

Embracing the Mystery of Christ: Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge

Thomas Robinson, *Embraced in God's Fullness 2*, August 19, 2018

Colossians 1:24 – 2:7

The Mystery of God's great work of hope: the Christ in all people, bringing them to maturity.

²⁴ Right now, I'm **rejoicing** in the **sufferings** experienced on your behalf, and I'm supplementing in my flesh the needed elements in **the tribulations of the Messiah** for the sake of his **body**, which is the **church** (*ekklesia*), ²⁵ of which I became a **servant** (*diakonos*) according to the **stewardship** from God that was given to me for you, to **bring God's message** (*logos*) to **fulfillment**, ²⁶ the **mystery hidden** from the ages and the generations, but now it has been made **manifest** to his holy people, ²⁷ whom God chose to make known what is the **riches** of this **mystery's glory** among **the nations**, which is **Christ in you**, the **hope of glory**,

²⁸ Him we are **proclaiming**, by **exhorting every person** (*anthropos*) and **teaching** every person in all **wisdom**, that we may **present** every person as **mature** (*teleios*) in **Christ**. ²⁹ It's for this that I'm also **laboring**, engaging in the **struggle** with all his active working (*energeia*) that he works by his power in me.

Love draws believers together as they recognize God's wisdom in Christ.

2:¹ For I want you to know how great a **struggle** (*agon*) I'm engaged in on **your behalf** and for those in **Laodicea**, indeed so many who have not seen my face physically, ² in order that their **hearts**, **being drawn together in love** (*agapē*), may be encouraged also toward all **riches** of the **full assurance** of **understanding**, into **recognizing the mystery of God**, namely, **Christ**, ³ in whom are all the **treasuries** of **wisdom** and **knowledge** hidden.

⁴ I'm saying this in order that no one may **deceive** you with plausible talk. ⁵ For though I am absent physically, yet in the Spirit I'm with you, rejoicing to see in you the **structure** and the **solidity** of your **faith** toward **Christ**.

They live a life securely based on all they have learned and experienced of Jesus.

⁶ Therefore, as you **received** the **Christ Jesus** as the **Lord**, **walk** forward in him, ⁷ **firmly rooted** and continually **built up** in him and made **firmly secure** by the **faith** just as you were **taught**, abounding in **thanksgiving**.

Ephesians 3:8-12

⁸ To me, though I am the least of all God's holy ones, this **grace** was given, to announce as **good news** to **the nations** the unsearchable **riches of the Christ**, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of **the mystery** hidden from the ages in the **God** who created the universe, ¹⁰ so that now **the many-sided wisdom of God** may be made known to the structures of rule and of authority in the heavenly places, through the church, ¹¹ according to a **purpose for the ages** that he has realized in **the Christ**, **Jesus our Lord**, ¹² in whom we have **boldness** and **access** with **confidence** through his **faithfulness**.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of our tribulation that took place in Asia (Ephesus). For we were so utterly crushed beyond our strength that we thought we would not survive. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

What is all of this about “Mystery”?

Paul writes to Believers he’s never met, encouraging them to the fullness of life in Jesus. In a hymn Paul expressed its vast scope: First, all of physical/spiritual creation is embraced in Jesus as creator and incarnation. Then all of human experience, as he dies and, in God’s Fullness, brings new creation out of death to reconcile the universe to God in Jesus.

This is a surprising, challenging event/narrative. Something pointed to but never fully seen before it became reality in Jesus, his life, teaching, crucifixion, resurrection, and meaning. It is “hidden” for ages as God’s Mystery (M, *mysterion*), his unique, unexpected way of embracing his creation. God’s kingdom should be glorious, overwhelming, not lowly, hidden, dying. But ironically that obscure, crucified Jesus brings God’s powerful, reconciling love to his whole world, both Jews and all nations, creating a new reality.

M. is God’s message (logos), Gospel of the humiliating cross. Even when we “understand” it, it remains a constant mystery, an astonishing revelation/face of the invisible God.

M. is Christ himself! All that he is and means. Israel’s Messiah/Christ, heir of all scripture’s history, can live in all people: “Christ in You!” From death he created new resurrection life. Ordinary people begin to experience surprising glory and hope for God’s future. They are drawn by this love and find that it makes sense of things – “wisdom and knowledge.”

How does the Mystery change things?

Yes, unexpected things happen: Suffering, struggle! Jews - Greek, slave - free together! So much breaking of old patterns. There’s a learning curve: continued teaching to bring every person to maturity in Christ. They learn to recognize the M. and gain assurance.

Seeing life on that different scale. Yes, it’s physical, (bodily, good creation). Physical is united with Spiritual. There is a higher, deeper life and purpose in all things and in our own lives. The exclusively physical is too small to grasp all of reality, which always carries an element of mystery. It’s never transparent to us. We experience it, but only partially even in our highest experiences. Life is given a structured, solid vision based on trust in Christ.

How do we engage?

We’re part of that physical-spiritual creation, drawn together by this self-giving love and vision of reality. We learn and grow by teaching, exhortation, wisdom toward maturity. We realize the mystery that Christ lives in us, we receive him as Lord who shapes us.

We do everything at once with him: We walk forward: we live, make mistakes; he helps and draws us up; we repeat. We sink roots: we need nourishment from this great, amazing story of God’s love and work. We learn to recognize new patterns, the mystery of God’s work everywhere. We let him build us, change values, give new love, openness, grace.

We let Faith/Mystery make life secure by trust in Jesus – God’s Fullness! There’s always more. We’re always called higher. That ever-growing love and challenge bring thanksgiving.