

"The mystery" — What is it?

Ephesians 3: 1-10.

N. Anderson.

It is important that we should know what the mystery is — it is the outstanding revelation of the present period. This period commenced with the downcoming of the Holy Spirit from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Ascended Man, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It will terminate at the coming again of the Lord Jesus to rapture His own to glory.

The apostle Paul speaks in our chapter, verse 2, of "the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward." This word, "dispensation," is elsewhere translated "stewardship" (see Luke 16: 2-4). This distinctive stewardship, entrusted to Paul, was the making known to the Gentiles (especially) the truth of the mystery which he had received along with the other apostles by revelation. The Lord was pleased to reveal (to uncover or unveil) by the Holy Spirit the great secret of God which had been hidden during the past ages. Yet to Paul alone was the ministry or stewardship of it committed. Hence, we find the teaching of it in the epistles of the Apostle Paul only. References to the mystery are to be found in Romans, 1st Corinthians, Colossians and Ephesians. The latter epistle gives a clear and concise statement of what the mystery is. In verse 6 of this third chapter we read that there are three constituents of the mystery:

1. That the Gentiles should be fellow or joint heirs.
2. That they should be of the same, or a joint, body.
3. That they should be joint partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel.

Thus we have Joint Heirs, Joint Body, and Joint Partakers of God's promise. We might rightly ask, with whom are the Gentile believers "joint"? Clearly, as this same epistle teaches (see chapter 2 especially) with believers from among the Jews. If, as we learn from Eph. 2: 1-6, these believers are united to the risen and heaven-seated Christ, they are also in union with one another, as taught in Eph. 2: 11-17. Three great intentions are in view in that chapter —

v. 7 — that in the ages to come God might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus,

v. 16 — that they might be reconciled to God in one body,

v. 22 — that God may have a House in which to dwell now, through the Spirit.

So then, the saints from amongst the Gentiles and Jews will be the vessel of display in the coming ages; are *now* the Body of Christ for the expression of the life of Christ; and also are now the House of God in which He dwells for His own pleasure, and through which He makes Himself known in wondrous grace. Believers then, from amongst Gentiles and Jews, are the subjects of the mystery. First they are Joint Heirs. This entails that they will share, collectively, the vast inheritance spoken of in Ephesians 1. According to verses 9 and 10, God has "made know to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself."

In the dispensation (administration, stewardship) of the fullness of the times He is going to head up all things in One, in Christ. This peculiar expression, "the fullness of times," leads us on to the world-to-come when our blessed Lord, God's anointed Man, will be supreme in the universe, manifested and acknowledged as such, by every intelligent being. Many are the times which have run

their course during the history of the ways of God. These were all marked by failure on the part of men to carry through to finality and fruition whatever had been committed to them of God. All that has ever been entrusted to man has broken down in his incapable hands. How blessed to look forward to that coming period when everything of God which has come out in His past dealings, gathered up in the capable hands of the Man of His pleasure, shall be seen in glorious display. "The pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hands."

God's inheritance will be administered by Christ in the coming period of millennial rule and splendour. He shall not be alone in that coming glorious epoch. All the subjects of God's purpose, marked out for this blessing before time began, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, the sons of God, all taken into favour in the Beloved, all these have obtained an inheritance in Him. God will take up the glorious inheritance in which Christ will be universally supreme by putting the saints, the many sons, in possession of it. Then will be manifestly fulfilled the first feature of the mystery as detailed in Ephesians 3: 6 — the Joint Heirs will realise their inheritance, for Christ will be set forth bringing His saints with Him.

The second feature of the mystery is that the saints are a Joint Body. There are not two bodies, "There is One body" (Ephesians 4: 4). According to Ephesians 2 this joint body is composed of those to whom the apostle refers in verses 1 and 2 as "you" and "ye" — these being believers from among the nations, and in verse 3 — "we" — believers from among the Jews. All alike are the subjects of God's rich mercy and great love. They had all lain in spiritual death, all were dead in sins, but God made them to live together in union with Christ; raised them up together and made them to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. These are they who are reconciled to God in One Body. This is the body of chapter 3. Not now a number of sons who are joint heirs in collective blessing, but through the life-giving operation of God united to the glorified Christ as a man's body is to his head. This unique, divine formation is a living organism — the Body of Christ. As the many sons, being heirs, will collectively have their part in the inheritance, so are the saints as Christ's body, the vessel, corporately, for the expression of the mind and life of the Head *now*, and for the display of the glory in the *coming ages*.

The third feature is, "Joint Partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel." What then is this promise in Christ which they partake of by the gospel? What then is this promise in Christ which they partake of by the gospel? Look at Titus 1: 1, 2, ". . . in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, PROMISED before the ages of time, but has manifested in its own due season His word, in the proclamation with which I have been entrusted, according to the commandment of our Saviour God." Also 2 Timothy 1: 1 — ". . . according to PROMISE of life, the life which is in Christ Jesus . . ." See also 1 John 2: 24, 25 — ". . . ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the PROMISE which He has promised us, eternal life."

We are not left in uncertainty as to the PROMISE. It is life, eternal life. Life and incorruptibility have been brought to light by the gospel. Our Lord by His going into death has annulled death and opened the door into life. The blessed tidings of this are clearly set forth in the gospel of the grace of God.

To summarise: The three constituents of the mystery as explained in Ephesians 3 are —

1. Heirship, which involves sharing the inheritance with Christ.
2. Organic unity, which involves the truth of the Body of Christ.
3. The Promise of life which involves relationship — sonship.

The late H. J. Vine wrote —

1. is COLLECTIVE
2. is CORPORATE
3. is VITAL

The truth of the mystery is that the saints of the ASSEMBLY are ONE with their glorious HEAD. The mystery thus embraces the truth of Christ and the Assembly. Much more could be written on this blessed theme of Christ and the Assembly, but the foregoing may suffice to give some indication of what the mystery is.

Two great intentions were before God in taking up Paul in His grace, according to this chapter:

1. Verses 7 and 8: As minister of the gospel to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.
2. Verse 9: As minister of the mystery to make all see (to enlighten all) as to the stewardship or administration of the mystery.

How wonderful the truth that God created all things by Jesus Christ that they might serve Him in effectuating His eternal purpose, that there might be in the present time a manifestation to principalities and powers in the heavenlies of the all varied wisdom of God. The mystery of God's masterpiece, and He employed all His own resources to purpose and effect it. Little wonder that we read in Colossians 2: 3 that in the mystery are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

This being so, may we set ourselves to be more thoroughly acquainted with this blessed truth, in which through grace and redemption we have such an intimate part. May we apprehend and live in the light of these things so as to minister pleasure to the heart of God, and honour our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Assembly. This privilege is open to us now in a way that it will not be in the glory. There will be no contrariety there — no testing, for we shall be circumstantially commensurate with our blessing; Christ will be universally owned, but now while He is the rejected One may we by the Spirit's power walk in the truth of these blessed things.