

**Ephesians 3:2—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you;**

*Wuest’s* commentary states that Paul, in penning the phrase, “*if indeed you have heard,*” reminds his readers that they had been previously introduced to what was to follow.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in Ephesians 3:2-12, Paul is repeating what he had taught these believers at an earlier date. Remember that Paul spent significant time at Ephesus teaching at “*the school of Tyrannus*” (Acts 19:9-10) prior to his imprisonment.

Paul viewed himself as having been entrusted with “*the stewardship of God’s grace*” (Ephesians 3:2). “*Stewardship*” refers to “the management of a household, a ministerial commission in the publication and furtherance of the Gospel.” Hence, Paul perceived himself as a manager of what God had entrusted to him in the gospel. He was called as a minister of “*God’s grace*” (Ephesians 3:2), thus he states in 1 Corinthians 9:16-17:

*For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel, for if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. (1 Corinthians 9:16-17)*

Again, in Colossians 1:25, Paul addresses this same subject:

*Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, (Colossians 1:25)*

God not only gave Paul the revelation of His grace, but also the responsibility of preaching and teaching this revelation to the Gentiles. Paul refused to take his calling lightly; he wrote, in fact, to the Ephesians (who were Gentiles) that this stewardship “*was given to*” him for their benefit (Ephesians 3:2). Paul realized that the ministry he had received from God was for the sake of others, specifically the Gentiles.

We must be responsible stewards over what God has entrusted to our care, be it insight, knowledge, wisdom, a particular gifting, material possessions, etc. In fact, excellently handling small responsibilities today may result in increased responsibilities tomorrow. Certainly, God grants additional insight and wisdom to those who, through His strength, properly apply the insight and wisdom they already possess? Think about it!

**Ephesians 3:3—that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.**

The “*mystery*” of God was made known to Paul through “*revelation.*” “*Revelation*” means “to uncover, to be discovered in true character.” “*Mystery*” is defined by some as “that which would remain undisclosed but for revelation.” That Jews and Gentiles become one once they receive Christ and are placed into Christ is the “*mystery*” revealed to Paul. Can you imagine Paul’s response when he received this truth? Remember, Paul’s passion was persecuting Christians prior to his conversion (Acts 8:3; Galatians 1:13). However, Paul’s “*gospel*” was “*not according to man,*” nor did he receive it “*from man*” (Galatians 1:11-12). He “*received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 1:12)—a disclosure that changed him forever.

After his conversion, Paul “*went away to Arabia,*” evidently spending much time alone with the Lord (Galatians 1:15-18). On his visit to Jerusalem (“*three years later*”) he did see James and Peter, but the revelation of the mystery did not occur at this time (Galatians 1:18-20). Neither did it occur “*fourteen years*” later when he visited Jerusalem; for, to quote Paul, “*those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me*” (Galatians 2:1-6).

Jesus also disclosed to Paul the details of His First Coming—information the eleven disciples already possessed. This truth is confirmed in 1Corinthians 11:23-24:

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (1Corinthians 11:23-24)*

The Lord revealed to Paul what occurred in the upper room prior to His crucifixion (Paul would have been an unbeliever when these activities took place. How Peter, John, and the other apostles responded to Paul's knowledge of these activities would have been intriguing to behold!

Paul's entire "gospel" was given to him "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12), even the "mystery" addressed in Ephesians 3:3. Evidently, the "mystery" was not revealed to the other disciples to the degree that it was revealed to Paul (2Corinthians 12:1-7; 2Peter 3:14-16).

The phrase, "as I wrote before in brief" (Ephesians 3:3), refers to one of two things: (1) an earlier letter possibly written to the Ephesians by Paul (2) his words concerning "the mystery" in Ephesians 1:9-10 and Ephesians 2:11-22. Based on 2Corinthians 12:1-7, the "mystery" was one of several "revelations" unveiled to this amazing apostle.

**Ephesians 3:4—And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,**

"Insight" means "a critical understanding." Therefore, Paul's understanding of "the mystery of Christ" was thorough and detailed. Paul's words in Ephesians 1:9-10 and Ephesians 2:11-22 validated the depth of his "insight into the mystery."

The phrase, "the mystery of Christ," is captivating; for New Testament believers have access to a thrilling "mystery" revealed only to the body of Christ. Once a depraved individual during the church age repents and believes by responding to the limited (yet adequate) truth accessible to all the depraved, God saves him and makes him new. He is then capable of progressing to the deeper things of God—such as comprehending the "mystery" and living life on a totally different plane. He can see that order exists in the cosmos and that life consists of more than random happenstances lacking purpose. He knows that everything is advancing toward a day when all things will be summed up in Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10). Once he is "in Christ" (2Corinthians 5:17), after repenting and believing while depraved, he not only possesses the capacity to comprehend the mystery, but, being part of Christ's body (1Corinthians 12:12-13), becomes part of the fulfillment of the mystery. Consequently, just as a proper perception of future events is based on the summing up of all things in Christ, the solutions to our present difficulties are also found in Christ.

**Ephesians 3:5—which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;**

1Peter 1:10-12 shows that men like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, King David, Isaiah, and Daniel did not know what Paul knew (nor what we have the capability of comprehending) concerning the mystery. They realized from passages such as Genesis 3:15, Psalm 22, and Isaiah 53 that a suffering Savior would die for the sin of man, but they didn't understand the details of the positive ramifications of that gruesome, yet glorious event. The Old Testament prophets prophesied much about Christ's death and His future Millennial reign,

but the church age remained a mystery—a time they knew little about. Thus, Paul states:

*which in other generations was not made known to the sons of man, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:5)*

“*Sons of men*” references mankind in general; for no one, not even the spiritual giants of the Old Testament, understood the mystery that Paul addresses in the book of Ephesians. Paul speaks of the mystery in other epistles as well (Colossians 1:27 serves as an excellent example).

This mystery “*has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets*” (Ephesians 3:5)—the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). Therefore, the mystery was not revealed to Paul alone. The “*apostles*” (such as Peter, Andrew, John, etc.) along with certain “*prophets*” (like Luke and James—who were not apostles), understood to some degree at least the mystery. In fact, all New Testament believers have the capacity to understand it. This truth is confirmed in Romans 16:25-26:

*Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; (Romans 16:25-26)*

Don’t overlook the fact that Peter, one of the apostles, evidently had difficulty accepting certain aspects of this mystery—that Jewish and Gentile New Testament believers are made part of the body of Christ with no racial distinction (read Acts 10, Galatians 2:11-16, and 2Peter 3:14-16).

The phrase, “*has...been revealed*” (Ephesians 3:5), is in the aorist tense. Coupling this fact with the word “*now,*” it becomes obvious that the holy apostles and prophets, who recorded New Testament Scripture, received revelation never before exposed to man. They received this revelation through the Person of the Spirit. Note: The phrase, “*in the Spirit,*” can also be interpreted, “*by the Spirit.*”

---

<sup>1</sup> Wuest, Kenneth S. (1983). *Ephesians and Colossians*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI. [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com). Used by permission.