

Colossians 2:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-2/colossians-21-3/>

Paul is working hard to proclaim the mystery of God to the people of Colossae and the surrounding region because it is right and because it is in their best interest.

Paul concluded Chapter One of Colossians by describing the purpose of his proclamations, admonitions, and teachings—namely, that “we may present every man complete in Christ” ([see notes on Colossians 1:28-29](#)). This is the reason he is laboring. Chapter Two begins with the transition word *for*, connecting the last verse of Chapter One with the first of Chapter Two.

Paul wants the Colossians to understand that he is expending *great* effort on their *behalf*. *He hopes to* aid the Colossians to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work” (Colossians 1:10a). This reveals a stewardship he embraces willingly, but it is also costing him something. People only endure struggle because of the hope of an imagined future. Paul’s hope is for the Colossians to please God with their lives, to “present every man complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28b).

Paul says, *I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf*. He wants the Colossians to see the evidence of his own life. The word for *struggle* here is “agon” (from which we get the English word “agony”) which literally means “an assembly.” It was used to refer to the place where Greeks gathered for games, so it had the strong undertone of action. A place where a struggle occurs, contesting for something of consequence. When 2 Timothy 4:7 says, “I have fought the good fight” and when Hebrews 12:1 says, “let us run with endurance the race marked out for us,” both underlined words are “agon,” the word translated *struggle* here.

So, in essence, Paul is saying, “I am in the arena *on your behalf*.” He actually says, *how great a struggle I have on your behalf*. The word *have*, “echo” in Greek, means “to hold” or “to possess.” Paul is living in this arena. Fighting the fight. Running the race of life. Living as necessary to ensure that he pleases God. For Paul to please God, he needs to fulfill the work God gave him to do, which was to spread the message that Jesus transforms all who will receive Him and walk in His ways. In this case, Paul’s concern is the believers in Colossae. He desires that they understand that their “hope of glory” is to live out the power of the resurrection of Jesus dwelling within (Colossians 1:27).

Not just for those dwelling in Colossae, but also *for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face*. *Laodicea* was only about ten miles from Colossae. Both were Roman cities in the Roman province of Asia. Paul is reminding the Colossians they are not alone. The body of Christ is active all around the world. In Chapter One, Paul goes to great lengths to explicitly celebrate the universality of the gospel that is being proclaimed throughout the world. He does so again here, inviting a perspective of unity among the Colossians, their neighbors the Laodiceans, Paul, and others who have not seen his face (and, by implication all believers everywhere).

We often hear about Paul's missionary journeys and how he writes the epistles (letters) to the places he visited along the way. But we see here in Colossians that some of Paul's letters are to places he has not been. Places where his *face* has not been seen. The book of Romans is written to the church which was established there before Paul had visited it. Perhaps Paul is trying to emphasize to the Colossians that it is not just the churches he has been to or established that are on his heart; he is concerned with the spread of the gospel to all. Paul's unique struggle for those who *have not seen his face* may also be his way of expressing the difficult task of teaching a community that does not know him personally.

Paul seems to be suggesting that there is a unique place in his heart and a unique arena of his ministry that is deeply concerned with those he has not met personally.

Why does Paul engage in this arena? Why does he "hold" this struggle? In verse 2, he gives the answer. It begins with, *that their hearts may be encouraged*. The word for encouraged is "parakaleo," which means "beseech" or "summon." Perhaps the best translation is "called near," like when children are playing in the yard and hear their mother's call to come in for dinner. It is an awakening. A call to action and to gather. Paul is not talking about making people feel good when he says *encouraged*, he is talking about people's hearts being stirred toward living out the good news of Christ together, that they might be found complete in Him.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). The word for "comforted" in that verse is also "parakaleo." It is not suggesting those who mourn will feel good; that is a contradiction. It is saying those who mourn will be called near to the heart of God. Which, paradoxically, brings a kind of comfort, one that acknowledges that enduring difficulty with faith produces great reward.

This makes the next phrase, *having been knit together in love*, an interesting one. It is past tense, meaning this is a reality rather than a hope. The hope is not that they are knit together in love, but that they recognize the current reality and lean into it. Think of pulling on the ends of your shoestrings. It tightens the reality of the laces, and brings the laces further into one another. Paul is beseeching believers to tighten their connection with one another, and live out the command of Jesus to love one another (John 13:34).

Paul desires to stir believers to be united *in love* with Christ and with one another. When this happens, it is of great benefit to all involved. The conjunction *and* is one of inclusion: *and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding*. Paul wants them all to have great *wealth*, a true *wealth* that brings the greatest riches. That is not a wealth of material goods, but of relational connection based on mutual actions of love toward one another.

The word for *understanding* in the phrase *full assurance of understanding* is "synesis," which means "*a running together, flowing with*." This phrase connects with a later phrase in this verse: indicating that the *full assurance of understanding* results in *a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. When we have a *full assurance of understanding*, we perceive that the greatest *treasures* that can be obtained are *wisdom and knowledge*, and those come through *Christ Himself*.

When we think of the word “synesis,” translated *of understanding*, we can think of the English word synergy. When we gain an internal sense of *understanding*, it connects with the greater context of *understanding* happening external to us, which results in *true knowledge*—and that leads to *Christ Himself*. All these things connect together. By having the *understanding* of seeing things from God’s perspective, we engage reality as it is. And this produces fruit, bounty.

When we have *the full assurance* (might also be translated “confidence” or “conviction”) of alignment with God, we can expect to receive the greatest treasures life has to offer, which is *wisdom* and *knowledge* in *Christ*. Paul does not mention material gain. By *wealth*, Paul means fullness of life. Abundance. It is a spiritual wealth. It is not materialistic possession or superficial circumstance. It is the fullness of life lived with *wisdom* and *knowledge*.

Paul says that this results in *a true knowledge of God’s mystery*. Here Paul has constructed a good old-fashioned math equation:

encouraged hearts

+ *wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding*

= *a true knowledge of God’s mystery*.

In other words, when we are stirred/summoned into gathering with God, and embrace the perspective that He has our best interest at heart, we are able to gain a *true knowledge* of the *mystery* of God.

The word for *knowledge* here does not mean a general knowledge. It isn’t about facts and figures. The word for *knowledge* here, “epiginosis,” means “a precise and correct comprehension.” A deeper *knowledge*. It is about intimacy and familiarity. To really know someone is much more than being able to recite their name, height, and eye color. It is about communing with them in such a way as to see the very essence of who they are.

Paul is suggesting we can be in communion with God as we walk through life. The *mystery* of God is *Christ Himself*. By adopting these perspectives, we open ourselves up to know Him. Much of God’s essence was hidden in the time before Christ. Ephesians 3:8-9 says,

“Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.”
(Ephesians 3:9)

The “boundless riches of Christ” is the revelation of the mystery of God. Christ coming to earth is an unveiling of this *mystery*. And this is what Paul is endeavoring toward, that all peoples might be able to see *Christ*, commune with Him, and participate in His Kingdom. An incredible proposition.

The *love* that knits the Colossians together is the Greek word “agape.” This is a *love* based on choice, choosing to pursue the best interest of others (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). When we see things from God’s perspective, and choose to walk in the faith that His ways lead us to the greatest treasures in life, it prompts us to choose actions that seek the best interest of others. This of course fulfills the second greatest commandment, to love others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

Paul concludes this section by saying that in Jesus there *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. Interestingly, the word for *knowledge* here is not “epignosis” (like it is above). It is the word “gnosis,” which means head-knowledge, science, or general intelligence. So, it seems as if Paul is saying the only way to truly obtain general *knowledge* is to first gain a *true knowledge* (“epignosis”) *of the mystery of God*—a true perspective based on a relational knowledge of Christ. Otherwise, the facts and figures of the world will not make proper sense to us and may even lead us astray (because we are interpreting them from a false paradigm—an untrue perspective).

In order to see the world around us for the true reality it is, we first need to gain the perspective of Christ. We gain the perspective of Christ through gaining the intimate, personal knowledge (“epignosis”) of Christ.

The *treasures* of practical living are found in Jesus.

In these three verses, Paul has shown some incredible purposes for which he is endeavoring.

- First, that people might be stirred up and called closer to Christ and to the *love* that unifies them.
- Second, that they might discover the eternal benefits that come from faith (*full assurance*) or alignment with God, that comes from believing that His ways are the path to life’s greatest treasures.
- Third, that this will lead to a deeper comprehension of and intimacy with Jesus, who is the *mystery of God* revealed to the world.
- Lastly, that from this intimacy with Jesus our ability to discern, think, and act (*wisdom and knowledge*) will be accentuated.

The gospel (the revelation of Jesus) is the key to living our best life. The spiritual treasures that result from this progression are not vulnerable to the whims of circumstance, but are rooted in the unchanging person of Christ, in whom all things exist (Colossians 1:16-17).

Biblical Text

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,² that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.