

The Gospel's Goal
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Allen Power

Colossians 1:24-2:3

Do you enjoy a good mystery in a book or on the screen? Credit for the first work of “mystery” fiction is given to Edgar Allan Poe in 1841. Long before that, people have been intrigued by mysteries. They wanted to discern the secret answer that others had not figured out.

Centuries ago people were convinced that coming to know God was a mystery to be solved, a riddle to figure out. There's no question God has chosen to keep many things to Himself. The hymn writer William Cowper wrote, “*God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.*” That refers to trusting that God will do what is good, just, and best without explaining Himself to us.

The good news of the gospel in the New Testament isn't shrouded in mystery at all: “*whoever believes in [Christ] will not perish but have eternal life.*”ⁱⁱ The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome: “*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart*”...⁹ ... *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*”

There were those in the early days of the church who said, “*It can't be that simple to be reconciled to God. There's more to it than that and WE have the secret.*” False teachers gain their power over those they deceive by claiming to have hidden, special knowledge no one else has. They count on people's desire for the secret to a mystery to give them control. That kind of false teaching was the problem in the church at Colossae and Paul was writing to straighten that out.

- Here's the truth that should change us from this passage: The goal of the Christian life is spiritual transformation. To achieve that goal we don't need a “guru,” a “shaman,” or even a priest because our great “High Priest” Jesus Christ lives IN US through His Spirit.

- The “secret” to spiritual transformation is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” What does that mean for you and me? Let’s dive in and find out.

Colossians 1:24–2:3 (ESV) — 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, **25** of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, **26** the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. **27** To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **28** Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. **29** For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. **1** For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, **2** that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, **3** in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

- Paul begins this section with an odd statement: *“I’m glad when I suffer...when I participate in the sufferings of Christ.”* Remember, Paul was suffering under arrest in Rome for preaching the truth of Christ.
- He said something that could be misinterpreted: *“I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”*
- Paul in no way thought Christ’s suffering on the cross was insufficient to save us. That would contradict all of his teaching. One scholar writes there was *“a Jewish and early Christian conviction of a predetermined amount of suffering to be endured by God’s people before the consummation of the age (see Rv 6:9–11). Paul saw his suffering on behalf of Christ as contributing to the sum total.”ⁱⁱⁱ* For an apostle, suffering was part of the job. Every Christ-follower shares in His suffering in some way.

- Verses 25-26 get to the point: Paul said he was given the “responsibility” to “make the word of God fully known” and then he invoked that word “mystery.” Paul used the word “mystery” 20 times in his letters.
- We can speculate that he used the word “mystery” to respond to the false teachers in Colossae. They claimed to have “special knowledge” to reach God but Paul said this “mystery” had been revealed to God’s people.
- This “mystery” was hidden in the past but has now been revealed to God’s people and “the Gentiles, too.” The Old Testament indicated the Gentiles (like these people in Colossae and you and me) would be included in God’s plan, but how God would accomplish that hadn’t been revealed.
- Matthew 12 quotes the Old Testament speaking about Jesus:
¹⁷ *This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:*
¹⁸ *“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.”*^{iv}
- Christ came to save all people, Jews and Gentiles, but how does that work? In verse 27, Paul pointed to the answer to that “mystery:” Christ in you the hope of glory. Everyone who trusts Christ as Savior and Lord is given His Spirit living inside us to teach and guide us.
- There is no secret “handshake” or code we must figure out. We don’t need someone who claims to have a special path to God. We have access to Jesus Himself because He puts His Spirit into our hearts.
- His Spirit living in our hearts does several things for His followers:
 - **Titus 3:5 (ESV) — 5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, [His Spirit convicted us when we were “dead in sin” and saved us]
 - **Romans 8:16 (ESV) — 16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [Assurance of salvation]
 - **John 14:26 (ESV) — 26** ...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things

and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.
[Understanding scripture]

- **1 Corinthians 2:11–13 (ESV) — 11** For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. [The Spirit reveals what God wants us to know]
- **Galatians 5:22–23 (ESV) — 22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [His Spirit in us bears "fruit" of behavior we don't have naturally]
- **1 Corinthians 12:1 (ESV) — 1** Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. **12:11 (ESV) — 11** All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. [His Spirit empowers us with spiritual gifts to do God's will in this world]
- **Galatians 5:16 (ESV) — 16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [His Spirit defeats sin in us]
- **Romans 8:26–27 (ESV) — 26** Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. **27** And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. [His Spirit gives a vibrant and effective prayer life]
- **Romans 8:11 (ESV) — 11** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. [His Spirit will one day raise us to eternal life!]
- We could go on and on unpacking the power of Christ's Spirit in us!

- Paul said Christ living in us gives us the “hope of glory.” We might assume that simply means the hope of Heaven, but it’s that and more.
- Salvation in Christ includes: Regeneration [made a new creature by new birth], Justification [God declares us not guilty], Sanctification [growing more like Christ by the power of His Spirit], and Glorification [fully redeemed and perfect for eternity in the next life with Him.]^v
- **Romans 8:18 (ESV) — 18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV) — 17** For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **Romans 5:2 (ESV) — 2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- Christ living in us gives us the hope of one day being glorified.
- Later in today’s passage Paul summed up His mission for reaching and teaching: ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.^{vi}
- Becoming “mature in Christ” is the goal. His Spirit makes that possible.
- Paul went on to say in 2:2-3: ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.^{vii}
- Look at that last sentence in the NLT: “I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God’s mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. ³ In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. “^{viii}
- Looking ahead to 2:9-10: ⁹ *For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.* ¹⁰ *So you also are complete through your union with Christ*^{ix}
- Everything we need for spiritual transformation is IN CHRIST and we have access to it because Christ’s Spirit is IN US. What an exciting thought!

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Through the ages false teachers have tried to garner power, fame, and fortune by claiming they have the keys to the “mystery” of knowing God.
- To achieve the goal of spiritual transformation we don't need a “guru,” a “shaman,” or even a priest because our great “High Priest” Jesus Christ lives IN US through His Spirit.
- A.W. Tozer wrote, *“Holiness, as taught in the Scriptures, is not based upon knowledge on our part. Rather, it is based upon the resurrected Christ in-dwelling us and changing us into His likeness.”*^x
- If we've truly trusted Christ as Savior and Lord we understand that He died to save us from sin and rose from the dead to give us eternal life.
- What we may not fully appreciate is the incredible gift we possess because His Spirit lives in our hearts to transform us so we can live the abundant life here and now and look forward to GLORIFICATION when we are with Him in Heaven one day.
- This week let's ask our Heavenly Father to help us embrace the “secret” that was revealed to God's people long ago: spiritual transformation can take place because we have Christ in us, the hope of glory!

ⁱ https://hymnary.org/text/god_moves_in_a_mysterious_way

ⁱⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 3:16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱⁱ Parker III, J. A. (2007). [The Incarnation: Could God Become Man Without Ceasing to Be God?](#) In T. Cabal, C. O. Brand, E. R. Clendenen, P. Copan, & J. P. Moreland (Eds.), *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1783). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

^{iv} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 12:17–18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^v <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#iv-salvation>

^{vi} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Col 1:28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{vii} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Col 2:2–3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{viii} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Col 2:2–3). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{ix} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Col 2:9–10). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^x A.W. Tozer, *Preparing for Jesus' Return: Daily Live the Blessed Hope*