

Community Group Discussion Guide

God's Mystery

September 17, 2023 | Colossians 1:24-2:5

MOTIVATE

Starter Question

⇒ ***What is one of life's greatest mysteries to you?***

Optional Activity: Share examples of general knowledge you've come to understand and how that information changed something in your life.

⇒ ***What have you recently learned from God's Word?***

DISCUSS

Once Paul updated the Colossians with details about his missionary endeavors and expressed concern and thanksgiving for them, he began to build his case for the truth of the gospel. Paul wrote in light of false teachers proposing that Jesus' sacrifice was inadequate and more was needed for a full spiritual experience. Paul wanted to restore the Colossians' confidence in their hope and to arm them against such false teaching.

Paul acknowledged that his ministry was due to the power of Christ at work in him. He also made clear his understanding that suffering was an inevitable part of his task to make the gospel fully known.

Colossians 1:24 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,

It's not surprising Paul talked about suffering for the gospel since he personally encountered it. He wrote this letter to the Colossians from prison. Paul understood from the time of his conversion and commission that adversity would come as a result of his mission to reach the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-16).

⇒ ***How might it affect the Colossians to know Paul was willing to suffer on their behalf?***

⇒ ***Are believers today willing to suffer for Christ? Are you? Explain your answer.***

Caution is needed when interpreting Paul's words in verse 24. It is almost as if he was suggesting that Jesus' redeeming work was insufficient and needed supplementing. However, in verses 15-23, Paul praised Christ for completely and perfectly reconciling all things to Himself. Paul was clear: nothing remains to be done and nothing believers can do will add to Jesus' sacrificial work on the cross.

While Paul knew there was no additional atonement in his suffering, he did see it as a means to increase his knowledge of Christ and to identify with Him further. The world hated Jesus. Once He was not physically present to persecute, the world began to persecute His followers.

Paul knew his suffering was connected to his Gentile mission and came as the byproduct of preaching the gospel to a hostile world. Jesus did not promise immunity from suffering, but He did promise to be with His followers in it.

- ⇒ *How can Paul's understanding of his own suffering for Christ help us come to terms with suffering for Him today?*
- ⇒ *Why does suffering for Jesus bring about an identification with Him that nothing else can?*

Colossians 1:25 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,

Before the Colossians could beware of falsehood, they needed to be aware of truth. Paul's expressed goal was to make the word of God fully known to them. This was his commission and he considered it a privilege.

- ⇒ *How can our Community Group help to make God's Word known?*
- ⇒ *How do we fulfill this Henderson Hills' value? Anchoring Truth: We prioritize God's Word in every sermon, every song, every prayer, every class, every group, and every decision.*

Colossians 1:26-27 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.

A key truth in fully knowing God's Word was for the Colossians to understand the mystery of God. In pagan religions, the word "mystery" referred to information about symbols and initiation rites—things that had to be kept hidden from the uninitiated. False teachers wanted to pull the Colossians away from the gospel by using the concept of mystery available to a select few.

- ⇒ *Can you give an example of a modern day "mystery" or teaching that has potentially pulled you away from the truth of the gospel?*

Paul's words indicate that this mystery is related to God's purposes, which only He can reveal. It's not something mankind can know or discover without Him. Generations of faithful Jews did not understand what God intended to do even though there were glimpses of it throughout the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the use of the word "mystery" refers to a secret once hidden but which has now been revealed and understood (Ephesians 3:2-5).

- ⇒ *Can you give an Old Testament example of God's intention to include all people in His redemptive plan?*
- ⇒ *Can you give an example from the four gospels when Jesus' words or actions indicated He came for all people?*

Paul and the other apostles lived in the time of the mystery's fulfillment and were the first to share it with the world. The mystery revealed to Paul was that God intended to save the Gentiles from the very beginning. Christ "among the Gentiles" was not Plan B after the gospel had been rejected by Jews. Rather, it was God's eternal purpose.¹ God was not intentionally keeping His plan a secret, but His plan for the world could not be fully understood until Christ rose from the dead.

Paul rejoiced because God chose him to make this mystery known to Gentiles everywhere. However, Christ among the Gentiles and for the Gentiles seriously undermined most Jewish expectations.²

- ⇒ *What did the Jews expect from their Messiah?*
- ⇒ *How was Jesus different than Jewish expectations?*

When Gentiles responded to the gospel, it outraged many Jews and created an identity crisis for Jewish Christians. Had God abandoned Israel for the Gentiles? Did Gentile inclusion undermine the Jews' special identity? No, the mystery involved equal inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in the body of Christ. The unprecedented secret is that all who put their trust in Jesus are included in the glorious day when God brings all things in heaven and on earth to a fitting conclusion in Him.

- ⇒ *Why would God's inclusive grace be difficult for the Jews to accept?*
- ⇒ *How is Christ in us "the hope of glory?"*

Colossians 1:28-29 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.

- ⇒ *Based on verses 24-27, why did Paul use the word "everyone" three times in verses 28-29?*
- ⇒ *What does it mean to be "mature in Christ?"*

Paul reiterated three things:

1. **His commission:** Proclaim Christ to everyone. Paul preached that access to Jesus included all people regardless of race, class, gender, or social standing.
2. **His method:** Warn and teach everyone. Paul used all means at his disposal to clearly present the truth of the gospel: admonition, encouragement, instruction, as well as reproof when necessary.
3. **His purpose:** Present everyone mature in Christ. Paul's message was the person and work of Jesus. It is through a life lived in Him that we become spiritually mature. In verse 29, Paul used

¹ Garland, D. E. (1998). [*Colossians and Philemon*](#) (p. 126). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

² Garland, D. E. (1998). [*Colossians and Philemon*](#) (p. 126). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

words like “toil” and “struggle” to describe his efforts. This is a picture of athletes agonizing during strenuous training to be victorious in competition.

- ⇒ *Why is toil and struggle involved in the process of maturing in Christ?*
- ⇒ *As with Paul, where do you find the energy and power to live out the Christian life and purpose?*

Colossians 2:1-3 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.

In Colossians 2:1, Paul mentioned the nearby Laodicean church. Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were three principle cities in the Lycus River Valley. Laodicea was situated at a crossroads of two trade routes, making it a thriving commercial center. Laodicea is most well-known in the Bible as the city of the “lukewarm church” in Revelation 3:15–16.

- ⇒ *What can we learn from Paul's love and concern for numerous churches, even those he had never visited?*
- ⇒ *How does Paul's use of the word “struggle” reveal the nature of his concern?*

The imagery of “being knit together” is that of a body being held together by ligaments to make a strong unit. Unity and solidarity create strength. False teaching is naturally divisive. A person left alone, with no support, is much more vulnerable than a cohesive unit.³

- ⇒ *Why was Paul so convinced of the solidarity Christians should have with one another?*
- ⇒ *How can our Community Group stand together against false teaching?*

Paul wanted believers to understand that only in Jesus can all the treasures of wisdom and understanding be found. In contrast to the false teachers, who said that these were hidden away in mystical experience, Paul declared that Christ is all believers need. If the Colossians were firmly rooted in understanding the rich mystery of their faith, they would be protected from the deception of false teaching.

Colossians 2:4-5 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

The bad news in Colossae was that believers were under attack. False teachers used seemingly credible, persuasive words to manipulate them. The good news is that these young Christians were standing strong. The words “order” and “firmness” are military metaphors which paint the

³ Anders, M. (1999). *Galatians-Colossians* (Vol. 8, p. 303). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

picture of the Colossians as not breaking rank or defecting. When the enemy attacked with an appearance of deep theology, the Colossians maintained a solid front in Christ.⁴

- ⇒ *How can false teaching lead us away from maturity in Christ?*
- ⇒ *How can a settled understanding that true treasure is only found in Christ protect us from deceptive error?*

TRANSFORM

1. Personal application: Increasing spiritual maturity should be the aim of every believer. Personal reflection through questions like these can help to point us in the right direction:

- ⇒ *How can I be alert to false teaching?*
- ⇒ *What are some specific ways my faith community can help me mature?*
- ⇒ *What perspective have I gained on suffering for Christ?*
- ⇒ *How can I regularly reflect on essential biblical truths that will keep Jesus central in my faith?*

2. Pray: Praise God for revealing His redemptive mystery through Christ. Thank Him for the privilege of understanding the fullness of His truth. Ask for His protection from false teaching.

STUDY: Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians*, pages 285-288, 300-304, 311-314.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, Colossians and Philemon*, pages 116-137.
- *Shepherd's Notes, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, pages 48-51.

⁴ Anders, M. (1999). *Galatians-Colossians* (Vol. 8, p. 304). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.