

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

October 2014

“Mystical” is that wonderful word we apply to things that have ultimate meaning but elude our understanding. Concerning life in the Spirit, the mystical reality is a place where two roads converge. The roads are mystery and passion. Where mystery and passion meet, we are often bewildered but never bored. At this junction we sometimes crave God most but understand Him the least. Here we experience the warm and exotic wonder that tells us we are in the vicinity of God. God will not - well, He cannot declare Himself fully to us. He is too vast, we are too finite. Our brains only weigh three pounds! How in such light and little human organs could the Great God ever fully described Himself? The most powerful passion focuses on things too wonderful to be understood. Such great truths cut across our lives and we feel the weight of glory.

And where is the center of this passion - this elation that gives the mystery its power? The Spirit of God gives life - creates meaning - His symbols are flame and wind. There is nothing that can ignite our living like the blessed Spirit of Acts 2. Fire and wind are his twin Eagles! The Spirit swoops into our dull flat earthbound philosophies as a wind-driven fire that keeps our faith from being dead and our confessions from being lifeless.

God waits for those who will love Him and who hunger for things to excellent to be understood. Sometimes even as we hunger for God our longing is swallowed up by our need for it.

The ultimate redeeming hunger is to be changed to the glory of His image - to be conformed to His image. Paul expressed this desire in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "*We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image*". This is Narcissus in reverse! The poor Greek kid! He looked into the pond, saw himself, and drowned trying to embrace his own ego. On the other hand, we look into a glass and see Jesus and are given life by our desire to become the Christ in our mirror.

"In other words," the apostle says, "hang a picture of Christ in the gallery of your heart. Determine you will be the living portrait of this inner picture, and your desire in time will make it happen." This is the hunger that makes the mystery usable.

I have no need to understand those mysteries beyond all understanding, only to encounter them. But I am eager to find the Place of His coming. I cannot by the soul power of my frail hunger entice His presence. But if I listen and scan my own spiritual boredom, I can still hear the roar of the wind and see the dancing flames. I run into his warm reality and know that all I have sought - God, heaven, Jesus - are indeed real!

What lies behind this drive? The Spirit Himself! And I am consumed by my need to find Him. Yes, I have drunk of such fire, but it was never enough. I thought it was at the time, but wherever Heaven touches Earth, a desire for Christ-likeness is addicting. Having tasted it, we must taste it more and more. Having heard it, we cannot find rest until we hear it again. When the mystery is gone, so is the vitality of the Church. I believe we are now in such an advanced stage of spiritual decline, unless we figure out how to

get mystery back in the Church, her life will continue to wane. We have how-to'd as long as we can. We must put the wind and fire back in our communion.

One of the first churches I worked at planned a revival. The pastor, to contrive the hype he thought necessary invited a "flaming evangelist" in to whip up the troops with life and bring a little excitement into his old dead church. One night of the revival, his stuffy congregation became inflamed with confession and spiritual neediness. The old altar, long dead, was thronged with repentant hearts. But the next night the pastor apologized for allowing the church to go overboard with emotion. The fledgling fire begging a chance to become a real inferno was swallowed up by the extinguisher of religious practice. The Spirit never again visited. The pastor left the ministry with the church secretary and his youth intern – me - wound up in prison!

What a pity. There is no life in business - as - usual. We must have the Spirit or we are only shallow, small, explainable people. Every week in various forms; classes, church services, committees, meetings, people go about doing what they always do, saying the right things, but they're spiritually dead. There's no life there. It's just business as usual - going through the motions. And it's sad because I don't think they know what to do to go about getting what they are missing.

Once upon a time there was a group of people in Ephesus who believed themselves to be true Christians. Except for the fact that they were pre-modern, two thousand years out of sync with our day and lacking a very large Christian publishing and media empire or a Christian therapeutic community, they seem to be rather typically suburban. Seeing them super-imposed upon our own day and age, they no doubt put together their thesis and studied their Greek and Hebrew, had a format for every service, including worship - two to four songs then get out of the way for the most important part of the service. They power-pointed their sermons and teachings.

Acts 19:1-2 does not say exactly how Paul met these believers, but when he met them, he felt compelled to ask, "*Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?*"

In short, they replied, no we have not. In fact, the term 'Holy Spirit' is unfamiliar to us," confused the Ephesians.

The Ephesians are not to be blamed for their confusion. I'm afraid the blame is to be laid at the feet of Apollos. He was the great communicator of the day. He no doubt "packed the pews - a millennium before there were pews - to hear his teachings and sermons. He had mastered the homiletic one-liner. "Amen walls"! It was no doubt hard to hear his sermons, for the applause was frequent. The cheers unhooked the precepts of his standing room only speeches. Still, finding good theology in his sermons was not easy. Finding the Holy Spirit was impossible! In the best moments of Church history, the Holy Spirit has dominated and empowered the Christian sermon. Apollos wasn't just an anomaly - a one-time person who died, never to reappear. Apollos has lived throughout time in every generation that tried to substitute hype for fire. Jesus is the only authentic alternative to hype. When he is our hunger, we shall see Pentecost. A Pentecost not created by ad campaigns and Christian aerobics. We find a church filled with yearning disciples - each of which is a blank page given to God with a plea for His direction. A church on its knees understands the power it invokes. Yet how casually we play with fire. How little we esteem it. We seek the Empowering Spirit, but give us the Spirit of Acts 2 if you don't mind. We like the way He was always doing unexplainable things.

There are other bogus spirits to be sure. There is a concert artist spirit who knows when to snap his fingers or dance in the aisle. There is the politically correct spirit who can "him and her" his way through a worship service, never offending any minority or sexual preference group. There is the institutional spirit, who smiles his broad preferences, because they're in charge and God put them there, over every

program happening. There is the ecumenical spirit, who is so tolerant He plays hearts with the Pharisees and spades with the hypocrites. This spirit is so tolerant it has convinced many that believing less or whatever they've got in their 'religious box' is better than believing more. That mutual acceptance is better when it is based on small ideas.

People play at church. Especially if we give them hazy definitions of Christ. We don't trust the Spirit to preserve and advance the church. I believe most churches are no longer free to give Him full reign. We're afraid that if we really trust Him, He will have us behaving like some wild televangelist or something, and the thought of wildfire is so repugnant to some that they avoid fire altogether. Stepping over the edge of propriety in worship can set people with different worship tastes fighting about how much "hang loose" is too much. Those who are not proper or stuck in the 1970s worship may feel there's such a thing as too much joy. Don't risk playing around with a high-voltage of Pentecostal circuitry.

On the other hand you can lose people when talking about the deeper life movement. In a Mercedes world, you can't talk much about self-denial.

We are ever reluctant to embrace the mystery of the power of Godliness. We have long emphasized preaching the truth and have usually defined truth as biblical facts that can be ingested and defended. We forget that facts do not produce life, only the mystery of Godliness can do that. The key question for vitality is not "Do you have the facts of the faith"? But, "Are you in touch with the Mystery that empowers?"

Spiritually hungry people outside of Christ do not come to the Church to be educated. They come seeking the meaning that grows from the Mystery that redeems and invigorates. To preach only the "facts" or only the "passion" or only the "fun", is to only preach half the gospel. The other half of the gospel is not preached into people: it is ushered into them by the wind and the fire.

I am convinced that most people don't really know how to articulate what they want out of Church. In short they want Jesus, but the Apollos tale in Acts proves the danger of an incomplete Christ. They want His Spirit to permeate their lives, but they don't know Him as the wind and fire. The validity of every religious gathering is to be evaluated by Paul's question, "*Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed*"? This really messes with dispensationalists and dogmatic theologians.

The Ephesians had been ravaged by glitz and glamour but, alas they confessed, "*We have not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit.*" Thus begins the apostles doctrinal repair work. Properly, wind and fire were to be the methodology of the Kingdom. It is odd that the Ephesians had heard of Jesus but not the Holy Spirit. But since the Holy Spirit is one with Jesus, it would appear that they did not have all of Jesus that was to be had. Indeed, they seem to have been surviving on half-a-Jesus. This savior always seems to be Jesus, but he hides in the shadows of half-truths and "stick – it – in – your - face" ideology that says "it's my way or the highway" theology, and the spiritually naïve minds of immature Christians of all ages. They teach from good outlines, but we need more. We need to embrace the mystery of the Spirit. It is odd that Apollos never noticed he was preaching half-the-gospel. Pentecost had come and gone. There had been tongues of flame and rushing wind. Three thousand people had been converted. The Holy Spirit was moving like a powerful mist of grace across the dry earth. Jesus was on the planet and mystery was His method. Only Apollos didn't know. After all he had his programs and his calendar was full and he was popular. Just like today, if you are popular enough, you can go a long way on a shallow doctrine driven only by hype. But sooner or later the mystery of things too excellent to understand must come, and we will reject the emptiness of worship service that have no real worship in them. We look for substitutes to create an aura of life in the Spirit.

All those who serve Christ and anything else become aware that serving Christ is somewhat easier than living Christ. As doing is easier than being, serving is easier than loving. In fact for a great many believers, serving becomes a substitute for loving.

Serving does not make happy Christians, only loving will do that. Serving without love becomes at best a dull habit that gives us a place in the community while it steals our relationship with Christ.

The question is how do you escape serving wooden religious habits long enough to really begin loving God and enjoying the mystery of Godliness? The answer lies in the mystery of the Holy Spirit. When we learn to "be" instead of "do," the Spirit can begin His work.

The one valid question for anyone's church is, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed"? How can we tell that the Holy Spirit is there? Who can describe every aspect of the way He works? When He first came in Acts, His coming seemed to be marked by a kind of madness, everyone babbling in languages they had never learned and acting in some ways as if they were drunk. Perhaps they were. Inebriated by the Spirit, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess but be filled with the Spirit", said the apostle. Spirit intoxication! A glorious addiction. If we but take one sip of the Pneuma. Be a Pneumaholic. We may not be wholly doctrinal or crisply theological but we are alive and the life is in the wind and fire. Wind that blows to disorient our self-righteousness. Fire that burns to ashes our need for always doing it the way we've always done it. This worship vitality often comes in what might be called Glorious Chaos!

"Amor non tenet ordinam" - love does not concern itself with order. In fact, if Acts 2 is to be trusted, warm chaos is a better way to measure God's visitation than a printed order of worship. The chaotic fire of Acts 2 is the only fire that ever mattered! And so I crave the holy flame.

Jesus is the only meal for the spiritually hungry. I seek Him in the ordinary ways and in the things that have too much excellence for me. And when the fire comes and I feel its warmth, I know the mystery that redeems. I still understand so little, but then we are not called to understand everything about God, only to attend Him. And I know that when I draw near to God, I am a prisoner of the only reality there is.

The reality of the divine mystery!

I'm praying that all of you that read this will receive the Holy Spirit since you believed because of your passion to encounter His mystery!

Be filled! There really is more.....

Chief

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