

Colossians 2:1–3

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians and Ephesians — Two Complementary Books

The two epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians are deeply related and deeply complementary. In Colossians, the aspect of the mystery that is pressed is *Christ in you, the hope of glory* (1:27). In Ephesians, it is that we are *in Christ*. These two aspects — Christ in us and we in Christ — are not simply the same thing repeated twice; they open up vast scope for the soul to explore. Corresponding to this: Colossians gives us the fullness of the Head, and Ephesians gives us the fullness of the body — *the fullness of him that filleth all in all* (Ephesians 1:23). The fullness of the Head is what chapter 2 especially presses; we are complete in Him who is the Head of all principality and power.

What Great Conflict — and for Laodicea

The apostle Paul had a great conflict — Darby's word is agony — of prayer for the saints at Colosse, at Laodicea, and for all who had not seen his face in the flesh. The mention of Laodicea here is not incidental. It appears again in chapter

4:16, where the epistle is to be read also in the church of the Laodiceans. The connection between Colossian truth and the condition at Laodicea is pointed to twice. Laodicea is reproved in Revelation 3 for its lukewarmness — a lukewarmness that arises precisely from a failure to have the fullness of Christ before the soul. The antidote to Laodiceanism is this very truth. And the Lord presents Himself to Laodicea as the beginning of the creation of God — which is the new creation — exactly the ground on which Colossians stands.

The apostle's agonising prayer was for something specific: not vague comfort, but comfort arising from being knit together in love and from attaining to the full assurance of understanding and the full knowledge of the mystery of God. Full knowledge — not merely acknowledgement that a mystery exists, but *epignosis*, full knowledge of it. The heart of a faithful soul surrounded by Laodicean lukewarmness needs exactly this: first, to be comforted; second, to be knit together with others, not to retreat into private comfort alone; and third, to advance into the full riches of what God has revealed.

Mystery in Scripture — Revealed, Not Concealed

A mystery in Scripture is something specific and important to understand. It is not something permanently obscure, withheld from all but an elite, as the mystery religions of the ancient world presented their secrets. A scriptural mystery is something that was once hidden — not revealed in former ages — but which has now, in the proper time and manner, been disclosed. The whole force of these mysteries is that they have been revealed and are meant to be understood by the saints. Where they remain dark to a soul, it is an opportunity for learning and growth in the knowledge of God's mind, not an occasion for mystification.

The mystery of God in verse 2 is the most comprehensive of all the mysteries — it comprehends all the others under it. Verse 3 shows why: it is in this mystery that *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. All the treasures. Not

some, not most — all. This is why the apostle's concern in verse 4 against being beguiled by enticing words is so weighty: to be drawn away from the mystery of God by philosophy and human tradition is to be drawn away from the only place where all wisdom and knowledge are found.

All Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge — The Antidote to Every Error

In whom — in the mystery of God, in Christ — are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. This statement has a direct practical bearing on every tendency to supplement or replace Christ with something from the intellectual or philosophical world. Wherever one looks first to what men have discovered about the human condition and then reaches back for some Christian application of it, one has already started at the wrong place. Paul started with the mystery of God and found all wisdom and knowledge there. Those who start somewhere else are looking for treasures where the Scripture says they are not to be found.

The parallel with what we have in Christ chapter 1 is important: the apostle prayed there that the Colossians might be filled with the full knowledge of *His will* in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Here the prayer reaches to the full knowledge of *the mystery*. These two things together — knowledge of His will and knowledge of the mystery — give character to the richness of what God has opened to His people. The book of Colossians is, as has been said, like a treasure chest. Open it and find riches. The chief treasure is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it is written in chapter 1:18: *that in all things he might have the preeminence*.

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