

To God Alone Be The Glory

Hey, pssst, I know a secret. In fact, I know a whole bunch of secrets. And I'm not going to tell you any of them. No way. Not unless you are willing to go through the secret process to be initiated into our select group of people who are "in the know."

Now if the group I've just described is comprised of ten year olds and the secret process of initiation is catching a cricket and kissing it so that you can gain admittance to a tree house—well that's just fun. Almost makes you wish you were ten years old again so you could kiss a cricket. Who wants to be left out of that?

But if you are an adult and the secret group has books for you to study which teach that you get right with "God the Grand Architect" by paying your dues and obeying the "Grand Potentate" and doing good to people—well that's just dangerous because it contradicts the Bible which states repeatedly that you get right with the Triune God by a free gift of his love through Jesus' death on the cross, and you do good to people to thank God for saving you. These two ways of approaching God are the opposite of each other. But lots of people, sometimes even Christians, join the Masonic Lodge anyway, usually because they think they'll get ahead somehow. Either they don't realize that belonging to both the Lodge and the Church is a contradiction,

or they decide to live with the contradiction because they want the advantage of both. They don't want to be left out.

Pastor, why are you talking about the Masonic Lodge? Don't you realize that membership in the Lodge is falling these days? Sure, but there are other secret societies around. Some are okay to join because they are non-religious. But others are dangerous because they lead people away from Jesus as Savior.

Even more dangerous than the secret societies is our American society. The messages being sent to us every day is, "Don't be left out!" You're supposed to dress a certain way, but that keeps changing every year—and have you also noticed that the styles are getting more revealing rather than more modest? You're supposed to listen to certain music, but new artists keep coming along. Your body is supposed to look a certain way, and if that means a make-over that costs more than you make or something extreme like elective plastic surgery—you have to do it or you'll be left out. You'll be incomplete.

Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. There's nothing wrong with dressing fashionably and looking nice, as long as it doesn't tempt others to look at you in a sinful way. And there's nothing wrong with enjoying popular music, as long as it doesn't tempt you go against what God's Word says. So listen to the

words of each song, and compare them to God's Word. And there's nothing wrong with having a cell phone and social media accounts—as long as you're not trying to belong or fit in to a group because you have swallowed the lie of our modern society that somehow or other you are incomplete unless you go to a certain vacation spot or you attend college and get a real job or you get a tattoo or you get something pierced—so that you can belong. Surely you feel these pressures to complete yourself being thrust on you by our society. In order to follow Jesus in our society, you often have to live counter to our culture.

As it turns out, things haven't changed much since Bible times. One of the early churches, the one in Colosse, was hearing this same false message, "You're incomplete unless you..." Some false teachers had come to town. They believed that "god" was totally separate from the world because "god" is spiritual, and 'spirit' is 'the good force' in the universe. Then there's the evil force in the universe, 'matter' or 'material,' things you can see and touch. So they taught that your body is evil but your soul is good. Get it? They taught that god did not create this world. In fact god, they said, is very far removed. You can't get to him directly. You have to go through these intermediary beings. After you get to the first level of intermediary beings, they will introduce to you the next level. "Well, how many levels are there till I can actually get to god?" "Oh,

lots and lots and lots." And 'how to go through these intermediary beings and get to god' was a carefully guarded secret, a mystery. Are you feeling left out? Guess who knew the secret? Yup, just these few false teachers that had come to Colosse. Are you feeling a little ...incomplete? Well, the teachers were willing to share their knowledge, but if these Colossians would conform to new ways, eventually they could become complete, perfect.

If you are convinced that the Bible is the truth, these false teachers are probably creeping you out. Listen to what the apostle Paul has to say to his beloved Colossians. ²¹*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.* The apostle Paul is saying: You used to be left out, but not just because your bodies are evil. Even your mind, the thinking part of you that the false teachers claim is good—even that was born evil. All humans, except Jesus, are depraved in to the core. That's why even good people like you and I have evil behaviors. There's something wrong with you and me.

²²*But God now has the solution. He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body...* "Wait. I thought the body was evil. How could God use a body to reconcile us to God? ...unless those teachers are false, and the apostle Paul is the true teacher." Uh huh, now you're really getting it. [God] *has reconciled*

you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation. There's nothing gradual about salvation as the Bible teaches it. You don't have to go through many intermediary beings. In fact, it's not even a process. God saved you. Boom. It's done... ²³{assuming that} *you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.* I mean, come on! If you abandon the Lord and go with the world, how can you still expect God to say you're okay the way you are. Stick with Jesus. Now that he's done all the work to save you completely, he does expect you to work at continuing with him. That means continuing in God's Word.

And that leads us to Miss Ring. Did anyone think I had forgotten about our dear teacher's 40th anniversary in the public ministry? This is something special. Not everyone can be a teacher—society needs all kinds of workers. But Miss Ring gets to help shape the future—she is a teacher. Not every teacher teaches in a school where the Word of God underlies all the subjects. But Miss Ring does. Not every Lutheran Elementary School teacher serves the Lord and his people for 40 years in a row. But Miss Ring has. God decided to grant her the privilege of teaching children that you don't have to do something to get God to love you—he already does. Jesus proved it by dying on the cross. She has been inoculating

children against all kinds of ideas that might lead them away from the Lord. Jesus is the Savior, the only Savior we need. *This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant, and of which you, Miss Ring, are a servant.*

Are you crazy, Molly? Surely you have noticed that people in our society want to be at the top, and if not the top, then at least not the bottom. They want to be number one. They want to be treated like they are better than everyone else. But by God's grace, you have been saying through your actions what the apostle Paul wrote: **I HAVE BECOME THE CHURCH'S SERVANT.**

You were told before you started in ministry that it would involve some suffering. You were even told that the most painful blows would come from people in the church, those who called you to come and teach, people who don't realize when they are being inconsiderate, or unkind, or how much it hurts when they leave you out. But after you experienced some of the suffering that comes to those in public ministry of the church, you joined the apostle Paul in saying, ²⁴*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.* You realized, of course, that your suffering doesn't finish Christ's work: Jesus redeemed all sinners already.

But the work of sharing the gospel is still unfinished. And sharing the gospel about Jesus is necessary if children are to grow up into Christly adults. And if you share the gospel, suffering will find you, just because you belong to Jesus, and you want to share him with others, and you aren't satisfied to be satisfactory. The gospel gets our best efforts, our best teaching. The gospel is what saved you. It's what motivated you to become a teacher of God's Word. That's why called workers say along with Paul, "*I rejoice in what was suffered for you,*" because that's the only way that anyone is brought to faith in Jesus and rescued from hell. If we have to suffer a little in order to keep people from suffering forever, we are willing, because that's how servants of the Lord think. ²⁵*I have become [the church's] servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the Word of God in its fullness—* ²⁶*the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.* The church is not a secret society. That's why Paul takes the word 'mystery' and gives it a new meaning. In the Bible the word 'mystery' means a truth that God had to reveal or else people wouldn't know it. But God did reveal it so that no one would be left out. God wants everyone to be saved. ²⁷*To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* Did you catch the big mystery? It's that Christ himself, our Savior, is willing to live

inside each believer. No going through layers and levels of intermediaries. God is here in our hearts by faith in Jesus. ²⁸*We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone* (because no one is to be left out) *with all wisdom* (so that you have the complete story) *so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.* In Christ God is already making us more and more complete. And on the last day we will be presented before God completely complete.

Uf-dah. This ministry stuff sounds like a lot of hard work. But, as you know, Miss Ring, from your forty years of servanthood to the church, God provides the energy. Paul says, ²⁹*To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.* Your students, their parents, and anyone who takes the time to learn what you do—we have all seen God's energy working in you powerfully. We are confident that you will continue to struggle with all his energy to spread the gospel among us for the next five to ten years. And because God has provided you to us as a gift, we count ourselves blessed. As you continue being a servant of the church, we hope many will follow your example so that they too may find ways to become servants of the church. We want God's energy to work in all of us so that we all share the gospel with others. The Holy Spirit will work through the gospel, and he bring at least some to faith in Jesus Christ.