

I Timothy 3.9

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Sermon notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Today, God willing, we are going to install two brothers into the office of deacon. We are thankful to God that he has answered our prayers in giving us two deacons to serve him. By the means of the installation these brothers have the authority to function in the office of deacon. They are servants of Christ and they come to you in the name of Christ. Receive them in your home warmly and enthusiastically, give your fullest honour to them as you would unto Christ.

In I Timothy 3, the apostle gives us the qualifications of office-bearers. From verses 1 to 7, he gives us the qualification of elders and in the next few verses, he gives us the qualifications of deacons, namely, they must be grave or serious, not double-tongued or insincere, not addicted to wine, and not greedy of material gain. We are not here to examine whether these brothers have the qualification for the office: we have already past that stage. Instead, we want to learn from the Word of God, what is God's will for all of us. Though it is true that this word is directly applicable to our 2 deacon-elects, it is also applicable to elders and to all Christians. This qualification ought to be in every office-bearer in a greater measure for this is the reason why you are a office-bearer and in a lesser extent for the rest of us. But, nevertheless this virtue must be in all of us. What does God require of us? In a word, it is godliness in our hearts. Godliness is not primarily outward, though godliness manifests itself by our behaviour. Godliness is primarily in our hearts – that we must be people who hold the truth in a way that is a pure conscience. In this sermon, you will learn what is the mystery of faith? Why is it called the mystery of faith? what does it mean to hold the mystery of the faith? And how do we hold it in a pure conscience.

The theme: HOLDING THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

Firstly, what is the mystery of faith. Secondly, what are we to do with the Mystery of Faith. And finally, how do we hold the mystery of Faith?

What is the mystery of Faith? Faith. How is it to be understood. Faith can be understood in two ways: one, it is our personal faith that by it we believe and put our trust in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Then, secondly, there is the object of faith, that is Jesus Christ. The object of faith is he whom we trust and He is Christ our Lord. In our text, faith is used in the second way, namely, the object of our faith. This is because the apostle says, "holding the mystery of the faith?" The calling of the deacons is to hold the faith. The deacons which is the subject is to hold. What is he to hold? Faith is the object. Faith is the whole body of truth that is recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Why is the word "faith" used as the body of truth? Because this is the truth that the saints are to believe and trust. And not by sight but by believing the Word of God. Faith is the gospel, that is the truths concerning Christ. Or according to the words of the apostle Paul in I Timothy 3.16, "Christ is the mystery of the godliness, manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory". And concerning this truth, firstly, we confess that God did fulfill his promise of sending his only begotten and eternal Son into the world and he did that according to the promises made to the fathers by the holy prophets, at a time appointed by the father. He took upon himself the form of a servant and became in the likeness of man, assuming the real human nature, with all its infirmities, except sin. Secondly, we confess that he was conceived in the womb of blessed Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, without the means of man. He assumed the human nature and true human soul, that he might be a real man. This was necessary so that he could save his people. Thirdly, we confess that Jesus Christ is anointed with an oath to be an everlasting high priest, after the order of

Melchizedeck, and that he hath presented himself in our behalf before the father to appease his wrath by his full satisfaction. He offered himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out his precious blood to purge away our sins for he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. Therefore, he suffered the just for the unjust for the remission of sins. And on the third day, he rose again from the dead. And finally, he, in the sight of his disciples, was taken upon into heaven and continues there for our interest, until he comes to judge the living and the dead.

Mystery. Sometimes we understand this word as something that is difficult or impossible to understand but this is not the meaning according to the Scriptures. Romans 16.25, 26, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith". There are four things to be observed about this mystery: firstly, Jesus Christ was kept secret from times eternal – it was something hid in the mind and counsel of God. Secondly, Jesus Christ did not continue to be kept hidden but it was manifested and made known according to the will and commandment of God. Thirdly, this revelation was finally revealed and recorded in the Holy Scriptures. And finally, this revelation is directed to the end that all nations may come to the obedience of faith. Therefore, this faith which is in Jesus Christ, which was hidden from us is now revealed and believed by the people of God.

What are we to do with the mystery of faith? Firstly, to hold means to have it in your possession, to safely keep it, preserve. And you have this truth because you were chosen as the elect of God before the foundation of the world. And in time, we became one in Christ. We became a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things have become new (II Cor. 5.17). And in the covenant that God has established with us, Jehovah declares, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God and they shall be my people". And the result is that we know God and He will forgive our sins and he will remember our sins no more" (Jer. 31.33, 34). And we embrace this truth in our hearts by faith. And we hold this truth as a very great treasure. Firstly, it is God who has given you and therefore it is precious. Secondly, it is hidden in God, but now revealed and therefore, very precious. Finally, the truth is about the only begotten Son of God who shed his precious blood for my sins.

Secondly, to hold means that you are committed to this truth. Not to hold the truth is to deny the cardinal truths. Such was Hymenaeus and Alexander who said that the resurrection of believers is past and therefore denied the truth of the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, making shipwreck or overthrew the faith of some. You honestly believe what you profess. Your profession of the truth is not fake or putting on a show nor are you hypocritical. But you wholeheartedly believe this faith is the truth of God. This is the gospel for sinners, the good news of salvation of Jesus Christ, whereby men, women and children will be saved And there is no other gospel whereby men many be saved, Acts 4.12. And you yourself have a firm grasp of the truth, and are convinced of it in your heart and furthermore, you have experienced the power of the gospel in your life. And you can confess that you are presently and in active way holding to the mystery of faith.

Finally, how do you hold the mystery of the faith? In the way of a pure conscience. What is conscience? In the Greek, it is made up of two smaller words, one meaning jointly, together with others, or in fellowship. And the other meaning is to know to understand, to perceive. Hence, the word conscience is to have joint knowledge or to know together. The question is, who are they are involved in this knowing

something together? Some think that the two involved are the mind and the heart, but this explanation is inadequate. According to Scripture, the conscience of a man is the share knowledge he has with God. God has revealed himself to all men, in all places and in all ages. There is the revelation of God in creation, and there is the fuller revelation of God in the Scriptures. Thus, God has not left himself without witness. And the witness of God is a witness to the Truth. God reveals himself to him as to his will, as to what is right and wrong, good and evil. And that testimony is always sufficiently clear so that man is left without excuse. And so, we define conscience as the speech of God in every rational creature telling him clearly what is right or wrong in the eyes of God. And what a precious gift of conscience that God has given unto us. To our two deacon-elect, holding the mystery of faith is a qualification for office. May you continue to hold the Reformed Faith in a pure conscience, not searing your conscience by being double-tongued or two-faced concerning the truth, but always believing this truth in your heart with sincerity and living it out to the praise of God. May you be able to testify like the apostle Paul when he explained to the Sanhedrin that he lived "in all good conscience before God" (Acts 23.1). And "he was careful to exercise himself in such a way that he would always have a conscience void of offense toward God and man" (Acts 24.16).

Why must the holding of the mystery of the faith be in pure conscience? If the faith is held otherwise, then he is two-tongued or two-faced, that is he is a hypocrite. Then, he is merely putting on a show. Therefore, only in the way of a pure conscience we are to hold the mystery of faith.

But, sometimes, we do not have a pure conscience in the sight of God. Because our conscience is often violated: the testimony of the conscience becomes useless, unreliable and muted. And if no repentance is made, after a time the conscience is seared with a hot iron (I Tim. 4.2). Our conscience is tender and sensitive. If the conscience comes into contact with a white – hot branding iron, then it is going to become seared, insensitive and useless. Literally, the Greek word is cauterize. And God holds the branding iron and applies it. And we ought not to live against our conscience. Martin Luther testified before the diet of worms, "my conscience is captured by the word of God. Therefore, I cannot and will not recant, since it is difficult, unprofitable and dangerous indeed to do anything against one's conscience. God help me. Amen.

But if we confess our sins due to our corrupted living, that would break the vicious cycle of sin. God knows that the Christian is to have a pure conscience. And this possible only because our hearts have been sprinkled from an evil conscience (Heb. 10.22). Because of Christ's sacrifice our conscience is made perfect or complete or whole. And because washing in his blood gives us the answer of a good conscience towards God (I Peter 3.21). And let us each one of us continue to hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience. Amen.