

**Sermon or Lesson: How Jesus Interacted With His Disciples, Part 6** (NIV based)  
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Teaching That Intentionally Veiled Understanding

PASSAGES: John 16:17-18, 25, 29-31; Matthew 13:10-18

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INTRO: Have you ever intentionally disguised information to your elementary-age children who asked questions about sex, perhaps because of what they saw on television? The main reason for veiling that information is because it is not time yet for them to learn such things, i.e. you did not want them to know yet.

In a similar but widespread way, God likewise veils information about the Kingdom Of Heaven from those who are not believers because He does not want them to know the correct or full meaning - yet. Jesus used this approach when teaching His disciples and teaching the crowds. Let's look at the specifics of His approach to gain understanding.

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READ: John 16:17-18, 25, 29-31

[Lesson Questions:

- - In this passage at this time, what is the core of a problem the disciples have been experiencing and struggling with?
- - How does Jesus respond to their concern about this problem?
- - And what has been the effect of Jesus' teaching style on the disciples?]

SECTION POINT: In this passage at this time, a core problem the disciples were experiencing and struggling with was understanding what Jesus was saying.

- - The disciples were struggling to understand what Jesus was saying (vv.17-18), because He had been speaking figuratively, in figures of speech (v.25).
  - - Jesus responds to their concern about this problem by confirming that He has been intentionally speaking figuratively to them and will continue to do so for awhile yet. (v.25)
  - - The effect of this teaching style on the disciples was that they did not understand what Jesus was teaching until He "[spoke] clearly and without figures of speech" (v.29). Then they finally ""can see"" and ""believe"" (v.30) ""at last"" (v.31).
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READ: Matthew 13:10-18

[Lesson Questions:

- - Did the disciples have the same struggle with understanding parables?
- - What reason does Jesus give for speaking in parables?
- - What is the implied difference between the disciples and the crowds, that the disciples are privileged to understanding this information and the crowds are not?]

SECTION POINT: The disciples had the same struggle with understanding parables.

- - The disciples did not understand parables until Jesus explained them in plain language. (v.18)
  - - Jesus discloses He has intentionally restricted understanding of His teaching to include only His disciples and not include the crowds, even though the teaching was being openly spoken and presented to the crowds. (v.11)
  - - The implied difference between the disciples and the crowds is that the disciples are privileged to understanding this information and the crowds are not because the disciples are believers and the crowds are unbelievers.
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[Lesson Questions:

- - What is the nature of this information, that its understanding would be restricted?
- - What is the nature of the restrictions?
- - What are God's intentions for the resulting effects of the restricting of understanding?
- - What is the reason given why God intentionally hinders unbelievers from easily understanding the "knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (v.11)?
- - Why then does God not want to make it too easy for masses of unbelievers to achieve right relationship with Him?]

SECTION POINT: The underlying reason this information has been restricted in understanding is because it is "knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (v.11).

"secrets" = Strong's #3466 - "secret or mystery"

- - This knowledge is generally unknown or not understood; it is about the kingdom of heaven - a place that is not visible and a system that is not easy to distinguish and to correctly identify.
- - This information about the kingdom of heaven is privileged information. Even though it has been made publicly available, its meaning has been intentionally veiled so that only the disciples can grasp its true meaning. (vv.11,13)
- - God intends that unbelievers be exposed to this veiled information, but that they do not correctly understand its meaning because their hearts have "become calloused" (v.15) towards the things of God, hindering and preventing correct understanding.
- - Conversely, believers are granted understanding of its true meaning and thereby become "blessed" by God. (v.16)
- - So, the effects of this restriction are that God intentionally designed there to intrinsically be within these figurative teachings about the kingdom of heaven both a simultaneous accumulative blessing of enlightenment for believers and an ongoing withholding of blessing of enlightenment from unbelievers. (see "never" in v.14)
- - This is in accordance with God's plan determined long ago, in fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah 6:9-10. (v.14)
- - The reason given why God intentionally hinders unbelievers from easily understanding the "knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (v.11) is because if understanding was easy, unbelievers would "turn" to God in mass and He would thereby place all of them in right relationship with Himself (v.15).

- - The reason why God does not want to make it too easy for masses of unbelievers to achieve right relationship with Him is not explained here, but in Romans 9:18 is a relating assertion that God, in His rights as Sovereign Creator, selectively chooses to extend mercy on some people (presumably individually) and selectively chooses to harden other people.

- - Another relating assertion is contained in Acts 17:24-30, that God wants persons to “seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (v.27). The implication here is that apparently God values when persons initiate an effort to find Him - to learn about Him - to find answers about Him - because they want to - because they then develop a desire to know Him - to call upon Him - to depend upon Him - to believe in Him - even though He is hidden and elusive.

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BIG IDEA: Believers are blessed (v.16) by God granting them understanding of the “knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (v.11); and by nature and intentional design, unbelievers in themselves cannot attain a correct understanding of these things about the kingdom of heaven. (see 1 Corinthians 2:14)

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[ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO PONDER (optional if you have time):

- - How do some unbelievers attain the ability to understand some of the knowledge about the kingdom of heaven in order to even get saved?

- - Although the disciples were believers, they still struggled to understand Jesus’ figurative teaching. Even as privileged-to-enlightenment believers, are there dynamics that can hinder our understanding of the teachings in Scriptures? And what dynamics does God use to actuate the enlightening of believers?]

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## APPLICATIONS:

- - Given that God chooses to bless those of us who are true believers with the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven but He chooses not to bless others with this knowledge, what should be your response to Him in this regard? (Hint: see Romans 12:1-2)

- - Have you ever had an “Aha !!” moment while studying the Scriptures, when concepts suddenly fit together and make sense? What were the spiritual dynamics that were occurring for you right up to that moment? Did you realize that God was revealing to you the meaning of veiled information about the kingdom of heaven?

- - What should be your (a believer’s) attitude, expectations, and approach towards unbelievers like your children or your spouse or teenagers when they don’t understand the Scriptural principles and concepts you are trying to teach them? Do you get frustrated with them? Short-tempered? Aggravated? Label them as A.D.D. (Attention Deficit Disorder)? Can you stop for a moment and consider that the information you are trying to teach them about the kingdom of heaven has been intentionally veiled by God so that they will not understand it at first?

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Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

"Strong's Greek Dictionary". *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

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