The Mystery of Christ — December 29, 2019

Joint Heirs, Joint Body, and Joint Partakers of the Promise: The Three Unsearchable Riches of Christ

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Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:9–10; Romans 16:25–27; Ephesians 3:4–12

> *“But God has revealed to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10)*
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> *“That they who are of the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings.” (Ephesians 3:6)*

How to Read the Scripture: Eye Has Not Seen — But Now Revealed

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First Corinthians 2:9–10 is one of the most misread passages in the New Testament. The common reading stops at verse 9 and understands it as a hymn to the incomprehensibility of heaven: eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. End of thought. But God does not stop there, and neither should we. The very next verse says: but God has revealed them to us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

The passage is not teaching that the things God has prepared are permanently inaccessible. It is setting up a contrast: before the coming of the Holy Spirit, these things were unseen, unheard, unthought. But now, since the Spirit has

come, they have been revealed. That is the definition of a mystery in New Testament usage: not something permanently secret, but something once hidden that has now been disclosed. The mystery was unseen and unheard and never entered into the heart of man. Then God revealed it. It is secret no more.

The Mystery Distinguished from the Gospel

Romans 16:25 closes the entire book of Romans with a reference to the mystery: now to him that is able to establish you according to my glad tidings and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, as to which silence has been kept in the times of the ages, but which has now been made manifest. Two things appear together here: the glad tidings and the mystery. They are not the same thing.

Romans 1:1 says that Paul was separated to God's glad tidings, which he had before promised by his prophets in holy writings. The gospel was promised before by prophets. Psalm 22:16 pierced my hands is not silence about the cross. Isaiah 53 is not silence about the cross. The suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah were spoken of by the prophets. And every chapter of Romans, from chapter 1 through the great doctrinal sections on justification, on the flesh and the new nature, on Israel and the nations — all of it builds on what was promised before by the prophets. That is not the mystery.

The mystery is that about which the Old Testament prophets kept silence — not because they failed to address it but because it was hidden in God himself and not in any scripture from the times of the ages. Ephesians 3:9 says it explicitly: the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God. Not hidden in Malachi, not hidden in Daniel, not hidden in Isaiah. Hidden in God. Therefore one cannot search the Old Testament to find it. It is simply not there.

The Mystery Stated: Three Joints

Ephesians 3:4–6 states the mystery with precision: the mystery of the Christ… that they who are of the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings. Three things, each characterized by the word joint. The joint is the connective principle. It is not independence, not separation, but connection. That is what distinguishes the mystery from a general statement that Gentiles would be blessed — which is in the Old Testament. The Old Testament speaks of blessing for the nations, but not as joints, not as connected to Christ himself in this particular way.

The first joint is joint heirs. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). This is a future inheritance, not yet fully received but absolutely certain. An inheritance can produce terrible strife among those who are waiting for it — children who got along beautifully throughout their lives suddenly become adversaries when a parent dies and leaves them a legacy. That is not joint heirs. Joint heirs are connected; they cannot be separated from what the primary heir receives. Christ is the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2), and we are joined to him as co-heirs. His inheritance and ours are the same inheritance. The distinction between his portion and ours disappears in the connection.

The second joint is joint body. Not multiple bodies, not a collection of independent members loosely affiliated, but one body. The singular matters. And the essence of the one body is the head. Every joint of the body is connected to the head, and the head in heaven does the thinking. The practical outworking is that each member does what the head says, not what the other members say. Christendom is characterized by members telling each other what to do. That is not the principle of the body. The head tells each joint what to do, and each joint does it — in its own place, in its own corner — and the result is the body functioning as its head intends.

The third joint is joint partakers of the promise. Ephesians 3:6 says of his promise; Acts 1:4 speaks of the promise of the Father. These point to the same

thing: the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, by which the one body was formed and by which every believer is sealed into that one body. The body was once for all formed by the baptism in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; it is not reformed or re-formed by subsequent baptisms. We are joined to that body by the sealing of the Spirit — ye have been sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13) — that one, the one they were waiting for at Pentecost. Joint participation in that one Spirit is what makes all believers participants in the same body.

The Unsearchable Riches of Christ

Ephesians 3:8 calls this the unsearchable riches of Christ. Not some vague abundance, not gold or silver, but specific and enumerable: three riches, three joints, corresponding to the three aspects of the mystery. A joint inheritance with the heir of all things. A joint membership in the one body whose head is in heaven. A joint participation in the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit who unites all to the head and to each other.

These things exceed anything that entered into the heart of man, because they were never in any heart before God revealed them. The nations — Gentiles, those who had no covenant of mercy, who were strangers from the covenants of promise, who were without God and without hope in the world — have been made joint heirs, members of a joint body, and joint partakers of the promise. This surpasses all the blessing spoken of in the Old Testament for the nations. It is the administration of the mystery, previously hidden in God, now revealed by the Spirit through the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. May God establish our hearts in it.

> *To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ. (Ephesians 3:8)*