

Spiritual Mysteries

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 14, 1844

"In the Spirit he speaketh mysteries." 1 Cor. 14:2

In the days of the Apostles, God saw fit, for wise purposes, to bestow special and miraculous gifts upon the church. These, indeed, have been long withdrawn; and while they lasted, peculiar evils appear, through man's perverse nature, to have been connected with them; among them this not the least, that they tended much to fill with pride the person who possessed them. We therefore find the Apostle Paul reproving the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 14, for the confusion and disorder manifested in their assemblies, and giving directions how these gifts were to be exercised for the profit and edification of the church. The gifts I allude to were such as prophecy, speaking in strange tongues, healing the sick, and other miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost. It appears, then, that some of those who were favoured with these supernatural gifts, were apt to make a display of them; and amongst these, particularly the persons gifted with speaking in unknown tongues. Sooner than not display their gift they would speak in a language not understood by the congregation. This the Apostle reproves. "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto man, but unto God; for no man understandeth him; howbeit, *in the Spirit he speaketh mysteries.*" Now, the Apostle was not blaming him for speaking mysteries; but he blames him for speaking them in an unknown tongue: for in so doing he edified himself, but not the church. May we not apply this reproof to ministers now, who preach in such fine language, that God's poor, plain, and uneducated people hardly understand what they say?

Every true minister of the gospel is "a steward of the mysteries of God;" as the Apostle declares (1 Cor. 4:1), "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." And his office is, as God the Spirit teaches and enables him, to bring forth these mysteries for the edification and consolation of the people of God. "We speak," says the Apostle, "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."

But what is a mystery? Let us endeavour to discover its scriptural meaning.

A mystery, then, has these three marks attending it. 1. It is a truth beyond the comprehension of nature, sense, and reason. 2. It is hid from the wise and prudent. And 3. It is revealed by the Spirit of God unto babes. These three distinct marks are found in every gospel mystery; and therefore nothing but divine teaching can lead us into a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with heavenly mysteries.

With God's blessing, I shall this morning endeavour to set forth some of those mysteries which are revealed in the Scriptures; and which, therefore, we may justly conclude, the person mentioned in the text would speak in the Spirit. And may God the Holy Ghost reveal them with power to our hearts.

1. The first grand mystery in point of importance which God has revealed in the word of truth, is *the mystery of the Trinity*; as we find the Apostle speaking (Col. 2:2), "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the *mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*" Here the Three Persons of the Trinity

are named, and their undivided Essence declared to be "a mystery." Can we find the three marks of a mystery in it? It is, 1. Beyond the comprehension of nature, sense, and reason. 2. It is hid from the wise and prudent. They may, indeed, have a notional acquaintance with it, and contend for it as a part of revealed truth; but as to any feeling acquaintance with it, any experimental knowledge of it, any spiritual enjoyment of it, they are completely destitute. But 3. It is revealed to the babes, a secret into which God's people only are introduced by the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

A spiritual knowledge of the Trinity lies at the foundation of all vital godliness. To know Father, Son, and Holy Ghost by special teaching and divine revelation, is the sum and substance of spiritual religion, and is eternal life; according to the Lord's own testimony, John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Thus, sooner or later, the Lord leads all his people into a feeling acquaintance with, and divine reception of this glorious mystery: and thus they come to know the Father's electing love, the Son's redeeming work, and the Spirit's inward testimony; and that these Three are One. But how opposed to nature, sense, and reason is this glorious mystery; and how they all rise up in rebellion against it. How can Three be One, or one be Three? nature asks, and reason argues. And yet the babes receive and believe it. For take away the doctrine of the Trinity, and all their hope is gone in a moment. How can we rest upon Christ's atoning blood, if it is not the blood of the Son of God? or upon his justifying righteousness, if not the righteousness of God? or how could we be kept, led, taught, and guided by the Holy Ghost, if he too was not a divine Person in the Godhead? Thus we come to know the mystery of Three Persons in the Godhead, by feelingly receiving into our hearts the work of each with power; and yet we know

that these Three are but one God. It is this inward reception of the truth in the love of it which holds up the soul in a storm. We are often tossed about, and ready to say, "How can these things be?" But we are brought up by this deep-rooted feeling, as the anchor brings up the ship in the gale, that we are undone without it. If this mystery be removed, our hope must be removed with it; for there is no pardon, peace, nor salvation, but what stands in, and flows out of, an experimental knowledge of the Three-One God.

2. Another deeply important mystery which the Holy Ghost has revealed in the Scriptures, is what the Apostle calls "the great mystery of godliness, *God manifest in the flesh,*"—the Person of Immanuel, "God with us." Deity and humanity in one glorious Person is this great "mystery;" in an experimental acquaintance with which lies so much of the secret of vital godliness, and so much of the faith, hope, and love of a Christian. But do we not still find the three marks of a divine mystery attending it? Nature staggers, reason fails, sense is confounded, that the Eternal God should lie in the womb of the Virgin a span long—that he "who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, should make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, should humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:6, 7, 8.) That he who was crucified on Calvary should be God and man in one glorious Person, may well be a mystery hidden from the wise and prudent. But in the feeling reception of it into the heart, and in an experimental acquaintance with it in the conscience, does every child of God, more or less, feel vital godliness to consist. When we begin to view, by the eye of faith, the Person of Jesus as God-Man, see his blood as the blood of God, his righteousness as the righteousness of God, his love as the

love of God, his sympathy as the sympathy of God, his power as the power of God, and that all he is and has as God is engaged on behalf of his people, how such a sight encourages the poor fainting sinner still to hope in his mercy; and how it emboldens him who is groaning and crying under the evils of his heart, to take refuge under the shadow of this glorious mystery, "God manifest in the flesh." How the love, grace, and condescension displayed in this wondrous mystery meet every want that God's people feel, suit every desire of their hearts, and are adapted to every experience of their troubled minds. Let this truth go, and they are driven on the quicksands of despair; let this hope fail, and their souls are eternally lost; let this sure refuge be abandoned, and they are tossed on the billows of guilt and shame, without any haven to flee unto. Thus, however nature, sense, and reason may be baffled by this mystery, yet as God the Spirit, in fulfilling his covenant office, unfolds and holds it up to the soul's view, and applies it with unction and power to the conscience, the whole heart of the child of God receives it, his affections flow to it, and all his hope hangs and centres in it. Sooner, therefore, than give up this glorious mystery, he would, when favoured with the enjoyment of it, consent to have his head struck off with an axe on the scaffold.

Now, if there were no cavillings working against it in our carnal mind, no mustering up of misgivings sturdy and strong, no formidable array of infidel objections, no subtle reasonings and pleadings of our natural understanding, it would cease to be a mystery to us. Could sense understand it, reason comprehend it, or nature explain it, we should not need the Holy Ghost to reveal it, nor faith to receive it; but because it is a mystery beyond nature, sense, and reason, it must be received by faith through the revelation of God the Spirit. There may be some poor desponding creature here this morning who has been tossed up and down, and his soul

sorely oppressed with the harassing darts of infidelity. Do not despair because your faith is staggering under the force of these infidel suspicions that continually shoot across your heart. Do not think that you are altogether a castaway, or will soon turn out an open infidel. It is because Satan sees that your heart longs to embrace this glorious mystery, that he exerts all his power, and musters all his infernal arts and arms against you. It is when the soul longs most to lay hold of this mystery, that Satan plies most thick his fiery darts; so that the very infernal objections that cross your mind, the very staggerings of faith, and sinkings of hope, so far from proving that you believe not that God was made manifest in the flesh, evidently show that you do believe it; for those who believe it doctrinally with the head, have few or none of these darts of infidelity; they only assail those who believe with the heart. I believe, from soul experience, that many of God's people are exercised with these temptations of infidelity; my own soul has had to labour under them at times for years. But these gusts of infidelity that rush down on the mind, only tend eventually to ground the soul more firmly in the truth; as the winds and storms that blow upon the oak only make it take firmer root in the soil. A winter storm soon blows down a dead tree; but it makes the living tree, when the first shock is passed away, to take a stronger root: and thus the gusts of infidelity, which would root up a dead professor, eventually establish a living soul more firmly in the truth. For myself I can say, that the more I have been tried about this mystery, the more firmly I have cleaved to it, for I have felt to part with it is to part with all.

3. Another mystery revealed in the sacred Scriptures, and received by faith, is, the mystery of *the union of the church with her covenant Head*, as the apostle speaks, Ephes. 5:30-32, where having declared, "we are members of Christ's body, of his flesh, and of his bones;" he adds, "for this cause

shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. *This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*" But why should the union of the church with her covenant Head be a mystery? Let us see if the three marks of mystery, which I before pointed out, are to be found here. *First*, nature, sense, and reason, cannot understand how the church could be in eternal union with her covenant Head. That the future wife can be a bride before she is born—how can reason comprehend this? And, *secondly*, is it not hidden from the wise and prudent, who therefore shoot out their arrows, even bitter words against it, and treat it with universal contempt and ridicule? How many ministers in London, for instance, believe in eternal union with Christ? And O what an armoury of academical objections may be found against it! But does it not bear the *third* mark of a gospel mystery; that it is revealed to babes by the Spirit, and sealed on their hearts with a heavenly unction? And a mystery indeed it must ever be to them, that such a beggarly wretch, such a filthy pauper, such a vile adulteress, should ever have an eternal union with the Son of God. I know indeed that the Church was viewed and taken before her Adam-fall; but base is the condition in which she is found, when the union is manifested by the Spirit's work. If a king were to take a beggar girl to his bed and throne, it would not be half or a thousandth part of such a marvel, as that the darling Son of God should take into union with himself his Church and Bride; pluck her, when debased to the lowest hell, from the ruins of the fall, wash her in his own blood, clothe her in his own righteousness, bring her into a feeling sense of union with himself, and shew her that this union existed before all worlds. O what a mystery is this to receive into the heart by faith.

But the very essence of a mystery is, that it is beyond

nature, sense, and reason. And will not then nature, sense, and reason fight against it? And will not faith stagger at the thought, that a vile wretch, sunk into the depths of sin and shame, should be in eternal union with the glorious Son of God? Do not a thousand darts of suspicion shoot through the mind whether these things can be true? Does not Satan perpetually ply all his infernal armoury of doubts and fears to sink the soul, if he could, in the waves of doubt, despondency, and despair? But in spite of all suspicions and objections, the soul is brought to receive it by a living faith; and in embracing this glorious mystery, feels a measure of its sweetness and power. And no one truth of revelation received into the heart will more debase the sinner, exalt the Saviour, and bring glory to the Triune God.

4. Another mystery revealed in the sacred Scriptures, and made known by the Spirit to the hearts of God's people, is, *the mystery of the gospel*; as the Apostle speaks, (Eph. 6:19), "That utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, *to make known the mystery of the gospel*, for which I am an ambassador in bonds." *The mystery of the gospel!* Let us see if the three marks are applicable to this mystery also. Is not the pure gospel of Jesus (I say, *pure*, in opposition to a mangled or mongrel gospel) opposed to nature, sense, and reason? Is it not hidden from the wise and prudent? And is it not revealed unto babes? But what is the gospel? It is "good news," a proclamation of mercy and grace, a message of glad tidings. But to whom? Why this is what makes it a mystery, that, in the gospel, salvation is proclaimed for guilty wretches, condemned rebels, and vile criminals. It would be no mystery if it were for the good and holy, the pious and religious. Nature, sense, and reason could easily understand how a reward is given to the deserving; nor would the wise and prudent cavil at that. But this makes it a mystery, that the

gospel of the grace of God should be for the worthless and undeserving, for the guilty and filthy, the lost and undone. Yet in this consists the glory, the preciousness, and the comfort of the gospel, that it is for sinners; according to those words, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world *to save sinners*; of whom I am chief." (1 Tim. 1:15.) And what a word the Holy Ghost makes use of (Rom. 4:5), "He justifieth the *ungodly!*" He does not justify those who are naturally righteous, holy, and religious; but the mystery is, that he takes the sinner as he is, in all his filth and guilt, washes him in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and clothes in his own robe of righteousness the naked shivering wretch, who has nothing to cover him but filthy rags. How this is set forth, Zech. 3:3, 4: "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." This is the gospel, the mystery hid from the wise and prudent, but revealed to babes. "But," say men, "such a gospel as this leads to licentiousness; we know that the Scriptures say, 'Christ died for sinners;' but we must guard it with conditions, and hedge it in with limitations, or it will only make men sin the more." But what other than a gospel of free grace, without conditions, could suit us in our desperate circumstances? We want something that comes down to us, not something for us to clamber up to; something to pluck us out of the pit of ruin into which we are sunk; not a something suspended over the top of the pit for us, all maimed and crippled, to reach by mounting its sandy and slippery sides. We are like the man journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho, who fell among thieves, and was left half dead. Instead of getting to the inn by our own exertions, we want the good Samaritan to come

to us, pour the wine and oil of the gospel into our bleeding wounds, and carry us himself where we can find food, rest, and shelter. And no other gospel is worthy the name but the gospel of the grace of God, which brings glad tidings of pardon to the criminal, of mercy to the guilty, and of salvation to the lost. A gospel which nature can understand, which sense can explain, which reason can fathom, is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no mystery in a conditional gospel: but that the holy God should look down in love on wretches that deserve the damnation of hell; that the pure and spotless Jehovah should pity, save, and bless enemies and rebels, and make them endless partakers of his own glory; this indeed is a mystery, the depth of which eternity itself will not fathom. As I before hinted, wherever there is a mystery, there will be doubts and suspicions floating through the mind; and as regards the mystery of the gospel, it will chiefly be how it can possibly be for such vile, guilty wretches. "If I could do something to recommend myself to God's favour, if I could purify my heart, renew my mind, and abstain from all sin, live entirely to God's glory, and be holy in thought, word, and deed, then," says the soul, "I think I might be accepted. But when I continually find all manner of evil working in my mind, every base corruption crawling in my heart, every thing vile, sensual, and filthy rising up from its abominable deeps, can I think God can look down in love and mercy on such a wretch?" And yet our very necessities, our very poverty, the very extremity of the case, and the desperate nature of all the circumstances, all combine, under the teachings and leadings of the Spirit, to prepare us for the gifts of faith, hope, and love; and thus really confirm us in a knowledge of the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For we feel brought to this solemn conclusion in our minds, that without a free grace gospel, we are entirely lost. The law, we are sure, cannot save us, for it only curses and condemns; the creature cannot help us, nor can we help ourselves. But

the free grace of God, flowing through the Saviour's love and blood, and manifested in the gospel, brings mercy, peace, and pardon, unclogged by works or conditions. And therefore nothing but such a gospel can suit our case, or do us any real good. Thus, sometimes through painful necessity, and sometimes through pleasing enjoyment; sometimes feeling lost without it, and sometimes feeling its beauty and glory; sometimes driven by the north wind of Sinai, and sometimes drawn by the south wind of Zion, we are led to embrace this glorious mystery of the gospel. And sweet indeed is it to see how in it all the perfections of God harmonize; how the sinner is pardoned, and yet sin condemned; how the justice of God is preserved in all its purity, and yet the mercy of God is manifested in all its fulness; how all the attributes of Jehovah meet in the Person of Christ, and the sinner is saved without one being sacrificed; nay, rather all heightened, magnified, and glorified in the face, love, blood, and work of the Lord Jesus. Now no other gospel than this is worth the name; no other gospel than the gospel of the grace of God is revealed to the heart by the Spirit. Every other is a mongrel gospel, and will leave the soul under the wrath of God. No other gospel brings deliverance from the curse of the law, manifests the pardon of sin, gives a sense of acceptance and reconciliation unto God, and takes away the sting of death: nor is any other gospel but the gospel that reveals salvation for the vilest of the vile, a mystery; nor will any other give the church all the comfort, and God all the glory.

5. Another mystery which the Scripture speaks of, is *the mystery of the kingdom of heaven*; as the Lord said unto his disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God." (Mark 4:11.) By "the kingdom of God" is meant the same thing as "the kingdom of heaven;" that is, the internal kingdom set up in the heart by the power of the Spirit:—that kingdom which shall stand for ever and ever,

and last when time shall be no more. This the Lord calls a mystery. And if it is a mystery, it will have the three marks I have mentioned; it will be beyond nature, sense, and reason, will be hidden from the wise and prudent, and will be revealed unto babes. Let us see if we can find these marks belonging to the kingdom of heaven set up in the heart. It certainly is above nature, sense and reason, that God should dwell in a man's heart, as the apostle says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory;" and again, "Ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said I will dwell in them, and walk in them." (2 Cor. 6:16.) That God should take up his abode in a man's heart; that Christ should be in a man; and the Holy Ghost should make the body of his saints his temple; how can nature, sense, and reason understand such a mystery as this? When one of the ancient martyrs, I think it was Polycarp, was brought before Trajan, when the Emperor asked him his name, he answered, "I am Polycarp, the God-bearer, for I carry God in me." At this answer the Emperor laughed, and said, "Let him be thrown to the wild beasts." That was the only answer a persecuting tyrant could give. That a man, frail and feeble, whom a lion could tear to pieces in a few moments, carried God in his bosom,—how could the wise and prudent Trajan believe a thing so unheard of? Yet it is a mystery revealed to babes for they receive it in the love of it under divine teaching, as one of the mysteries that God the Spirit makes known in the heart.

Daniel, in prophecy, had a view of this kingdom of God. In interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image, he said to the King, "Thou sawest till a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no

place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." (Dan. 2:34, 35.) This "stone cut out without hands," represented the Lord Jesus, and shadowed forth his kingdom which was to stand upon the ruins of all the preceding. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall brake in pieces and consume all the kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2:44.) Thus the internal kingdom of God breaks to pieces all the other kingdoms, and stands upon their ruins; it breaks to pieces the kingdom of pride, the kingdom of covetousness, the kingdom of self-righteousness, the kingdom of lust and passion, in a word, all that kingdom in which nature, sense, and reason reign. Now, if this is the case, that the kingdom of God stands on the ruins of all the rest, it must, indeed, be a mystery, that I have no true religion till I have lost all my old; that I can enjoy no sense of God's goodness till I have seen the wreck of all my own; that the mercy and grace of God are built upon the ruins of self; that I have neither righteousness, or holiness of my own to boast in, or to be saved by. That the kingdom of heaven should be thus built on the wreck of the creature is indeed a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot comprehend; is a mystery indeed hidden from the wise and prudent; but one which is revealed by the Spirit of God unto babes. And to their experience I may appeal. Do we ever know anything of the grace of God in Christ till nature is laid low? Do we ever feel the blessedness of God's salvation till our own righteousness becomes an unshapely wreck? Do we feel anything of supernatural religion and vital godliness till our own religion and our own exertions fail us in the hour of need? Thus the internal kingdom of God stands upon the ruins of nature; and only so far as it does so stand, has it any abiding place in our souls.

But this kingdom of heaven within is exposed to perpetual assaults; the child of God, therefore, taught by the Spirit, finds there is an inward mystery in himself—*the mystery, I mean, of the two natures*, of "the flesh lusting against the spirit," and the "spirit lusting against the flesh." Are you not often a mystery to yourself? Warm one moment, cold the next; abasing yourself one half-hour, exalting yourself the following; loving the world, full of it, steeped up to your lips in it to-day; crying, groaning, and sighing for a sweet manifestation of the love of God to-morrow; brought down to nothingness, covered with shame and confusion, on your knees before you leave your room; filled with pride and self-importance before you have got downstairs; despising the world, and willing to give it all up for one taste of the love of Jesus when in solitude; trying to grasp it with both hands when in business. What a mystery are you! Touched by love, and stung with enmity; possessing a little wisdom, and a great deal of folly; earthly-minded, and yet having the affections in heaven; pressing forward, and lagging behind; full of sloth, and yet taking the kingdom with violence. And thus the Spirit, by a process which we may feel but cannot adequately describe, leads us into the mystery of the two natures, that "company of two armies," perpetually struggling and striving against each other in the same bosom. So that one man cannot more differ from another than the same man differs from himself. But do not nature, sense, and reason contradict this? Do not the wise and prudent deny this? "There must be a progressive advance," they say, "in holiness; there must be a gradual amendment of our nature until at length all sin is rooted out, and we become as perfect as Christ." But the mystery of the kingdom of heaven is this, that our carnal mind undergoes no alteration, but maintains a perpetual war with grace: and thus, the deeper we sink in self-abasement under a sense of our vileness, the higher we rise in a knowledge of Christ; and

the blacker we are in our own view, the more comely does Jesus appear.

6. Another mystery spoken of in Scripture, is "*the mystery of iniquity*;" as we read (2 Thess. 2:7), "The mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." There is a twofold mystery of iniquity—one outward, and the other inward. The outward mystery of iniquity is in the professing church; and to this the Apostle refers in the passage quoted, where he shews that it will one day be fully ripened and developed in the man of sin, that "Wicked" one, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." (ver. 8.) The mystery of iniquity in the outward church is the mystery of a dead profession, the hands being full of blood, and the heart full of hypocrisy. This, in its varied forms, seems now fast ripening to a head, and gradually advancing till it will come to its grand completion in the "man of sin."

But there is, also, the inward mystery of iniquity in a man's own bosom. And O what a mystery is that! What shapes and forms it wears! What marks and disguises it puts on! How it intermingles itself with every thought, appears in every word, and discovers itself in every action! This inward mystery of iniquity we cannot for a single moment bar out; like a flood, it will force its way in; do what we will, still it works in the heart; with all our desires or resolutions to the contrary, we cannot keep this mystery from working and manifesting itself perpetually. This mystery in a man's heart takes such subtle forms, wears such various dresses, insinuates itself into such crevices and corners, entwines and entangles itself so around every thought of the heart, that we never seem free from it. Would we pray against it? The mystery of iniquity still works in the very prayer. Would we read the Scriptures to find

some promise against it? It mingles with all our reading. Would we separate ourselves from the world, and seclude ourselves from all society? Still the mystery of iniquity will work in the deepest solitude. So that do what we will, we find the mystery of iniquity will still work. But is it not hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes?

7. Another mystery revealed in the Scriptures, is *the mystery of the resurrection*. As Paul says, "Behold, *I shew you a mystery*; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Cor. 15:51, 52.) The mystery of the resurrection is this, that the vile body shall one day become a glorious body, changed into a perfect likeness to the glorified humanity of Jesus, and entirely conformed to his image, so as to be for ever with him, and like to him, as the Holy Ghost testifies, Phil. 3:21: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2.) Now this is a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot grasp; a mystery hidden from the wise and prudent, and yet revealed unto babes. Has it not struck you sometimes as an inexplicable mystery, how you could be ever holy enough for heaven, so as to find all your delight to centre in looking at Jesus and being like him through the countless ages of eternity; and to have no other happiness but what consists in communion with the Three-One God? Is not this a mystery? Now you can scarcely for a quarter of an hour be spiritually-minded, scarcely now for the space of five minutes be engaged in meditating on the Person of Christ. When on your

knees, vile thoughts will intrude; when at the ordinance, some wicked iniquity will suggest itself; in hearing the word, your minds cannot sometimes for a quarter of the sermon keep up their attention. Being now so earthly and sensual, is it not a mystery how you, who are God's people, shall one day be perfectly holy, perfectly pure, and perfectly conformed to the image of Christ; and that all your happiness and joy will be in being holy, and in holding communion with the Three-One God? O what a mystery is this to nature, sense, and reason. Do they not stagger and give way beneath it? When we compare the happiness and glory of the saints in heaven with what we are here on earth, how amazing the contrast. When we see our vileness, baseness, carnality, and sensuality; how our souls cleave to dust, and grovel in things evil and hateful; how dark our minds, how earthly our affections, how depraved our hearts, how strong our lusts, how raging our passions; we feel ourselves, at times, no more fit for God, in our present state, than Satan himself. What a mystery then is this, that such a wonderful change should take place as to make the saints perfectly holy in body, soul, and spirit, and fit guests to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb! Sure I am, the more that a man becomes acquainted with the depravity of his fallen nature, and the more that he feels the workings of devilism in his heart, the more will he wonder how he can be brought into such a state as to be perfectly holy, enjoy uninterrupted communion with the Three-One God, and bask for ever in the smiles of Jehovah.

But though this is a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot comprehend, yet faith receives it as revealed by the Holy Ghost. Would it be heaven, if we could carry our present depraved nature there; our pride, our presumption, our hypocrisy, with all the abominable workings of our fallen, filthy, and grovelling hearts? To carry these with us to that

glorious abode of perfection, holiness, and purity would make heaven to us a hell. Therefore, though it is indeed a mystery how it can be, yet, as received by faith, the child of God is happy that it should be so; for he is certain, were it otherwise, heaven would be no heaven for him. He would not be fit for it; he could not enjoy it; nay, the very thought of being there for ever would be irksome and intolerable to him. Nay more, when the soul is tossed to and fro by exercises and perplexities, and the workings of sin in a depraved heart, and can look forward with something of gospel hope to that day when it shall feel the plague of sin no more, but be perfectly holy and perfectly pure in body and soul, it becomes commended to the conscience, and is embraced by faith as a blessed mystery suitable to us, and glorifying to God.

8. And then comes what John saw in Revelation (10:7): "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, *the mystery of God shall be finished*, which he has declared to his servants the prophets." This is the winding up of all things, when the mystery of iniquity in the professing world; the mystery of God's dealings with his people in grace; the mystery of his dealings with them in providence; the mystery of the way in which God has led his church; the mystery of all our trials, temptations, afflictions, and sufferings; the mystery of the crooked road we have walked, of the tangled labyrinth which we have threaded; the mystery why the wicked have prospered, and the righteous been oppressed—all these mysteries, which now puzzle and perplex nature, sense, and reason, will then be unfolded to the church of God. Then "the mystery will be finished;" and God will lay bare the mystery hid for ages in Christ Jesus, and make it known to the salvation of his people, the confusion of his enemies, and the glory of himself.

Now, "in the Spirit," the man of whom the Apostle spoke, preached "mysteries;" for "in the Spirit" they must be preached, and "in the Spirit" they must be received; or he that preaches, and those that hear, will preach and hear in vain. But what a mercy if the Spirit has preached any of these mysteries into our hearts; and what a blessing if we have received them in a measure of faith, hope, and love; and being deeply sensible of our ignorance, have received the truth in the love of it, been enabled to embrace it, in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, for our soul's edification and consolation. They must be received as mysteries. Immediately that natural reason intrudes, and the question is asked, "How can these things be?" we cease to submit to God's will and word. But when we fall down before the throne of God, and feeling that though we cannot understand them, cannot comprehend them, cannot reason ourselves into them, we yet are enabled to receive them into our heart by a living faith, we see their beauty, taste their sweetness, and enjoy a measure of their glory.

Thus we have some evidence that we have received and have felt a power in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, when a reasonable religion, a natural religion, an intellectual religion satisfies us no longer. Has there not been a time with us when we scorned all mysteries, and would have no religion but one which we could comprehend, and, by dint of our natural understanding, could lay hold of? And through mercy, has not this proud Babel been laid low? And have not some of us, through the teachings of God in the conscience, found nature, sense, and reason buried in the dust; and felt ourselves brought down to be little children, to know our own ignorance, and to cry to the Lord to teach us the truth by divine revelation? And since the Lord in mercy has brought our reason to nought, since in mercy he has caused the tall steeples of natural religion to topple down and be stretched

in the dust, have we not felt a measure of sweetness, of power, of reality in the things of God not known before? Has not truth come with life and light into our souls, made us new creatures, revolutionized our lives, changed all our views, and given us eyes to see realities we never thought of before? And has not the Gospel of the grace of God been received into a believing heart, and a measure of its sweetness been experienced? It is thus we have some evidence that we have received the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And are they not doubly sweet, because reason cannot comprehend them, because we are not able to understand them; and because they can only be received from the lips of Jesus, or as they are dropped into the heart, and distilled on the conscience by the power of the Holy Ghost? And is it not far more blessed to learn them thus, than if we could understand all mysteries by natural intellect, or fathom the depths of God by the line of creature understanding?

Some of you perhaps are poor and despised, and are ridden down by great professors; your family and friends perhaps cast you out, and say, "Really we cannot understand you; you were a good Christian once, a pattern to others, a truly pious character; and everybody loved and spoke well of you. But," say they, "what a strange person you are now! we cannot at all get on with you. Ever since you have gone to that chapel, and become connected with that strange set, you are quite altered, and we know not what to make of you." Does not this shew that the mystery, revealed unto babes, is hidden from the wise and prudent? If all could see as we see, hear as we hear, feel as we feel, the gospel would then be no mystery at all; but by knowing something of this mystery, we are made to differ from them, and this stirs up their enmity and wrath. "What," say they, "are there only two or three in a village, only half a dozen in a town, only

one in a family going to heaven? and are none right but they?—Away with such narrow-minded, bigoted wretches." What is this but declaring that there is a mystery in this people's religion? If they could understand it, if it were agreeable to nature, sense, and reason, it would cease to be a mystery, and you would cease to have a testimony from God that you have received it into your heart with power. Therefore, to know gospel mysteries by divine teaching, will separate a man from the world, lead him out of false churches, cut him off from dead ministers, and bring him into union with the people of God. And as he finds these are spiritually led into the mysteries of the kingdom of God, it will produce a communion with them, and a sweetness which he never knew in dead churches; and, his heart being dissolved in love and affection, he will cry, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." (Ruth 1:16.) And thus he will have an increasing testimony from God that he is not one of the "wise and prudent" from whom these things are hidden, but one of "the babes" to whom they are revealed.

O may we know more of these divine mysteries! And may the Lord the Spirit lead us more deeply into them, favour us with more sweet and abiding views of them, and specially make the mystery of the gospel, in the Person, love, and blood of Jesus, "all our salvation and all our desire." And then, we shall bless God not only that there is a mystery in the gospel, but that he has mercifully unfolded it with power to our consciences.