

## “Paul: Secret Agent”

Ephesians 3:1-6

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God entrusted to Paul more mysteries than to any other apostle—mysteries that he was to reveal and explain to the church. Here in Ephesians 3, Paul delineates the greatest of the mysteries he revealed to the saints:

1. A New Testament “mystery” refers to a truth hidden in the Old Testament but now revealed by God because of the work and life of Christ
  - a. Jesus revealed mysteries about the kingdom of God (Matt 13)
  - b. A mystery was not for an elite few, but for all believers
  - c. A mystery could not be discovered by human intuition or knowledge
  - d. A mystery was not to remain a secret
  - e. God revealed the mysteries at His sovereign discretion
2. God enlisted Paul for a unique mission
  - a. God called Paul to go to the Gentiles  
“I, Paul...for the sake of you Gentiles...” (3:1)
  - b. God called Paul to a life of hardship  
“I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus...” (3:1)
3. God equipped Paul through a supernatural method
  - a. God gave Paul supernatural revelation  
“the mystery made known to me by revelation” (3:3)
  - b. God made Paul a holy apostle  
“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1:1)  
“it has now been revealed to His holy apostles” (3:5)
4. God commissioned Paul to proclaim a divine message
  - a. God gave Paul a mystery for the churches  
“given to me for you” (3:2)
  - b. The mystery was not revealed in the Old Testament  
“in other generations was not made known” (3:5)
  - c. The mystery is fulfilled in Christ  
“the mystery of Christ” (3:4)  
“in Christ Jesus” (3:6)
  - d. The mystery is the Church: Jews and Gentiles making one new Body  
“the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body” (3:6)

### Are you a Dispensationalist?

**Yes**--If you believe Ephesians 3:5 at face value then you are *dispensational*—that is, if you believe the idea of the Church being one new man or Body made up of Gentiles and Jews, a truth which was not revealed in the Old Testament but revealed for the first time by the Apostles after Jesus’ resurrection.

**No way, dude!**—if you believe the Church existed in the Old Testament and the Church is now the new Israel—then you believe in Covenant theology.

**Sort of**—a new teaching is that the Church is kind of a mystery and was only partially revealed in the Old Testament—then you are a progressive Dispensationalist—but that is not what is taught by Ephesians 3:5.

**Totally, dude!**—some take this mystery too far and say Paul was the only Apostle given this mystery about the Church—these are Ultra-Dispensationalists; but Ephesians 3:5 says it was revealed to the “apostles and prophets” (plural), not just Paul.

### “Mystery” in the New Testament

Paul’s main theme in Ephesians 3 is the “mystery of Christ” (3:4) which God gave him to teach to all believers. The word “mystery” has a very specific and technical meaning when used by Paul. “Mystery” comes from the Greek word *musterion* (μυστηριον) and is used 27 times in the New Testament, 20 times by Paul, and 6 times in Ephesians (1:9; 3:3,4,9; 5:32; 6:19). A New Testament mystery was a truth hidden in Old Testament times but now revealed to all believers through the New Testament apostles and prophets through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament mysteries all flow out of the work of Christ with an emphasis on God’s redemptive work and love for His people. The different mysteries given by Paul [who was a steward “of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1)] include the following:

- Romans 11:25*—the mystery of the present temporary hardening of Israel as a nation  
*Romans 16:25-26*—the mystery that Jesus is to be the Messiah of all nations  
*1 Corinthians 2:7*—the mystery that we can know the very mind of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit  
*1 Corinthians 15:51*—the mystery of the rapture or ‘translation’ of living saints  
*Ephesians 1:9*—the mystery that Christ is predestined to be preeminent in all things  
*Colossians 1:26-27*—the mystery of the indwelling Christ in believers  
*Colossians 2:2-3*—the mystery that Christ is fully God incarnate  
*2 Thessalonians 2:7*—the mystery of the coming antichrist, son of perdition