

THE FELLOW-HEIRSHIP OF THE GENTILES

In the portion of the Word read this morning from the Ephesians, Paul tells the brethren that what he had to say to them, he said on the supposition that they had heard and understood a certain matter which he styles a mystery.

“If,” says he, “ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you-ward; how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

What is this mystery which in other ages had been withheld from the knowledge of men? He answers the question in the words immediately following:

“That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”

Let us ponder this a little. Let us look at it first with regard to those that are without, and then as it bears upon ourselves. It would not be needful to consider those that are outside in the matter at all, were it not for the fact that they claim to be the people of the Lord and to stand on scriptural ground. They are a mighty and a respectable multitude, and always in contact with us, in one way or other, and therefore we are bound, more or less, every other now and then, to consider them. Here, then, we put their claims to the test. We ask them if they understand this mystery which before Paul’s day was hidden, but in Paul’s day was revealed, and by the hands of Paul made open and effectual for the salvation of the Gentiles. If they do not, Paul’s words are not for them; for it is only “if” people have heard of the matter and understand it that Paul expects what he has to say to be acceptable or appropriate. If people have not heard and understood the mystery of the fellow-heirship of the Gentiles, then there will be much in Paul’s letters that is unintelligible.

Ask orthodox professors if they understand it. You will be answered by a blank look. Paul’s statement is so much jargon to them, containing no idea. Their ideas and views of things prevent their understanding it. What are their ideas and views? Why, that man is an immortal being by nature, and that immortal souls that are virtuous (as men talk) when they leave the bodies they have inhabited on earth, which they are supposed to do with consciousness, identity and mental power unimpaired, do, by reason of the eternal laws of justice (as philosophic babblers phrase it), depart to a blessed state, a saved state; that state to which Abraham and all the prophets are supposed to have departed; consequently, that Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, and their disciples of the Greek schools; Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, and all his followers; Zoroaster and his Persian devotees; and all natural thinkers of every barbarous clime and nation, whose thoughts have taken a “religious” turn, however dark and mistaken that turn may have been—the orthodox view is that all these classes—the multitudes of them who lived before the days of Christ—have all gone to glory in heaven. Consequently, of what meaning to them are Paul’s words, that in pre-apostolic ages, the very idea of the Gentiles being fellow-heirs of the promise with Israel, was a concealed mystery: *“which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men”*? Not only have they no idea of the fellow-heirship of the Gentiles, but they have no idea that there is anything to have a fellow-heirship in. They have no understanding of the original heirship of Israel. They have no idea of salvation’s being confined within a certain line of things—within the groove of certain promises established in covenant with the fathers of the house of Israel. Their notions are purely pagan. They think man—all men, Jew or Gentile—immortal, and a happy immortality, an affair of natural morality. Consequently, there is no place in their thoughts for covenants of promise appertaining to Israel and the long-established exclusion therefrom of mankind in general.

An ingenious adversary of the orthodox type might suggest that Paul's words are a confirmation of the orthodox view; that in fact they mean that in Paul's day it was revealed, what had not before been revealed, that the Gentiles of all ages, before and after Christ, were fellow-heirs of salvation with Israel, notwithstanding their darkness and exclusion from the covenants of promise. The suggestion, however, is inconsistent with those facts of the case which interpret Paul's words. We are not dependent for the meaning of them merely upon the statement itself, though the statement itself is sufficient, for what does he say?

*"That the Gentiles **should be** fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ **by the gospel.**"*

This shows that the fellow-heirship did not relate to pre-apostolic times, and that where the fellow-heirship was brought into effect, it was by the instrumentality of the gospel preached and believed; which is sufficient to exclude its application to the Gentiles who lived before Paul's day and on whom the gospel was never brought to bear. But the facts of Paul's case place the matter beyond all doubt. What are those facts briefly stated? It was Christ who sent Paul to do this work towards the Gentiles. Now let us listen to Christ's language in committing this dispensation to the hands of Paul:

"Unto the Gentiles now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan (the adversary) unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18).

This speaks for itself. The receiving by the Gentiles of forgiveness and inheritance (the fellow-heirship) was contingent on being turned from darkness to light; and this operation Paul was sent to perform on living men. Before he performed it, they were in darkness, and that in this state they were without hope is plainly stated by Paul himself in the case of the very Ephesians to whom he is writing in the chapter we are considering. He tells them that before he came to them, they were *"without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having NO HOPE, and without God in the world"* (Eph. 2:12). This effectually disposes of the suggestion that Paul's mission to the Gentiles was to tell them that they had hope, and that they were heirs of salvation and had been so all along without reference to the gospel.

We therefore return to the fact that before Paul's day, the Gentiles were without hope, and that his mission was to proclaim the purpose of God to admit them to fellow-heirship of the promises, and to announce the conditions on which that admission would be allowed. I remind you again that Paul's words are to us "if" we have heard and understood this matter. To those around us, who profess to be based on Paul's doctrine, it is unintelligible because their pagan immortal-soul traditions nullify it. To those enlightened in the truth, the words are highly intelligible and very interesting. That enlightenment shows us mankind mortal, wicked, condemned, and exiled from all divine relation—disqualified in every way to approach God or to nurse hope. It shows us God divulging His own plan and issuing His own invitations on His own principles, with a stringency illustrated in His striking Nadab and Abihu to death for bringing strange fire in their censers to offer in the tabernacle, saying,

"I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me."

It shows us that plan unfolding itself in the selection of a particular family of mankind—a family begotten to himself in a miraculous interposition in the birth of Isaac. It shows us this family made the repository of the promises—the Israelites, *"to whom,"* as Paul says, *"pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises"* (Rom. 9:4). It shows us this family the sole object of divine recognition among the nations of the earth, as we read in Amos 3:2:

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth."

It shows us all the divine dealings in the past absolutely restricted to this one nation and those of the Gentiles who might incorporate themselves with it (Isa. 56:3-6). It shows Christ's own labours avowedly confined within this restricted channel, saying to his disciples,

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel . . . Go not into the way of the Gentiles."

It shows us the early believers, for a time *"preaching the word unto none but unto the Jews only"* (Acts 11:19). It then shows us Paul coming forth as the bearer of an invitation to the Gentiles who had not beforetime been invited. He calls this a mystery which had beforetime been concealed. It is an appropriate and instructive designation. It was a mystery. The promises to Abraham, in the very beginning, announced Yahweh's purpose to bless all families of the earth, and yet, up to Christ's time no provision had been made for extending the blessing of Abraham to them. The prophets plainly intimated the participation of all nations—the nations of the Gentiles—in the glories made sure to the house of Israel, and yet announced no arrangement by which meanwhile the way to that participation might be opened. It therefore remained a mystery how the evident purpose of God was to be carried out. It was a mystery, *"which, in other ages, was not made known unto the sons of men"*; but which, at the last, was *"revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets"* of the apostolic age. Peter, referring to the matter, said in the council of the apostles, as recorded in Acts 15:7:

"Ye know how that, a good while ago, God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe."

The invitation to the Gentiles was officially inaugurated by the hands of Peter, and the practical working out of it was committed to Paul—at that time a persecutor—on whom Christ laid his hands as a chosen vessel to bear his name before kings.

We will now look at the matter in its bearing upon ourselves. We are, of course, all aware of the effect of the apostolic work on all who come within the compass of its operations, as regards their original relationship. Originally, they are Gentiles; but such they no longer remain when they become subject to the adoption that is in Christ. *"In time past,"* says Paul, *"they were Gentiles in the flesh,"* but in Christ they cease to be *"strangers and foreigners,"* and become fellow-citizens with the members of the original Israelitish family—(Eph. 2:19-20)—wild olive branches grafted among the branches of the original Abrahamic good olive tree, with whom they partake of the root and fatness of the good olive tree (Rom. 11:17-24). They are not saved as Gentiles, but as Gentiles transformed into Israelites indeed, Jews inwardly (Rom. 2:29). It is not, however, to this aspect of the work of the truth among us that I wish to call attention; but to one that comes closer than that, the question of what manner of persons it is designed these Jews inwardly should be, and which, if they be not, they will be rejected. This is the question with which the epistles of Paul especially deal, and it is from these epistles we get the right cue in the matter. The epistles have not been addressed to us personally, but they are none the less applicable to us on that account. They were written to certain persons in the first century, not because of their individuality, or because they lived in certain places, but because of their relation to Paul's work and to Christ. For that reason they are addressed (as, indeed, they more than once allege) to *"all that in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"* and therefore to us, if that define our position.

What then has Paul to say on the supposition that we have heard and understood the dispensation committed to him by Christ, by which we have the wonderful distinction of being invited to a participation in the kingdom and glory of God? He says,

"I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love."

Let us ponder this. It suggests some things of urgent importance which we may be liable to overlook in our zeal for other forms of truth in the abstract. If we walk unworthily of the vocation, what then? There are people in our day—Oh! they are so numerous as to depress the spirit oftentimes, and make the heart cry out for the blight and barrenness of the age in which we live—who, instead of speaking the truth in love, and adorning the doctrine of God by the excellence of their deportment, on the contrary defile and disfigure it by a most unholy association with “*all bitterness, wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, hatred, variance, emulations, strife, seditions, envyings.*” Such there were in the apostolic age. Jude speaks of them as “*spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear . . . Murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts, and their mouth speaking great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage.*” Peter also describes them in language equally strong:

“Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities: whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.”

Let us beware of the influence of this ungodly class who walk after the flesh. Be it ours to walk worthy of the heavenly vocation in Christ in all lowliness—not in mightiness: mightiness is the order of the day. It is the universal habit to walk in pride. Society in every grade exemplifies it. It is even defended as a virtue. Be it ours, as Christ’s brethren, to hold and to carry out Christ’s views on the subject, and not the views of the respectable world which lieth in wickedness, though it be not aware of it. The world says: “Be ambitious; keep up appearances; get as high as you can.” Christ says by the mouth of his apostles,

“Mind not high things; condescend to men of low estate. Be content with such things as ye have. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Let this mind be in you which was in Christ, who made himself of no reputation.”

The world says, “Look after yourself; get as much money as you can; everybody else does: why not you?” Christ says,

“Look every man on the things of his neighbour; bear one another’s burdens; labour not to be rich; lay not up treasures on earth. Learn of me. I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”

The world says, “You are your own master; you have a right to do as you like.” Christ says,

“Ye are not your own. Ye are bought with a price. Wherefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

What the world says is continually dinned in our ears, so to speak, in one form or other; and we have all of us a nature sufficiently prone to feel a sympathetic response to its suggestions and maxims. There is consequently imperative need to resist constantly the world’s pleasant doctrines, and to insist constantly on those of Christ, which though unpalatable to the natural man, bring great purity and peace in our present experience, and enrich and tranquillise the prospect with promise of the life to come. We shall all experience at the last the truth of the statement that we are not our own. The judgment seat will reveal the case nakedly as it is—that we are the property of another and that all we have is his property, for the use of which we shall have to account. We shall then see that now in this time, when we are not permitted to see the fact, God has invisibly, but really by a series of perfectly natural arrangements on the surface, conferred upon us what time, health, money, or opportunity we have in trust for our trial. We shall see that it is a literal fact and not a pretty sentiment that the brethren of Christ are not their own property, but actually belong to their now absent, yet cognisant, and then present master. Jesus plainly teaches that the decision of

our case in judgment will hinge upon our stewardship in these present affairs in which most men can see no divine relation. He says:

“If ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?”

It is added that the Pharisees, *“who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him”* (Luke 16:14). This is precisely the treatment which the doctrine receives at the hands of the same class in the present day; but it is true for all that, and no wise man will be deterred by conventional prejudice from proclaiming the truth. Every man at last will be judged *“according to his works”*: so Jesus has declared over and over again, and if there seems harshness in the continual assertion of these things, it is due to the peculiarity of the present situation, in which the carnal mind has a host of advocates and apologists, and few are valiant for the commandments of Christ. The power of darkness is enthroned on every side, and but for constant vigilance in the fight, the flood would pour in on every side and extinguish the little light enkindled. All seek their own and not the things of Jesus Christ, so much so that even those who seek the things of Christ are suspected of aiming, like the rest, at their own objects. Well, the day of Christ will reveal the secrets of all hearts. If a man live to himself, regarding himself as his own property, and consulting only his own comfort and honour in the present evil world, he will reap as he has sown. The reward that Christ brings is for those who live to him as his servants, agents and stewards, in all their arrangements and affairs; and how this is to be done is made plain in the word of his apostles, which addresses itself to every grade.

Servants are to be *“obedient to them that are their masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers: but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not unto men”* (Eph. 6:5).

Masters are to *“do the same things”* to the servants, doing what they do as to Christ, and not to men, in the recollection that they have a Master in heaven who is no respecter of persons, and who will render to them according to the divine and not the human rule of judgment. The poor are to be *“content with such things as they have,”* yet not to consider themselves exempt from the service of giving at the call of Christ, for the work or for his poorer still; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. They are to remember that if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not, and that, therefore, the poor can sow as bountifully as the rich, like the widow woman of Christ’s commendation, and like the brethren of Macedonia of whom Paul says that—

“In a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For according to their power I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints”

(Heb. 13:5, 16; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 9:6-7).

The rich also have their part marked out; they are to rejoice in the social degradation to which their submission to the truth subjects them (James 1:10), and they are to be *“rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate”* (1 Tim. 6:18). In this way they are to fulfil the part of *“good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* (1 Pet. 4:10). All and sundry, of every age and station, who belong to Christ, are to walk in love and follow holiness, without which, they are informed, no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Being thus found worthy of the vocation to which the kindness of God in Christ has called them, they will be invited at the judgment seat to enter and inherit the kingdom prepared for them. And who

shall declare, then, the greatness and joy of their recompense? The brief conflict of mortal years will have ended in the victory of immortality, and the honour of an unfading crown. Trial will have given place to approbation; labour to its reward; and the endurances of self-denial and obedience, in a dark and evil age, to the unspeakable enjoyments of the incorruptible and perfect world to come.

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