

The Mystical Style
Eph 3:14-19, Col 3:1-4

Brothers and sisters, I wonder if you are familiar with the saying “familiarity breeds contempt.”

It is a proverbial expression which asserts that once you gain extensive knowledge of something it no longer fascinates you, and it loses its appeal... or if you end up spending too much time with someone you start to take them for granted, and you don’t treat them with the respect they deserve – you become cavalier with them.

So this is why that catchy hit song on the radio begins to sound repetitive and predictable after you’ve heard it for the 5th week in a row and it becomes downright annoying after 10th week.

And this is why after some years have gone by – when you step back and look at your life and you observe that you have been doing the same job, hanging out with the same people, going to the same restaurants and vacation spots, driving the

same car – you still have the same hairstyle you did in college! You see all this same old same old, and its so very familiar and predictable that your life becomes boring and uninspiring to you.

And believe it or not brothers and sisters this can happen in our relationship with God as well.

Not in the sense that its possible to learn too much about God or spend too much time with God – but in the sense that our Christian lives can fall into a familiar pattern and routine and we just assume that our relationship with God is going to automatically continue to grow without any intentional effort on our part.

And so the years go by and we regularly go to church and sing the songs and listen to the sermons – week in and week out... we do our volunteering to help out here and there, we read the bible, we pray – and at some point we step back and look at our spiritual life and we see that familiar routine and it’s the same old same old – so predictable and boring – so very

uninspiring. And we realize that that we've plateaued and we're stuck in a rut.

And its not like we can go back to the scriptures to discover something new that we didn't know before – we've been reading the bible for years and we are very familiar with it...

Its not that we don't believe in God or that we're doubting God or in a crisis of faith about God, or wondering about God – we already know what we need to know about God. He's almighty, he's all-knowing, he's everywhere at once, no beginning no end – ya we know all about God, we're very familiar with all that...

So even in our Christian walk, our faith life, our relationship with God – familiarity can breed contempt.

Brothers and sisters I don't know if you have ever experienced something like this in your personal life or in your spiritual life – but when you hit that point where you feel like everything is the same old same old and its dull and boring and you're just

too familiar with it... well you begin to look at making some changes to inspire you and get you out of your rut and give you a boost to get off that plateau.

So maybe you decide to get a new haircut, buy some new clothes, or a new car... or you decide you're going to take an exotic trip to somewhere you've never been before – like Lethbridge!

But if you are wanting to get closer to God then maybe you start looking for ways the bible can speak to the issues of your everyday life, or you go to a big Christian conference with inspiring speakers, or you go on a short-term mission trip – or God forbid – you consider changing churches because you're thinking that maybe a change in scenery is what you need to give your relationship with God a boost.

So, if you can relate to what I'm talking about brothers and sisters, then I hope you are motivated and willing to continue to explore the various ways that we can grow spiritually.

And while each of the nine different styles offers you a particular focus that might just be the inspiration you are looking for – and a worship conference would certainly be a way that you could focus on some Enthusiastic growth, a short-term mission trip would be perfect for the Sharing style... can I humbly suggest that if spiritual boredom is what you are suffering from that you consider looking into the Mystical style.

Because brothers and sisters the strength of the Mystical style is that we learn to rest in the presence of God, contemplate who God truly is, and enjoy Him solely for who He is – and not just because of what He can do for us.

And when we are stuck in a rut and uninspired in our relationship with God, what we truly need is a renewed vision of the greatness, awesomeness, and majesty – and especially the mystery of God.

And the Mystical style is all about being captivated by that mystery and simply resting in it... instead of trying to probe it

and understand it and grapple with it - because truly brothers and sisters, what else can you do when you encounter the actual presence of the Living God?

Now, the irony of the Mystical style is that when we are looking at it from the outside - it actually looks kind of plain and boring and uninspiring.

And while its located in the Blue zone, right alongside the Enthusiastic style, the Mystical style is quite opposite to the Enthusiastic style in many respects – most notably that the Enthusiastic style looks inspirational with its emphasis on the manifestations, miracles and the demonstrations of power from the Holy Spirit.

Whereas the Mystical style is quiet, contemplative, meditative, and focused on the internal presence of the Holy Spirit. In this way the Mystical style is more similar to the Ascetic, but without the disciplined austerity of that style.

Now up to this point I have avoided saying anything about “if the Mystical style is your style” because if there is one thing that characterizes Mystical style people is that they hate being characterized by various styles or put into categories and systematic ways of looking at spiritual things and experiencing the presence of the Triune God.

And of course, that is exactly what we are doing with this sermon series on nine ways to grow spiritually, finding your natural and opposites styles by taking the survey, and learning how to keep your strength from becoming your weakness by making sure you do not neglect the difficult and unpleasant level B growth in your opposite style.

This is a very systematic and categorical way of being spiritual and Mystics really do not like it.

So let me just say, for anyone who is a Mystic, that I totally recognize that this is just a tool to help us, and that the point of having an organized way of learning about spiritual growth

and spiritual growth principles is simply to help people grow in their experience of God – that’s the goal.

We must never confuse this content and these categories about how we experience God with the experience of God himself... and learning about principles of spiritual growth and practicing those principles are not be confused with God’s actual presence.

In the Mystical style one we realize that we have far more ability to describe what God is not – in comparison with our creaturely limits and boundaries – than we do to positively describe and understand who God is. Does that make sense?

If God is uncreated and we are created – how do we bridge that existential reality gap between human and divine to begin to grasp who God truly is?

If God is three persons in one and yet we are only one person in one – how do we fully comprehend what it is like to exist as a Triune being. How can we even describe that?

And it's not just a matter of figuring out how to say it in the right way – it's actually beyond our comprehension of reality – it is a mystery. It's something that we can't know or discover on our own unless it is shown to us- revealed to us.

And so even as we spell out the doctrine of the Trinity to help us know and understand God, for a Mystic it will always fail to do justice to what it attempts to convey. How can mere words deliver God and His presence to us?

The great author and Christian teacher C.S. Lewis encountered this challenge during one of his lectures from someone who I believe was of the mystical style. He describes this exchange in his book *Mere Christianity*.

He writes *"I remember once when I had been giving a talk to the R.A.F., an old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, 'I've no use for all that stuff. But, mind you, I'm a religious man too. I know there's a God. I've felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's just why I don't believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To*

anyone who's met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal!'"

Are you catching the mystical style from this fellow? And how the experience of the presence of the reality of God in who He truly is makes any attempts to describe Him seem insufficient?

Mystics will even find the scriptures to be inadequate for capturing the full reality of the experience of God's presence. They will be the first ones to remind us that the fullness of God in His Triune being can not be contained in, or limited to, a book.

And C.S. Lewis acknowledged this about his critic's mystical experience – he says *"Now in a sense I quite agreed with that man. I think he had probably had a real experience of God in the desert. And when he turned from that experience to the Christian creeds, I think he really was turning from something real to something less real. In the same way, if a man has once looked at the Atlantic from the beach, and then goes and looks at a map of the Atlantic, he also will be turning from*

something real to something less real: turning from real waves to a bit of coloured paper.”

So brothers and sisters I hope we're starting to see why we can plateau and get stuck in a rut in our relationship with God when we believe that scripture is equal to God, or that our worship and charity activities are equal to God. That's falling into the trap of confusing God himself with things that reveal Him or serve Him.

But if we are wanting to get out of our “all-to-familiar rut” and encounter God's presence – how do we do that? God is the Sovereign God so we can't simply command or will His presence to manifest itself on demand for our experiential benefit.

So how can we learn to grow in the Mystical style?

Well, in spite of what we've just said about not confusing God with the scriptures – we're going to turn to the scriptures,

because while they are not God – they are God's revelation of Himself to us.

And brothers and sisters God intends for the scriptures to lead us into an experience of His presence, AND to take us further and deeper into His presence than what we have already become familiar with.

So, In this regard C.S. Lewis's example of the ocean map is very helpful – especially when the path to growing deeper into God's presence is not familiar to us and we need to be shown the way.

C.S. Lewis says; while *“the map is admittedly only coloured paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want*

to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you are content with walks on the beach, your own glimpses are far more fun than looking at a map. But the map is going to be more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America."

So brothers and sisters – if we want to grow deeper into the experience of the presence of God then let us consider how the scriptures encourage and guide us in doing that.

Now, since we are looking at the Mystical style – and not the Scripture-Driven style – we will approach our readings this morning in a meditative, contemplative manner as opposed to looking at all the structure, grammar, and word studies – that is what Mystical style people need to do for their level B growth – keeping in mind C.S. Lewis' advice about maps.

So in keeping with the Mystical style we are going to quiet ourselves before we read, quiet our minds, quiet our hearts, assume a posture before God of humility and openness, ready

to receive what He will give us as we read through the passage and reflect and meditate on it.

So please turn with me to Ephesians 13:14-19 and we'll engage this passage together.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father" - this is exactly the posture that we are starting in. Kneeling before God in our spirits, we are humble and acknowledge that God is so much more than we are as human beings.

"from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray..." Prayer... but not the hard-working intercessory, standing-in-the gap, speaking in tongues kind of prayer. Just a quiet, earnest, modest, intimate prayer – the kind of prayer that calls God Abba, Father.

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." Here we have a path being shown to us – directing us to focus on our inner being, where in response to this scripture prayer we can

trust that God is giving us power to strengthen us. So, we focus on our inner being. And this is where we need time, uninterrupted time and quiet to do this.

“so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Our inner being needs to be Spiritually strengthened in order to host the presence of Jesus Christ... dwell on that, reflect on that, mull it over – ask for more strengthening.

But most of all recognize that Jesus Christ is dwelling in us. The one in whom all the fullness of God dwells – is dwelling in the core of who we are – at the very center of our identity. Reflect on the implications of that for our identity.

And notice that we now have a path and a place to go and meet with Christ, courtesy of the Holy Spirit.

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power.” So, we see prayer again... this kind of quiet unassuming prayer is so important in asking to experience the presence of God.

And then, once Christ dwells in our hearts after the Holy Spirit’s power has strengthened our inner being in order to host Christ, this makes us rooted and established in love, the particular love which God the Father demonstrates to us by sending the Son and the Spirit.

But reflect on that image of being rooted, being established – what does that look like for you?

How does that put you in a good position to receive more power?

Certainly when love is your foundation... the love of God in Christ, then you can be trusted with power, and trusted to use it for God’s people, for the building up and empowering of those whom Christ came to save.

“together with all the Lord’s holy people,” even the mystical style with its internal focus is not private and individual, spiritual growth is for the church, it is communal.

So what are we empowered for? Service, action, witnessing?

Not in this case, but rather *“to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.”* Contemplate why we need spiritual power to grasp this... to fathom the vastness of Christ’s love... this is what we are not yet familiar with, we must explore it – wander in it, lose ourselves in it, rest in it.

“and to know this love that surpasses knowledge— that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” The vastness of Christ’s love is a mystery – it surpasses our ability to understand it from a place of similar comparison... why Christ would leave behind his glory, take on human flesh, redeem our human nature, subjecting himself to the limits and conditions of a creaturely being.

And... here’s where spending time in contemplation will show us the limits of our knowledge and the need for empowerment to grasp Jesus’ love. He took on ALL of the sin of those He would save, ALL their sin and sins.

Not just the ones you are glad He personally forgave you for, but also the horrible ones that were perpetrated against you...

the atrocities perpetrated against innocents... and the crimes so terrible they do not deserve to be forgiven.

And Christ’s love moved Him to choose to suffer hell and the wrath of God to pay the penalty for ALL these. We have no place from which to understand that - it surpasses our capacity. We need the Holy Spirit’s power to be able to accept and grasp this

And even so - It is a mystery that we will never become too familiar with, and in the face of it we would do well to listen to the Mystical style advice – Don’t just do something... stand there! Rest in it.

As you do, the Holy Spirit will make you increasingly aware of the real presence of God, it is no longer about bible verses and theological concepts but the reality to which they are pointing you – the fullness of God in Jesus Christ increasing in you more and more through the Holy Spirit.

The presence of God filling you – the wonder and the mystery of the Uncreated Creator of all things who is intimately and immanently in us and with us and revealing Himself to us.

So brothers and sisters, familiarity may breed contempt – but contemplation on the mysteries of God will bring us into His presence.

Let us leave the familiar and encounter the mystery. Amen