

Stewards of the Mysteries

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Introduction:

- A. I am pleased to be here with Chuck Swindoll and Howard Hendricks.
- B. My roots are also with Navigators.
- C. God uses many in his enterprises.
- D. I want to share a guideline in ministry.
 - 1. Out of Dallas Seminary in 1950 I came to ministry and soon began running out of steam.
 - 2. After about six months I found myself empty and turned to the Scriptures.
 - a. I found some verses that have stuck with me.
 - b. These talk of what ministry is all about.
 - 3. First and Second Corinthians are very important to me.
 - a. San Francisco is the Corinth of the modern world.
 - b. Los Angeles is the Ephesus of the modern world.
 - c. A sign says "Leaving California, resume normal behavior."

I. Paul told the Corinthian believers how to regard him and his ministry. (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

- A. Ministers are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
 - 1. These are meaningful phrases.
 - 2. Today we will deal with the phrase stewards of the mysteries of God.
- B. A steward is entrusted with a responsibility from a superior.
 - 1. They pass out information and commodities.
 - 2. New Testament stewards are to pass out truth of the word of God.
 - 3. I don't hear much good preaching today.
 - 4. A professor told me that his seminary is focusing on worship, not preaching.
 - 5. Great preaching produces great worship.

6. The preaching of the word of God is a worshipful moment.
7. Paul often speaks of his entrustment from God.
 - a. He calls it the hidden things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:7)
 - b. Jesus said he had been entrusted with speaking things hidden from the beginning of the world. (Matthew 13)
 - c. Paul told his disciples he had not shunned declaring the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:)
 - d. The primary work of the pastor is dispensing the mysteries of God, the exceeding great and precious promises of God.
 - e. I have taken these verses to heart.
 - f. I have been called to preach the amazing mysteries of God.
 - g. Paul seemed to have been amazed that God privileged him to preach.
8. We all need to understand this calling.
 - a. Lack of understanding this hinders many pastors from true preaching.
 - b. Some think the mysteries are esoteric ideas unimportant to many.
 - c. These mysteries are essential truths we must understand and cannot be comprehended unless God reveals them.
 - d. I call these the lost secrets of our humanity.
 - e. Without these secrets life can never be lived right.
 - f. The preacher has no rival; not scientists, or psychologists.
 - g. Preachers will never be given a higher honor than proclaiming the unsearchable riches of God.

C. God's mysteries are wisdom and essential knowledge that no university will teach. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

1. This wisdom is not proclaimed in superiority of speech.
2. This wisdom is proclaimed in the cross.
3. The people in Corinth were involved in discussing ideas, but Paul saw that only the cross would bring them to the truth.
 - a. Human knowledge and wisdom are not the same.

b. We are not told to accumulate human knowledge.

c. I live near Stanford University and I am amazed at the accumulation of knowledge it represents.

1. They have nuclear accelerators.
2. They have a school of medicine perfecting organ transplants.
3. They have several libraries.
4. We are not to demean human knowledge.
5. God has hidden himself in thousands of ways and wisdom is the use of knowledge.
6. Human wisdom has gone astray, however, and the cross expresses the judgment of God on humanity.
7. Secular minds cannot understand this because they benefit humanity.
8. Nevertheless, there is a flaw in human thinking that the cross reveals.

d. Paul said he came to Corinth in fear and trembling, unsure of how to express the mysteries of God.

1. His speech was not in wisdom of men but in the power of God.
2. He contrasted the wisdom of men and the wisdom of God.
 - a. The wisdom of men is doomed to pass away.
 - b. The molders of public opinion are passing.
 - c. Many ideas sound great at first but soon pass away.
 - d. The New Deal passed without accomplishing much.
 - e. The Fair Deal and the Great Society passed.
 - f. Peace with honor and that Camp David process.
 - g. Reaganomics passed.
 - h. All promised utopia but all passed away.
 - i. Preaching is called on to unveil the futility of human wisdom.

3. Paul said he imparts a secret and hidden wisdom of God for our glorification. (1 Corinthians 2:7)

a. Man is to live for the glory of God, and God is to live for the glory of men.

b. Human glorification is God's aim in preaching.

c. Glory is the outward manifestation of an inward reality, revealing an attractiveness hidden within.

d. John said the word was made flesh and we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.

e. Human glory is the fulfillment of what man intended for man, to become whole people, operating the way God intended.

f. Every person desires this glory.

g. People want to be fulfilled in wholeness, operating as God intended for them.

h. Tom Landry said the job of a coach is to make man do what they don't want in order to achieve what they really want.

i. The content of preaching is not religious truth about life after death but the secret of functioning in life as God intended it.

j. Once you see that your preaching will be transformed so you can transform others.

k. Jesus said this truth will set us free.

l. This verse is relevant to every generation. (1 Corinthians 2:7)

4. Paul also said none of the rulers of this age understood this mystery of God for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

a. Misunderstanding God leads to abominable blunders.

b. Human knowledge misses the wisdom of God.

c. Today we miss God and resort to immorality and violence and divorce.

d. Today some Christians are turning from the word to shameful ways.

e. We are strong in doctrine but weak in understanding the ways of God.

f. Preachers are not passing on a real understanding of the word of God.

h. Teach young people the true nature of life and they will seek you out.

4. Some of the mysteries are manifold.

a. The kingdom, the nature of God, etc.

b. These are the great hidden secrets of God.

c. The kingdom, for example, refers to God's invisible control of history.

1. God is behind what happens in human affairs.

2. Preaching the kingdom helps people understand what God is doing in the world.

3. The rise of homosexuality is happening because God gives people up to depraved lust so that they will listen when they don't want to listen.

4. God prepares the way for revival by bringing people to desperation when their ideas fail.

5. Paul told us to redeem the time because the days are evil.

6. I have had contact with gay groups that were open to the Gospel because we didn't condemn them.

d. The mystery of lawlessness is what perplexes leaders today.

1. They can make no real progress in peace, poverty, etc. because man is incapable of saving himself.

2. The leader of the United Nations met to solve international warfare by asking three questions.

a. What element is lacking so that our knowledge is insufficient?

b. Why do our efforts produce so little?

c. What is the solution?

3. The answer to these questions is the mystery of lawlessness.

a. There are forces at work in the world committed to evil.

b. These forces rob people of all God wants to give.

c. TV commercials are using the word "deserve" to appeal.

d. It induces people to take what they want.

e. This robs people of the blessing of thankfulness, which is the chief ingredient of joy.

4. Preaching is to expose the lie of human wisdom and proclaim the wisdom of God.

a. Are your people understanding these secrets?

b. Jesus said “You in me and I in you.”

c. Paul said, “Christ in you the hope of glory.”

d. Anything less than this is a false panacea.