

The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications

The mystery of...

CHRIST IN YOU

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you. Always read your Bible first, then read these notes. Check the references and read them also. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

Read: Colossians 2:2-3

God coming to us in the form of Jesus Christ is a mystery beyond the grasp of our finite human minds.

God has revealed Himself to man as three persons, yet **ONE GOD**. He is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Yet He said to the people of Israel, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deut 6:3).

Jesus Christ died for our sins and made it possible for those who believe to have a personal relationship with God. Every true believer prays to the living God. We approach His throne of grace with awe and wonder (Heb 4:16). He has promised to hear us and answer our prayers. What an amazing fellowship with our Creator. It is almost too wonderful to think about, but it is true.

Every morning I rise from my bed, fall on my knees and seek God's help and blessing for the day. I give Him honour and praise with thanksgiving. Does that change what happens during the day? Yes, it does. I have peace in my heart because I know that my life is in God's hands. Whatever happens to me, He knows and cares and He guides my steps.

BE ENCOURAGED

Writing to the Colossians, the apostle Paul longed that his readers "may be encouraged in heart, and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2-3).

'Mystery' to Paul means something he received from God as a special revelation (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:3-9). But it does not mean some truth which other Christians cannot know. However, it can mean a truth which no believer can fully understand - a mystery may be something partly revealed and partly hidden from our understanding (Rom 11:33).

The "treasures hidden in Jesus" are like that, we can know a little of them - all we need to know - and enjoy them in his life. But beyond that there is so much more to come.

Paul states plainly that what he is writing to the Ephesians was a mystery which God revealed to him: He wrote, "God made known to us - the mystery of His will..." (Eph 1:9).

BORN AGAIN BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Read: John 3:1-8

One night, a Jewish teacher came to Jesus. His name was Nicodemus. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council. The Sanhedrin was the highest court in the land, and this leader did not

dare go to the Prophet, Jesus, in daylight.

Jesus had done miracles (signs) and many believed (2:23). Nicodemus was a teacher and leader, but he wanted to know more. "Rabbi," he said, "we know you are a teacher...come from God. No one could do the signs you are doing if God were not with Him" (John 3:2).

Jesus did not ask Nicodemus, "Have you believed?" He knew what was in every man's heart (John 2:24). Jesus knew this man kept the law and lived a good life, but that was not enough.

"I tell you the truth," Jesus said to Nicodemus, "no one can see (or be part of) the Kingdom of God unless he is born again (born from above)" (John 3:3,8). No one can enter God's Kingdom without a new birth.

This man was a "teacher in Israel." He knew how babies were born, and he knew that a person could be born only once. So he asked Jesus, "How can these things be" (John 3:4)? How can a man be born when he is old?

We are born into a human family once, but Jesus was not talking about our flesh-and-blood parents. He said, "born from above, born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5). Born by God's Spirit! This is a second birth.

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

Jesus used three symbols:

1. Birth - new life.
2. Water - which speaks of the Word of God, also of cleansing (John 15:3).
3. Wind - to show how God's Spirit moves in a man's heart (John 3:8).

No man can be "born again" without the Word of truth and the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9). The new man is "born of the Spirit."

When we repent of our sins and believes that Jesus was sent from God to be the Saviour of the world, the Holy Spirit comes to us. Our spirits which are dead in trespasses and sins receive new life and we are born again (2 Cor 5:17).

Man is like God, in three parts: body, soul and spirit. It is with our spirit that we can know and love God.

Nicodemus was puzzled by Jesus' words about being "born again," so Jesus said to him, "Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit..." Men can give birth to human life, but the Holy Spirit gives men and women life from heaven (3:6 The Living Bible).

Paul told the Christians at Ephesus, "You also were included in Christ...(they were born again) when you heard the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Eph 1:13).

They heard the Word of truth and believed it, and the Holy Spirit brought life to their darkened hearts.

God's Spirit must give life to our spirits. Our spirit is our heart, our very being. It is like the wick of a candle. The wick is the 'heart' of the candle. Because of sin, our hearts are cold toward God. Our wicks have gone out. God must relight us. God's Spirit brings His fire to our hearts. The Light of Christ leaps to our hearts and we are reborn. This is a work of God's Spirit.

We do not know where and how the Spirit works. He is like the wind. We cannot see the wind or know where it comes from or where it goes to. Jesus used these earthly things, like the wind, to speak of heavenly things.

TALK ABOUT

1. Who came to Jesus with a difficult question?
2. How can a man be born when he is old?
3. Who gives us new birth (John 3:5,8)?
4. Do we need to be born again? Why?

SEALED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

Read: Ephesians 1:13-14

When a man believes and turns from his old life of sin, God's Spirit gives him a 'new birth' (John 3:8). This is not a physical birth, but a birth by God's Spirit. Paul said this happened to the believers "when you heard the word of truth, the gospel...having believed, you were marked in Him (in Christ)...with the promised Holy Spirit" (1:13).

Look at the parts of this verse, (Eph 1:13):

- a) "When you heard..." Men must hear the gospel clearly (Rom 10:14-15).
- b) "Having believed...the gospel." Faith sprang up in their hearts.
- c) "You were marked...with a seal...the Holy Spirit" (Eph 1:13). God marked them as His own possession.

The moment we believe, we are sealed into God's family by the Holy Spirit. God gives the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Jesus (Rom 8:9). He accepts us immediately.

GOD'S PROMISE

Long ago, God's prophets said that His Spirit would come to live in those who believed (Joel 2:28-32). Jesus gave His disciples the same promise (John 14:16-17). God sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and He filled every believer, both men and women (Acts 2:2-5).

Now God's Spirit comes to every born-again person the moment they believe in Jesus. The Spirit is like a first payment or 'deposit' on all the blessings God will give His children in the days to come (2 Cor 1:22).

TALK ABOUT

1. What was so special about being a first-born son?
2. Is our faith different from the faith men had in Old Testament times?
3. What did Paul mean by a spiritual birth (John 3:8)?
4. Who is the Holy Spirit?
5. Have you been born again by God's Spirit (John 3:5, 8)?

CHRIST IN YOU

Read: Colossians 1:24-27

Paul was a Pharisee. He hated the people who believed in Jesus Christ and tried to punish them at every opportunity.

Paul studied the law of God with the best teachers in Jerusalem. Anyone who did not keep God's law was an enemy of Paul's. He served God zealously night and day. But Jesus Christ had come and fulfilled the law's demands and, by faith in Him, men and women were accepted by God. God saw them in Christ.

When Paul was travelling to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, a great light knocked him off his donkey and blinded his eyes.

As he lay on the road, Saul heard a voice from heaven speak to him and say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me" (Acts 9:4)?

"Who are You, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," the voice replied. "Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do."

Paul obeyed. His friends took him by the hand and led him to the house of Ananias, a godly Christian. There God gave Ananias this message, "This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name" (Acts 9:15-16).

PAUL LEAVES DAMASCUS

Read: Acts 9:20-31

After preaching to the people in Damascus, Saul (his old name) had to flee for his life. No man taught Paul the deep truths of God's word. The Holy Spirit taught him. He went into the desert and lived there for many years (some think 14 years, see Galatians 2:1).

The Holy Spirit showed Paul the truths he so clearly sets out in the many books he wrote to the New Testament churches.

He said, "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21). Paul did not learn that from God's Law. God's Law could not save him from his sins or give him a right standing before God, even if he kept it to the letter.

He knew his life under the Law did not gain God's favour. This was not the fault of the Law, nor was the Law defective in any way. It was the fault of the people who refused to believe or obey what the Law instructed them.

A righteous standing before God, which the Law could not provide, is given to all believers through faith in Christ - that is the only way for a man or woman to be saved. Their faith is the very same faith that father Abraham had (Gal 3:29).

TALK ABOUT

1. What happened to Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus (Acts 9)?
2. Did Paul believe that by keeping the Law of God he would go to heaven?
3. What did Paul say about the Law of God (Gal 2:15-16)?

HOLY AND BLAMELESS

A righteous standing before a holy God must be followed up by a righteous life. Indeed that is the whole purpose of God calling us to Himself (Eph 1:4) - that we would be "Holy and blameless in His sight." (Phil 3:9).

"Christ, then," Paul says, "is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4).

"End" here means completion. Just as the Law revealed the character and will of God, so it pointed to Christ as the goal of all faith. Jesus was the fulfillment of all divine revelation (2 Cor 1:20; Heb 1:1). Everything in the Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus Christ.

When Jesus came, He brought man the last and final revelation of God. Nothing more can be added and nothing taken away (The Revelation 22:18-19).

THE MYSTERY REVEALED

The Spirit of God taught Paul these great truths. He had never had a teacher like the Holy Spirit. And no one before him has been taught the truths revealed to Paul.

For this reason, Paul referred to the revelations he received from God as "a mystery..." The first and greatest mystery of all is Jesus Christ.

You may think of Jesus living in the world and teaching the people. But now Jesus lives in His

people. That is one of the most wonderful provisions God has made for the true believer. Jesus' presence and power living in us by His Spirit.

When Paul preached Christ to the Gentiles, many believed. He wrote, "God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

Paul called this, "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" (Col 1:26).

TALK ABOUT

1. What was 'hidden' from earlier generations (Col 1:25-27)?
2. What does Paul call this a 'hope' if we can have Christ in us now?
3. What is His purpose for each person (Eph 1:4)?

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

Read: Philippians 3:10-16

The mystery of godliness is God dwelling in the believer. Though we are all sinners saved by grace, God is willing and ready to come into our lives and "eat with us" (Rev 3:20). He will come and have moment by moment fellowship with us. And we can know His presence.

Only Jesus Christ was perfectly sinless and holy. The writer says, "He was tried in all points yet without sin" (Heb 4:16). Yet that is the standard God has set for every believer. It is the goal and objective of our faith. Paul wrote, "Not that I have already obtained all this (his desire to know Christ more intimately, Phil 3:10), or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...But this one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus...Only let us live up to what we have already attained" (Phil 3:10-16).

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CREED

Read: 1 Timothy 3:16

The mystery of godliness - who God is - is outlined in an early Christian creed. We believe new Christians learned this poem and repeated it often. It is the secret of how we sinners become godly, or become 'saints' as Paul so often called them.

This is the history of the God-man Jesus Christ in the shortest possible statement:

"He appeared in a body" Jesus was God in heaven (John 1:1). Yet He came to earth and was born a babe in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-20).

"He was vindicated by the Spirit" His body was resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Romans hung Him on a cross, but the power of God raised Him to life. Because He was resurrected, we have this hope that we, too, will be given resurrection bodies (1 Cor 15:35-58).

"He was seen by angels" The angels were puzzled. How could God stoop to become a human being? They sought to look into these mysteries (1 Peter 1:12).

Gabriel told Mary that her baby would be "the Son of the Most High." The angels were there to herald His birth (Luke 1:32). They ministered to Him in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43).

"He was preached among the nations" and so it will be to the end of time. Jesus, Himself said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14).

"He was believed on in the world" On the Day of Pentecost alone, more than 3,000 persons were saved and came into God's Kingdom (Acts 2:41).

"He was taken up into glory" On a hillside outside the city of Jerusalem, as His loyal followers watched, a bright cloud hid Him and Jesus disappeared from their sight (Acts 1:9).

TALK ABOUT

1. Did Paul say he was a perfect Christian (Phil 3:10)?
2. Does the Bible say we can be sinless?
3. What did the angels tell Jesus' followers as they watched Him go up to heaven (Acts 1:10-11)?
4. Do you witness for Jesus?

THE CHURCH IS A MYSTERY

Read: Ephesians 2:11-22

Some say that the concept of the Christian Church was not understood in Old Testament times, nor was it taught by Jesus. That is a discussion for another time and place.

God called the Church out of the world for the purpose of fellowship and witness (Acts 1:9). Adam and Eve broke the fellowship God had planned, so God called the people of Israel to be "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:5-8). When Israel failed to live up to their promise (Ex 19:6), God raised up a remnant (Isaiah 10:20-22) to take their place.

But all through the ages, God was apart from the people. No man could come to God and worship Him freely. So God set up a system of worship which kept man at a distance. When a person wished to come before God, he or she had to come in a special way and through a priest and sacrifice. Then God came to live among us.

When the time had fully come, God came to earth and lived among His people (John 1:14). Simeon spoke of the baby Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:32).

CHRIST'S GLORY FILLS HIS CHURCH

Read: 2 Corinthians 3: 7-18

Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians on the subject of Christ's Church and the gifts the Holy Spirit had given to the Church (Eph 4:3-10).

The Church has a double purpose. It is to be a "holy priesthood" serving God (1 Peter 2:5) and it is "to declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Paul tells of a "glory" that shone on the face of Moses whenever he met with God (2 Cor 3:7). Moses met God on Mount Sinai. After he had been with God, his face shone with a glory not its own. The glory of God was reflected in Moses' face. This showed that he had been in the very Presence of God Almighty.

This glory was wonderful, but it was outward and passing. Moses hid his face so that the fading glory would not be seen by the people. How did he do this? He put a veil over his face.

The glory came on Moses' face only as he spent time with God. It came from God and it began to fade from Moses' face when he left God's Presence.

If we had been there we might have said to Moses, "Go back up the mountain, Moses, and get more of that glory."

What do you think Moses would have said to us? "I can't. I can only go when God calls me to come."

TALK ABOUT

1. Did the Old Testament prophets speak of the Christian Church?
2. Could the people who lived under the Law come directly to God?
3. Why did God set up a system of priest and sacrifice?

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

Read: 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8

Augustine might have wondered what Paul had in mind when he wrote “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work,” or, as the Authorized Bible has it, “for the mystery of iniquity doth already work...” (2 Thess 2:7).

Christians today wonder why God, who has all power, allows Satan to roam the earth and do his evil work. Satan is not “the man of lawlessness,” though he does share his power with others. This lawless spirit is being restrained by God, or by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. More than that we cannot say for sure.

Antichrist is coming, but his influence is already here (1 John 2:18). Jesus said the world would be like it was in the days of Noah “full of violence” (Matt 24:37). Then the end would come.

Let us remember, God is in control, of the good and the bad. And He makes “all things” work together for the benefit of those who love Him (Rom 8:28).

TALK ABOUT

1. Mount Zion is a picture word. What does it represent?
2. What was the ‘glory’ that shone on Moses’ face (2 Cor 3:7)?
3. Why did Moses cover his face?

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