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Don't You Love a Mystery?

You are intrigued by a
puzzle to be solved... or a
code to be deciphered...



“Don’t You Love a Mystery”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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MAYBE IT DIDN'T HAPPEN THIS WAY AT your house. Maybe it did.

Christmas was just around the corner. There was guarded conversation going on - grown-ups whispering to each other and children exchanging significant glances. There were bulky packages put away in supposedly well hidden places. The air of secrecy was everywhere. You could hardly wait for Christmas to come, when all the MYSTERY would be made plain.

One of the dictionary definitions of "mystery" is this: "Something not understood or beyond understanding." Paul, in writing to believers in Colosse, used the word "mystery" twice in chapter one of the Book of Colossians. We might say those verses (Col. 1:26, 27) deal with

"The Mystery of the Indwelling Christ."

That first chapter speaks also of other mysteries, although they are not so labeled in the text.

Taken together they are:

- (1) *The Mystery of Fellowship (vs. 2-8)*
- (2) *The Mystery of Prayer (vs. 9-14)*
- (3) *The Mystery of Christ's Greatness (vs. 15-20)*
- (4) *The Mystery of Redeeming Grace (vs. 21-23)*
- (5) *The Mystery of the Indwelling Christ (vs. 26-29)*

Let us look at a few of these blessed truths that bring delight to our hearts, although we never can grasp their full meaning.

"The mystery of fellowship Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother ... To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ." (Col. 1:1)

In simplest terms, an "apostle" is a sent one.

Did you know that if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, enjoying His salvation, you have become a part of a blessed community-a fellowship of "sent ones"?

The miracle of the Christian faith is its mobility. It is a going faith. Jesus Himself said to His first followers, and the word comes down to us:

"As my Father hath sent me, so send I you ... All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach..." (John 20:21; Matt. 28:18,19)

If you have heard these words in your own heart, and if you are endeavoring to obey them, you are joined to hundreds of other saints of all ages who have been commissioned to represent our Lord, to GO in His name and by His authority. What an awesome privilege that is!

Motivation

The cohesive element in this fellowship is “the will of God.” Paul said: *“I am a sent one by the will of God.”* Each of us can echo this truth.

Contrary to popular opinion, the will of God is not something merely to be endured, to be lived through. It is, rather, direction from God to be recognized, appreciated and enjoyed. This “will of God” is to be manifested in the church, in the home, in the workplace - wherever we are. It can be active even in those situations that are painful to us, such as when we are relegated to an obscure post when we are sure we deserve better treatment.

The “will of God” encompasses where you are and what you are as well as the circumstances in which you find yourself. It gives God the opportunity for GOD to work through you.

Beloved child of God, are you in a rough place today? Then look up and say, “Thank you, Lord, for the situation I’m in. I don’t understand it. I certainly wouldn’t have chosen it. But I accept it because it is part of YOUR PLAN for me. Now, work out Your will today through me.”

And you know something? That’s just what He will do. Hallelujah!

Not only is the “will of God” a part of this blessed fellowship-something so other-worldly that it cannot be described adequately-but it also involves a special kind of participants.

Demonstration

“Saints and faithful brethren.” (Col. 1:2)

The word “saints” refers to what you are as God sees you. “Faithful brethren” applies to what you are - or ought to be - in the eyes of your fellow men.

The moment you trust Christ as your Savior, and by faith make Him the Lord of your life, that instant you become one of God’s special (“set apart”) ones. You don’t need to wait some hundreds of years to be canonized (if ever) by some ecclesiastical authority. No.

If you have been bought by the precious blood of Christ - and you know this is true on the basis of God's infallible Word - if you have been redeemed from the slave market of sin, adopted into the family of God, then He calls you His SAINT. He sees you through the Lord Jesus Christ who saved you and now intercedes for you. *"He ever liveth to make intercession for them [for you] who come unto God by him."* (Heb.7:25)

You may not feel like a saint. Sadly, you may not always behave like one. Circumstances and feelings fluctuate. Even so small a matter as the weather may affect your deportment. But God never changes His attitude toward you, once you have trusted Christ as your Saviour . You are His saint. Thank God for that.

Many a Christian lives his or her life governed by feelings. We hear: "I feel terrible about this-and-this ... I never can get over what so-and-so has done to me ... This is so hard to bear! ... This hurts me terribly."

All this may be true. I would not for a moment discount the reality of the pain you are suffering. The point I am trying to make is this: in all of the reality of your feelings, it is the point of view you determine to take that is important. It is the resultant attitude you carry with you that makes the difference between gloom and defeat and glorious victory. It is not how you FEEL that matters, but what God wants to accomplish in this circumstance. What is "the will of God" for me this moment?

I can guarantee that when the focus of your life changes from yourself to GOD, everything else about you will change, too, and you will begin to reflect the very glory of God in your difficult situation.

Note, in particular: Faithful brethren.

It is one thing for you to know that you have trusted Christ as your Savior and therefore possess eternal life. It is an altogether different thing for you to live day by day in such a manner that people will say of you: "He's faithful. He's genuine. He's a brother (or sister) I can trust."

Some Christians are so saintly (doctrinally acceptable) that for all practical purposes they are not good for much else. Others, it must be admitted, are so feverishly busy being "faithful" - chalking up good deeds they have done that they have little time to enjoy the presence of God. The objective we should strive for is a healthy balance between those two concepts.

As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ each of us can say: "God knows me completely. He has

loved me with an everlasting love. He has adopted me into the family of redeemed ones. I am a joint heir with Christ."

At the same time, though I am a "saint" in His eyes, I have work to do, in His strength and for His glory, and I had better be fully committed to doing it! Faithfulness, rather than genius, is the measure of success.

What does it mean to be faithful? It means:

... I recognize what my job is.

... I give to my work the very best effort I can command.

... I stay with the task until it is completed. When I was a student at Wheaton College and a young pastor, I heard of a colleague who was having great success in his ministry. I knew him to be a godly man, but certainly no great preacher.

I asked some of his parishioners, "Why do people flock to this man's church?"

"Oh," they told me, "that's no secret. Every workday morning at 5:30 he is at the gate of one of our big factories, giving out tracts, greeting the workers one by one and inviting them to come to church on Sunday. He really works at his job."

That man had learned the value of the formula: recognize that you have a task to perform. Give it your best effort. Stick with it until it is done. BE FAITHFUL.

No one can explain how this blessed fellowship among believers is created or maintained. It is a mystery. We know it involves a relationship with God and one with fellow believers. We ought to thank God for it-and press on in His name.

The mystery of prayer

"For this cause we also ... do not cease to PRAY for you." (Col. 1:9)

What cause? If Paul were here he probably would say, "Oh, don't you know? When we heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for fellow believers and the eternal hope that you cherish -as Epaphras told us about you when he came - we couldn't help but pray for you night and day!"

No one ever will be able to fathom the wonders of prayer. This divinely constituted means by which any needy soul can contact the almighty Creator of the universe can be enjoyed - but never explained.

In Colossians 1, which we are presently considering, and throughout the Word of God, we are given instructions as to how we ought to pray, if our prayers are to be effective.

Pray on the basis of the facts

"We heard." (Col. 1 :4)

The facts about the believers in Colosse were the basis of Paul's praying. We are not always like him in this practice, are we? Wouldn't you say that a great deal of our praying turns out to be formal, habitual, ritualized, interlarded with "filler" phrases when we don't know what to say next?

I can remember an occasion when I had a thorny problem to face, one involving action that seemed inevitable but that I did not want to take.

"O Lord," I began to pray, "You know ... O Lord ... I need Your help today ... O God, bless me ... " Suddenly I realized I was getting nowhere in my praying. I was not telling God the truth in simple straightforwardness.

Finally I blurted out, "O Lord, I don't like this whole business!" Then I told Him frankly about the raging feelings that I had inside me. I didn't try to change, or to soft-pedal, or to evade anything.

It was then that the dear Spirit of God took hold of my heart and mind and will. The situation was easily clarified and I was filled with praise to God.

Whether you pray only for yourself, or for others, tell it like it is. Pray on the basis of the facts. The Word of God has many examples of God's response to preciseness in prayer. Consider two of them.

HEZEKIAH. When this man received a threatening letter from the head of an adversary nation, what did he do?

“Hezekiah received the letter. . . and read it, and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord and prayed ... Open, Lord, thine eyes and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib which hath sent him to reproach the living God...” (2 Ki. 19:14-19)

Read the whole passage. Note the details in Hezekiah’s petition. What happened then? The prophet Isaiah was commissioned by God to take these cheering words to His servant Hezekiah: *“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: that which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I HAVE HEARD I will defend this city, for my own sake.” (2 Ki. 19:20,34)*

God honors prayer that withholds nothing.

Consider another example of factual praying.

NEHEMIAH. *When this “cupbearer to the king” heard that the walls of his beloved city of Jerusalem were broken down he “wept, and mourned and fasted and PRAYED before the God of heaven.” (Neh. 1:4)*

The answer came in the form of official permission, granted to Nehemiah by King Artaxerxes, to head an expedition for the rebuilding of the ruins. Note: definite prayer, clear answer.

“Almost at once Nehemiah met with sharp opposition from Sanballat and Geshem and Tobiah. They taunted and slandered God’s servants and sought to hinder their work of reconstruction. Nevertheless [said Nehemiah] we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night because of them.” (Neh. 4:9)

This was no time to pray in generalities: “Lord, get me out of this fix.” The petition was exact-“because of them”- and it was matched by practical action.

In chapter 6 of the Book of Nehemiah we read of the glorious results God gave: SO THE WALL WAS FINISHED ... *“And it came to pass that when all our enemies heard thereof.. they were much cast down in their own eyes, for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.” (Neh. 6:15, 16)*

Yes, beloved, God answers prayer. He waits for us to be specific in our asking, so that He can be almighty in His bestowing. Do we understand this procedure? No. It is a mystery - but it is also a glorious reality.

Pray with regularity

"We do not cease to pray for you." (Col. 1:9) You should pray when you feel like it; that is certainly true. But if you have an on-going program of praying—a healthy spiritual exercise independent of your feelings—that practice will do at least two things for you, both of them good. It will keep you from offering the excuse, "I'm too busy now; I'll pray some other time." And it will make it hard, if not impossible, for Satan to defeat you.

Pray with intensity

"We do not cease to PRAY ... and to DESIRE". (Col. 1:9)

The Greek word translated "desire" means to ask or plead or crave. What we need, beloved, is to bring our praying to the level of intensity. This is David Livingstone on his knees pleading for the continent of Africa. This is D. L. Moody beseeching God for a special touch as he begins a ministry overseas. This is John Knox crying, "Give me Scotland or I die."

It is the level of yearning that is important, not how loudly you pray or even how strongly you believe. Figure out what you really want from God and then talk to Him with earnestness.

Somebody reading these lines has a troubled home situation. If you are that person and if I should ask you, "What do you want?" you might reply, "I wish my husband would treat me and the children better," or "I wish my wife would be more responsive to me," or whatever. But if you looked deeper you would see that neither of these outcomes is what you actually yearn to have. What you want is a home full of peace ... and happiness ... and GOD, isn't it? You know that if you had that kind of home, everything else would fall into place.

A businessman said to me one day, "Bob, I'm getting a divorce." I was shocked, for I supposed that he was happily married. He went on: "I've never been really happy in my home. Now I've met this fine young woman who works for me here, and I plan to divorce my wife and marry this girl."

"Oh," I said, "don't do that! I'm going to pray that you won't."

And I did pray—for hours, for this man, his wife and the whole situation. The following Sunday, surprisingly, they both came to my church. They had attended occasionally, but never had committed themselves to Jesus Christ.

That day, when I gave the invitation, they responded. Later, when the plan of salvation was

presented to them personally, each of them received Christ as Savior.

I saw them several days later, and this was what the wife told me: "You know, Pastor, when we got right with the Lord, right away everything went better with our marriage!"

The husband broke in, his face beaming. "Oh," he said, "it's just like a second honeymoon." Yes, "desire" is a strong word. It has a large place in this matter of our praying. It needs to be focused on those things in our lives that have eternal value.

Pray with perception

Paul's use of the word "desire" takes us to Mark 11:24 where the same word is used by our Lord: "*What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*"

In other words, visualize the answer. Thousands of self-help books emphasize the value of this visualizing process. They tell us that whatever the mind can conceive, the individual can achieve, and to an extent this is true.

What the Lord Jesus is giving to us, and what the Apostle Paul is repeating, is far more. It involves Almighty God-His will, His purpose, His power. It envisions divine enablement through the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit (if you are God's child through faith in Christ). The "picture," then, that you will draw, as you pray, will be of HIS accomplishment, through you-and it will be beyond anything that you, by yourself, could ever ask for or think of.

The mystery of Christ's greatness

"His dear Son." (Col. 1:13)

In one of the long sentences for which the Apostle Paul is noted, he presents his dear Lord in many aspects.

... *The Deliverer-*"delivered us from the power of darkness" (v. 13).

... *The Redeemer-*'redemption through his blood" (v. 14).

... *The One who forgives-*'forgiveness of sins" (v. 14).

... *The Image of God* (v. 15).

... *The Originator-* "all things created" (v. 16).

... *The Maintainer-* "all things consist" (v. 17).

... *The Head of the "Body"-*"the body, the church" (v. 18).

This is your Savior. Give yourself time to savor His greatness. We can look today at only a few of the concepts that Paul cites.

Redeemer

In whom we have redemption. (Col. 1:14) Redemption involves two things: lostness and the necessity for a price to be paid. The object may be a person (such as a slave), or a possession (perhaps a pawned treasure) or a relationship (as between two individuals once close to each other).

The cost of your salvation and mine was no less than the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the shedding of His blood for us.

Christ DIED for us. We utter the words too glibly. Have you ever seen a person die? Someone dear to you? At times the passing may be peaceful and quiet. At other times agonizing pain is involved.

Some who read these lines live with the memory of horrible days of warfare. Perhaps you actually saw a pal of yours fall on a grenade before it exploded, in order to spare the lives, as he hoped, of his buddies, including you.

Dying can be horrible business. Christ DIED in agony for us. When we say we have redemption through His blood we are dealing with the basic agonies of a life given up for others. I urge you, dear friend, to spend some time with your Redeemer today, allowing the precious Holy Spirit to teach you something new about the indescribable willingness of the Lord Jesus Christ to DIE for you.

Paul speaks of Him also as the Great Originator.

Creator

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible ...” (Col. 1:16)

Everything that exists came from the creative hand of our blessed Lord. You say, “Every Christian knows that is true.” But do we really grasp the magnitude of this truth?

Christ not only called into being such things as the universe with its uncounted galaxies, the environment with its endless necessary variations, the atom with its awesome power He not only created these things but He also controls perfectly everything He made. Think about it! There is another aspect of creation that I want us to consider. It concerns us individually.

Let me tell you about Martha Moennich.

For many years this dear lady was known as a “missionary to missionaries.” She brought blessed insight from the Word to faithful but often discouraged representatives of the Lord in foreign fields and at times to groups in the United States.

Martha came to minister in the church in West Philadelphia where Coreen and I were located at the time. Though her visit occurred over fifty years ago, I still remember with great blessing some of the things she said.

“I learned,” she told us, “to trust Christ as my Savior and as my Creator as well. When I became aware from time to time of areas in my life that were not adequate, I would simply turn to Him and say, ‘Lord Jesus, do again Your work of creation! Create in me what You see is lacking in my life.’”

Use that language in your praying, beloved.

See how mightily God will work!

If the Son of God called continents into being and He did-is He not able to cause each of us to become more and more fully conformed to His image, if we trust Him?

He knows about you. He is aware of your inabilities as well as your strengths. Every detail of your life is entered in the divine computer, if we may use modern terms.

I ask you: What challenge do you face today?

Is it a job-related situation? Is it an inner feeling you can't master? Is it a requirement for skill or experience that you simply do not have? Now is the time to call on the creative power of your blessed Lord.

Ye are complete in him. Ye are in Christ Jesus, who of God is MADE unto us (created) wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. (Col. 2:10; I Cor. 1:30)

Accept by faith the full provision made possible for your every need. The death, resurrection and continuing intercession of your blessed Lord assure you of this unlimited supply.

Friend

“Henceforth I call you not servants ... but I have called you friends.” (John 15:15)

We have been looking at “the great God our Savior,” using Paul’s list of His attributes. John supplies another characteristic; he says Jesus wants to be our FRIEND.

“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” (John 15:14)

To be a friend of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, is not something unusual: it is the normal relationship for every Christian. There is an old song that emphasizes that point.

Friendship with Jesus, Fellowship divine; Oh, what blessed sweet communion, Jesus is a Friend of mine!

I can still hear my father sing those words as he sat in his favorite rocking chair after supper. He must have felt lonely very often. His dear Daisy, my mother, was with the Lord and he and I were living alone together for some years.

Sometimes when he had finished singing he would look at me fondly and say, “Well, hallelujah, my boy!” I never knew all that meant, but I was sure it implied a special closeness to his blessed Lord.

Are you and Jesus good friends? Can you tell him everything-and do you? He wants to be close to you. His yearning for you and for me inexplicable though it always will be-is part of the mystery of His greatness: Redeemer, Creator, Friend.

The mystery of redeeming grace

Christ’s purpose: *“To present you [who receive him as Savior] holy, and un-blameable and unprovable in his sight.” (Col. 1 :22)*

What an assignment! What a mystery! First, the Lord Jesus pronounces you *Holy*.” You have righteousness that is not your own; it is HIS, imputed to you. That new nature takes care of all of Satan’s attacks and every accusation leveled against you. It answers every haunting charge of your own guilty conscience. It assures you, a sinner, of sharing the very nature of God.

Second, the Lord Jesus pronounces you *above blame*. Not perfect-NEVER perfect-you are free of chargeable wrongdoing only because of the atoning blood of Christ that covers you.

Third, the Lord Jesus pronounces you unprovable. You are free of all condemning judgment. Though as a believer in the Lord Jesus you will one day face the record of your words and actions, the object of that search will be rewards, not condemnation for sin.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1)

Notice the phrase "in his sight" (v. 22).

When you are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father looks at you through Him, through His faithful work on your behalf at Calvary. Each of us can say, "Christ died for me. He rose for me. He represents me before a holy God. I have no fear." When you grasp that blessed truth, as Paul did, you can go further with him. He said, *"Now [I] rejoice in my sufferings for you"* (v. 24).

Here is an unfathomable condition if there ever was one: the mystery of suffering. It touches everyone of us, in one way or another. But with Paul it actually became a ministry to others - "for you," his friends in Colosse. All of this could be possible, for Paul and for us, only by God's redeeming grace and submission to His almighty power. Let me give you an illustration of how, a few years ago, I saw this principle at work.

A dear missionary lady came to the States and to our home, ostensibly to have some dental work done before her return to her field of service. We came to know her well.

In the course of a full examination, cancer was discovered. Though she was helped at the time and able to return to her duties abroad, it was not long before she needed to come back this time for extensive surgery.

The prognosis was not encouraging, and I admit I was bothered by that fact. Here was a young woman, exceptionally gifted with a beautiful voice and personality, adored by her husband and family, greatly needed on the mission field. Why was her life apparently cut short? It was some time later that I learned certain facts that showed the whole experience in a different light.

The missionary lady was in the hospital for twenty-one days. On each of those days - mark you, each one!- at least one person, often more than one, was led to Christ by this dear suffering saint. Hers was a "ministry" right up to the end. Her concern was, like Paul's, "for you," for those around her. God was glorified and continues to be through those who come to know Him as

Savior and Lord.

Some of you are going through experiences of terrible pain-physical, emotional, financial. I want you to realize, beloved, that when your heart is broken, when your body is pain-ridden, when your burden seems too heavy to bear, these are the times when you need to look up and say, "Dear God, my Father, help me to MINISTER to somebody."

Then I can rejoice, for the suffering will payout in eternity.”

The mystery of the indwelling Christ

“This mystery ... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory ...” (Col. 1 :27)

The mystery of Redeeming Grace, that we have just considered, and the Mystery of the Indwelling Christ cannot be separated; they belong together. The truth of “Christ in you” constitutes the very dynamics of the gospel. It declares that you must accept and open your life to a PERSON, the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you do that—there is HOPE: *“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

The blessed Spirit of God is the One given to reveal Christ. He comes to indwell the believer and to make Christ visible in everyday life. This was new truth to Gentile believers to whom Paul spoke. It is unknown also to many a Christian today.

Do you understand how this blessed transformation is brought about? Of course you don’t! Even Paul called this blessed relation to Christ a “mystery.” (Col. 1:27)

Someone may say, “If we cannot understand fully the deep truths you have been talking about, of what good are they?” I have found this to be true:

I am humbled by God’s mysteries—They show how little I know.

I am challenged by God’s mysteries—They invite study and contemplation.

I am strengthened by God’s mysteries—Faith and obedience are made to grow.

Don’t you love a mystery?

