

## **Ainigma**

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1 Corinthians 13:12

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In *The Ghost and Mr. Chicken*, actor Don Knotts becomes an unlikely hero when he spent a night in a haunted house. And at a meal in his honor, Don's character says something that strikes a chord within my own heart. He asks "Who are you, Luther Heggs, to be a guest speaker at this luncheon." Okay, I don't call myself Luther, but I do ask myself "Who are you" quite often, especially when I realize that God wants to work through me. Let me clarify this. This is a mystery to me; an *Ainigma*. Like Luther, I know my imperfection, my weakness, my failures, and my sin. So I use these shortcomings as excuses, just like Moses.

When God spoke to Moses from the Burning Bush, He gave him a task. He was supposed to lead his people out of Egypt. But instead of simply obeying God, Moses made excuses. He says "Who am I". He says "I don't know your name, Lord". He complains that no one will believe him. And he points out his weaknesses. Yet even with all the reasons why he was the wrong person, or that he was not up to the task, God says "*Certainly, I shall be with you*" (Exodus 3:12).

Do you ever find yourself feeling a bit like Moses? Ask yourself why you would hesitate to be the instrument through which God works. Now, hopefully you understand where your gift has come from. You know who is to receive the glory (God). You understand who owns the gift. You are even motivated out of love. Yet you hesitate. You feel incompetent. You ask "Who am I". Why is this? What causes a believer like you and me to hesitate; to make all kinds of excuses why we can't or why we shouldn't be used by God?

The life of a Christian is often described as a journey. A person begins that journey toward God when they recognize their sin, when they understand that this sin has created a barrier between themselves and God, and when they realize that no religious experience or religious practice can overcome that sin. They take a further step in that journey when they understand that God has provided the way. And the way to God is through Jesus Christ. Those who believe in what Jesus accomplished upon the Cross will be saved. They are saved by their faith in God's promise.

Now a good believer doesn't stay there. This is a journey toward God, after all. And a person continues along in their journey through Bible Study, through prayer, or through the teaching of others. But do you want to know why I think we hesitate. I think it's because the more we study, the more we pray, and the closer we draw near to God, the more of our sin we see. This is the lesson Paul was trying to teach to the Roman church. He says, "*I would not have come to know sin except through the Law*". <sup>1</sup> (Romans 7:7). As Paul studied scripture, he became aware of what God said was right and what was wrong. And in himself, he saw what did not belong. Like Paul, we too see our weaknesses the closer we come to God. We see our failures. We see within ourselves too much of the world. And that's when we look to God and mutter "Who am I".

I thought things would be different. Perhaps you did as well. Somehow I thought coming to Christ meant I was stepping out of this world and entering into the Kingdom of heaven. But as much as I wish it were not so, I too am a person who seems to have one foot in the world and the other in God's Kingdom. What am I to do? What are we to do? The more time we spend with Christ in this Journey, the more of our sin we see. The closer we draw to God, the more our righteousness seems like filthy rags. I suspect this is what causes a believer like you and me to hesitate; to make all kinds of excuses why we can't or why we shouldn't be the instrument through which God works. But may I remind you of one important thing. None of this comes as a surprise to God.

As Paul is addressing the Corinthian believers about what Agape love is truly like, he makes an interesting statement about being fully known. "*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.*" <sup>2</sup> (1 Corinthians 13:12). When I think about the journey a person begins with God, they only know a part of their sin. In His mercy, God does not reveal it all at once. However, the more time they spend with Jesus, with His word, and listening to the Holy Spirit, what they saw dimly at first becomes fully revealed. As a Christian matures, they become more and more aware of the

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<sup>1</sup>New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Ro 7:7). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (1 Co 13:12). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

*ainigma* (ah-ee-nig-ma), the thing which at first is difficult to perceive. But as Paul has said here, none of this comes as a surprise to God. We have been fully known.

God was not shocked at your sin when you first came to Him. He is not surprised when we kneel before Him and confess our sin. I mean, you will never hear the Lord say, "You did what!" Our sin precedes us. It goes before us. It is not some enigma (a mystery) to God.

Why is it important that we know this? It's important because even though there is much about ourselves that remains an enigma (hidden) to us; even though we seem to be a people with one foot in God's Kingdom and the other in this world, God has still poured out His gifts to us so that we might be working and serving for the Glory of God and for our Neighbors good. Oh sure, we see our sin. We know who we are, but so does God. And I am amazed that even though He knows more of our sin than we do, He still has made a choice to tap us on the shoulder and assign us some task within His Kingdom. That's because God not once expects us to be perfect. He only asks that we have a heart bent toward God. He only asks that we incline toward Him; that we hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Sure God knows the things you struggle with; the bad habits, the lying tongue, the wandering eye, the passions of the flesh. But He also knows your heart. God knows which way a Christian's heart leans. And any Christian with a heart that is bent toward God is going to be gifted by God and asked by God to let Him work through them. I know that's surprising. See, that's the real mystery; the real *Ainigma*. But perhaps this is an *Ainigma* because we have fixed our eyes on our sin and not on the grace God has sent to us in return. Maybe it's because we've forgotten that, "*Grace is nothing more nor less than the face that love wears when it meets imperfection, weakness, failure, sin.*"<sup>3</sup> God has looked upon us and saw more sin than we might ever know. And yet He has chosen to pour out gifts. He still sets a task before us. He still desires to work through us. Are we worthy of this? Of course not. But this is the kind of Grace God pours out upon those with a heart bent toward Him; that He would allow us to serve Him in this way; that we, of all people, could be worthy to labor along side our Master.

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<sup>3</sup>*Free For The Taking – The Life-Changing Power of Grace*, by Joseph R. Cooke (out of print)