

Palisades Community Bible Church

Online Sunday School

What Is The Most Mysterious Thing About God?

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By; Brent Briggs

The “Holy Bible” is our Creator’s word to mortals...that’s us. In it, He tells us a great MANY things about Himself. He explains things that He has done, will do, and IS NOW DOING. His Word is a history book written from the unique perspective of one who has already constructed the story from before the beginning, and after the ending. Understanding some things is fairly obvious. Others take serious study. Some things, God strictly withholds, but He is actually clear about them.

However, there is one great and mysterious aspect of God that humans have not logically figured out. The deeper one digs, the more elusive the answer. In fact, the MORE you understand God, let LESS you understand this mystery. Let’s check it out:

First, an illustration: I spent my summers working in my grandfather’s big garden and on his small ranch. As one who endured the Great Depression, Paw Paw had a hard time discarding anything that might be useful later. Millennials would call it junk. To him, it was ‘money in the bank.’

One day, we were riding in his ’65 chevy pickup and it developed a funny “thumping noise.” We couldn’t figure it out. He’d be driving down the road “thump, thump, thump” and he’d have me crawling around in the cab listening to locate it. We’d stop and look at the tires, the springs, the shocks, the engine the drive train...everything we could think of. That thumping just persisted.

We had almost given up on that thumping, when one day, we picked up a couple of Paw Paw’s friends. I jumped in the back. As we rolled along, I could hear that darned thumping and I finally FOUND IT!

Paw Paw had picked up an old baseball bat, with the knob on the handle end broken off, and he stuck it into the stake hole in the bedside of the truck next to the cab. It wobbled back and forth in that hole, bumping against the cab as we drove! Mystery solved! We belly laughed for a long time about it. He even used it as a metaphor for other unexplainable mysteries; "Well, Brent, it's like that old bat....one day, we'll know."

Isn't it satisfying to solve a mystery? Well, the mystery we'll share with you cannot be completely solved, but you will be satisfied, nonetheless. Let's go....

"The Mystery Of God"

If you ask most any Bible scholar, or do scripture research; "the mystery of God" has many references. In the Jewish scripture; the Old Testament, it is not referred to as a 'Mystery,' rather, there are prophecies and promises pointing to a specific future event. Faithful Jews anticipated the revelation of this mystery for centuries:

- **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were created through Him, and without Him nothing was created that was created" (John 1:1-3).** (Just who was there, too, is a hint to the mystery)
- Genesis 14, Abraham had just succeeded in battle when he was greeted by Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who had a few interesting characteristics. First of all, he was both a priest of the God Most High and a king—unheard of anywhere else in the Old Testament. His name means "king of righteousness." He was from Salem, which means "peace." In other words, he was a king of righteousness and peace. He brought to Abraham bread and wine, and he blessed Abraham. Abraham gave him a tithe, honoring him as a unique agent of God.
- **"For to us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6)**
- **"Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." He said, "Look! I see four**

men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” (Daniel 3: 24-25)

- As "the" Angel of the Lord: The Old Testament mentions the article "the" several times, before "angel of the Lord." Is it possible that this angel was the pre-incarnate Messiah? In every instance where "the angel of the Lord" appears, He speaks with the authority of God, and the listener assumes His supreme divinity.

The answer to this “mystery” in the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament:

- **“the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:26-27)**
- **“making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Ephesians 1:9-10)**
- **“that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ,” (Colossians 2:2)**

Though the word “Mystery” is not used in the OT, it is used often in the NT. The OT cites references, actual manifestations of Messiah, Christ (Christophany) and prophecies that were satisfied when Jesus arrived. Christ is the great mystery that was foretold, foreshadowed, by God in the Old Testament – which was revealed in the New Testament. This revealed mystery was the actual fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies about the Messiah.

That’s not the mystery to which I referred at our start, however, they are very connected and related. The mystery of the Messiah in the Old Testament is the fulfillment revealed and confirmed in the New Testament. Yet, **one mystery** remains. Humans have not quite figured it out.

God Did It...But, How?

Like so many of God’s marvelous works, they are stated, but not explained. God breathed life into Adam, but there is no explanation of HOW. God caused the Sun

to stand still in more than one instance recorded in the scriptures, but HOW is not explained. God raised ten dead people to life...HOW is not explained.

The greatest of God's actions that has no explanation can be summed up in two words: **Grace and Mercy**. In every other situation, God is true to His character. But, when it comes to Grace and Mercy, God steps out of character. For a perfect and holy God, this is not fully understandable to mortals – especially Jews who remain under the “old covenant” which required blood sacrifice for atonement (the foretelling of Messiah's purpose).

You've heard George Carlin's line about being a snarky kid in Catholic school asking; “If God is so powerful, can he make a rock so big that he, himself, can't lift it?” The answer to that is; God cannot contradict Himself – He cannot act in a way that is not in perfect keeping with His own character.

True story: I once got a speeding ticket and I did not want to pay the fine and have points added to my driving record. I went to traffic court and confessed my guilt. I asked the Judge if, instead of the typical fine and points, that I might receive another sentence. I told him I'd be willing to serve our community in any way he deemed was appropriate for the infraction. The judge told me: “You are now asking ME to break the law. I can only give you a sentence prescribed by law, and is afforded me to give.”

The traffic judge could not act contrary to the position in which he served. He could not extend grace to me, the guilty party. Grace and Mercy are contradictory to a judge's purpose. God is holy and just. He is the law maker, the law giver, and the judge of all. As such, God is bound to His own character and laws...similar to the traffic court judge. God tells us this in His word:

Isaiah 66:16 “For the Lord will execute judgment by fire and by His sword on all flesh, and those slain by the Lord will be many.”

Hebrews 12:23 “to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,”

James 4:12 “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?” (it is improper for mortals to hold the position of such a judge)

Isaiah 3:13 “The Lord arises to contend, and stands to judge the people.”

Psalm 50:4 “He summons the heavens above, and the earth, to judge His people:”

Psalm 82:1 “A Psalm of Asaph. God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers.”

The Mystery Comes Into Focus

So, how can a perfect, almighty, lawgiver and judge also be forgiving? That is the greatest mystery! God is so perfect that anything He created which does not testify to HIS majesty is worthy of destruction! Yet, under the New Covenant (Messiah), He is willing to forgive imperfect, unfaithful, humans who dishonor and blaspheme Him! Whaaaat??

Let’s get a picture in our minds: Imagine a Jewish couple that had been murdered in the gas chambers of Hitler’s Germany, and their son managed to escape. This son migrated to New York City and became a high court judge. Now, suppose one of Hitler’s most ruthless and murderous henchmen showed up in this judge’s courtroom, accused of crimes against humanity. He was accused of mass murder; most of them Jews, and many of them were members of this judge’s own family. The charges were read, the evidence presented, and the jury proclaimed the man guilty.

What was the **just and righteous, lawful**, thing that should have happened? Of course, the guilty man should have been sentenced to execution for his crimes. Even God’s law, as He gave it to Moses on Mount Sinai, says the punishment should fit the offense:

“Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, the same sort of injury he inflicted should be inflicted on him.” Leviticus 24: 20

Yet, the Judge in our illustration did something that left the jury and the gallery in shock. He had his one and only son brought into the courtroom. “Sir, under the law, you are guilty. The sentence is death. It is a punishment befitting your crimes. However, my son stands willing to be condemned in your stead. He will go to the electric chair in your place, and you may now leave here a free man.”

Though the man was condemned to death by the law, the Judge gave his own son that the CRIMINAL MIGHT BE SAVED!

Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

Romans 6: 23a For the wages of sin is death,...”

The criminal would be set free because the law was satisfied. Can you imagine such a thing? That is the greatest mystery of God! That sinners who are guilty of sins and which carry the penalty of death, might have our sins placed upon Messiah, instead! That’s a mystery! Where is the justice? Where is the logic? Though foretold in the Old Testament and witnessed in the New, it is still difficult to understand.

Matthew 19: 25 “When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” 26 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Ephesians 2: 8 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Titus 3:5 “He (Messiah) saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,”

You see, God is perfect. He is Holy. He is so holy that He cannot have sin in His presence. If He could look upon sin, he would not be God! He created humans to live up to His standards (the Law). The punishment for failing to do so is death. That is God’s law; a reflection of His character. God cannot act in opposition to his character of perfection.....yet, in order that YOU MIGHT NOT GO TO HELL.....HE violates his own character through the sacrifice of Messiah, Christ!

Grace!Amazing!

Grace is receiving something we do not deserve. Mercy is NOT receiving something we do deserve. The war criminal in the illustration was offered mercy; an escape from the execution he deserved. He was offered grace; forgiveness of his crime and freedom. **His choice: accept condemnation under the law, or accept the freedom afforded by grace.**

Placing the criminal's crime upon an innocent person, who then pays the price, satisfying the law, is UNJUST! The criminal behaved unjustly. Now, the Judge behaves unjustly! HOW UNLIKE A JUDGE to do that! Can you see the headlines in the papers the next day? "Judge frees war criminal! Condemns his own innocent son for the crime....INSANE!!

Messiah was prophesied through hundreds of years of Old Testament history. Jesus, Immanuel (God with us), was born, lived, died and was resurrected, according to those prophesies – the fulfillment of the 'great mystery.' All this, so that God could give us grace and mercy. An even greater mystery, however, is that God did it at all!

Charles Wesley, the writer of this Hymn captured it well:

**And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be;
that Thou, my God, should die for me?**

**He left His Father's throne above,
so free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me!**

**Amazing love! how can it be that
Thou, my God, should die for me?**

God is holy and just. It is just and it is righteous that the offender suffers for his own crimes. Yet, God acts out of accord with his own character by offering Messiah's payment for our sin! He gives us **grace**; forgiveness we do not deserve. Even the Old Testament speaks of the "Mercy Seat." It is out of mercy that God communes with man:

Numbers 7:89 “Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him.”

He gives us **mercy**; freeing us from the penalty we deserve. Let's continue our illustration with the war criminal;

Suppose the Judge told the criminal; “Under the law, you are guilty and it condemns you to death in the electric chair. However, my Son will take your condemnation upon himself and die in your place. Accept this atonement and you will be a free man. The law will be satisfied.”

This criminal had two choices: to accept the Son's offer of substitution and be set free, or to refuse it and die in the electric chair, himself. The law required satisfaction; **a life**. Grace afforded the choice.

Let's See How This Works

Since his creation, mankind has demonstrated that he cannot not keep the law. The law of God is perfect, but man is imperfect. Humans, held to the perfect standard of the law, fail. And, failing at one point of the law makes one guilty of the entire law. Even if one is wholly dedicated to keeping the law – compliance – the law is perfect and man is not.

Grace is about being committed from the heart to doing what is right in the eyes of God, not because there is a law that commands us, but because the mortal loves God above all else. Under the Old Covenant, God demands compliance. Under His New Covenant, God requires COMMITMENT!

A person committed to pleasing God in all his ways does not need to fear the law. The law can be set aside. GRACE and MERCY then, are how we live. Who, living under the grace of God willingly breaks the law? Here is an example:

John 8:3 The scribes and Pharisees, however, brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before them 4 and said, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. So, what do You say?” 6 They said this to test Him, in order to have a basis for accusing Him. But Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with His finger. 7 When they continued to question Him, He

straightened up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." 8 And again He bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard this, they began to go away one by one, beginning with the older ones, until only Jesus was left, with the woman standing there. 10 Then Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, Lord," she answered. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Now go and sin no more."

Jesus came to pay our debt under the law and free us from the law. In turn, our commitment is required; go and sin no more. What a contrasting shift!

The Transition From "Old Covenant" LAW to "New Covenant" GRACE

So, it is with each of us. Our JUST God has chosen to act UNJUSTLY on our behalf. Justice demands our condemnation to hell. God mysteriously stepped off his throne, out of heaven, and took on the flesh of a man, Messiah, Immanuel (Jesus). He put our sins upon himself and was punished on a criminal's cross so that we may choose not to spend eternity suffering for our own sin.

Jesus suffered on the cross for each and every one of our sins. Therefore, **we, ourselves**, have become responsible for what was required to free us from condemnation under the law. None of us is more, or less, guilty than the next person at the foot of the cross.

Daniel 9:5 "we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances."

James 2:10 "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

Ecclesiastes 7:20 "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins."

Do you remember the two criminals that were crucified next to Jesus?

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come

into your kingdom.” 43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

By this standard; Mother Theresa and Jeffrey Dahmer were equal as sinners before the Cross. Each was equally in need of a Savior. And, as I understand it, BOTH did receive this Savior and are now, equally saved and in the presence of God. It is not the degree of the sin. It is that we are sinners. It is not what we do, it is what we are. This is important: no matter how good you are, or how bad you are, you need this Savior! There is no grace apart from Messiah. You need GRACE.

Romans 3:10 “as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one;”

Psalm 53:3 “Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.”

Psalm 143:2 “And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight (God) no man living is righteous.”

Romans 3:9-10 “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one;”

Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

So, this is the greatest mystery: how can a holy, righteous God, who holds all things in His creation to His perfect standard, put your sins upon His own Son? Your sin condition condemns you to hell. Yet, Jesus took that condemnation upon Himself and served your sentence in Hell for you. He’s already done it. Like the war criminal, you have the choice of accepting or rejecting that payment. You have free will to remain under the judgement of the law, or to accept Messiah’s grace. That is a great mystery!

There Is Only One Conclusion: LOVE.

What is more powerful than the law?

Psalm 36:7 “How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.”

Psalm 109:26 "Help me, LORD my God; save me according to your unfailing love."

Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

1 John 4:7 "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."

OK, here you are; a sinner before a righteous God.

You are given the choice: Accept what Jesus did for you, satisfying the law, or remain condemned under the law...carrying our own guilt, condemnation, and consequences.

Luke 12: 8-9 "And I (Jesus) tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man (Jesus) also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God."

John 10:30 "I and the Father are one."

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

The choice is yours.