

What Is the Mystery of the Faith?

International Bible Lessons

1 Timothy 3:1-13

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“They must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9—NRSV).

“but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9—NASB-U).

“Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9—KJV).

In the Bible, God openly reveals the mystery of the faith for anyone to read. By human reason alone, we cannot completely understand God’s revealed truths, but we can understand them well enough to accept and believe. We come to understand these truths better through further Bible study, spiritual experience, and most importantly from the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment. Paul wrote that church leaders, including those under consideration for leadership positions, must hold fast and not compromise the mystery of the faith, which I believe includes all of the mystery’s revealed components.

Paul stated the basic facts of faith, that he sometimes called mysteries, in his letters to Timothy and other letters. The mystery of the faith includes such truths as Christ coming to earth in human flesh, the resurrected Christ ascending into heaven, Christ indwelling those who trust in Him for salvation, Christ uniting with His church, Jews and Gentiles serving and worshiping God together through a common faith and fellowship with Christ, and the resurrection of the body.

Those who aspire to leadership as elders in the church must be able to teach about these mysteries and other facts in the Bible. Along with church elders and other prospective leaders, deacons must hold fast to these truths with a clear conscience. A clear conscience results from living daily on the basis of the Bible’s teachings while submitting to the lordship of Christ over all of life—with the indwelling Jesus Christ being our Helper moment-by-moment. If church leaders trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and strive to follow His teachings, they will not act deceptively; instead, they will live transparently with a clear conscience.

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Thinking Further

1. What qualities do you look for today when you select your leaders? In what ways should church leaders be different from leaders in other areas? In what ways should they be similar?
2. What makes church leadership “a noble task”? How can knowing this fact influence a leader?
3. What should disqualify someone from being an elder or a deacon? What can a church do if an elder or deacon begins acting dishonorably or contrary to the Bible’s teachings?
4. If an elder in the church is also an elected government official, how might that make a difference in the way they make decisions in government?
5. In what ways might a person be tested prior to being selected as a church leader? Why did Paul say this testing was important?