefs become a litmus test to determine who the blood covers?
 4. At its core this is "sectarianism!" By definition it means: An

exclusive attachment to a particular group of people.

5. In other words we limit Christianity to "my kind" of Christianity.

B. Paul has given us the absolute best description and word of warning concerning this diversity or the fight we have with it!!

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (TPT)

10 I urge you, my brothers and sisters, for the sake of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree to live in unity with one another and put to rest any division that attempts to tear you apart. Be restored as one united body living in perfect harmony. Form a consistent choreography among yourselves, having a common perspective with shared values. 11 My dear brothers and sisters, I have a serious concern I need to bring up with you, for I have been informed by those of Chloe's house church[e] that you have been destructively arguing among yourselves. 12 And I need to bring this up because each of you is claiming loyalty to different preachers. Some are saying, "I am a disciple of Paul," or, "I follow Apollos," or, "I am a disciple of Peter the Rock," and some, "I belong only to Christ." 13 But let me ask you, is Christ divided up into groups? Did I die on the cross for you? At your baptism did you pledge yourselves to follow Paul?

IV. Another word that describes our Christian faith is *Community!*

A. Within the Christian Faith, we should have a deep feeling of belonging, not only to Jesus, but to one another!

1. One of the great challenges to seeing our faith accurately is our profound "*individualism!*"

2. None of the Church Fathers and nowhere in scripture can we define our faith as anything but community!

B. We see this principle throughout the early Church story and across cultural diversity!

1. From the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts we see a multi-cultural Body of Christ developing! Yet they lived their faith as part of a "community of faith!"

Acts 4:32 (TPT)

32 All the believers were one in mind and heart. Selfishness was not a part of their community, for they shared everything they had with one another.

2. The moving of God among the Body of Believers is even a

testimony of this “community!”

1 Corinthians 12:7 (NLT)

7 A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NLT)

12 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. 13 Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

Romans 12:15 (VOICE)

15 If some have cause to celebrate, join in the celebration. And if others are weeping, join in that as well.

C. Redemption and salvation is better understood as “belonging!”
Belonging to the Kingdom of God and by extension one another!

John 10:16 (NIV)

16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

1. It’s true that salvation is personal, but it is not individual.

2. Our new identity in Christ MUST supersede all other identities!

Galatians 3:26-28 (NIV)

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

3. All other identities are secondary.