

WHO RECEIVE THE SECRET?

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus . . . to all the saints . . . who are pre-expectant in Christ (Eph.1: 1,12). I do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may be giving you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the realization of Him . . . for you to perceive . . . what the riches of the glory . . . (Eph.1:16-18)

THE SECRET that, in spirit, the nations are to be *joint* allottees, and a *joint body*, and *joint* partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel of which Paul was the dispenser (Eph.3:6) was not made public until after he was a prisoner at Rome. It is evident that it was neither sent to the twelve apostles nor received by them. The epistles of James, Peter and John, although they may have been written afterward, do not acknowledge it at all. Peter may have hinted at it, since he found "some things" in Paul's epistles "hard to apprehend" (2 Peter 3:16).

It is quite evident that those to whom Peter wrote did not receive the secret. The salvation which they received was that which the prophets had foretold (1 Peter 1:10). This was by no means a secret. They prophesied concerning the grace which was for them. They were a "chosen race," a "royal priesthood," a "holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9; Ex.19:4-6). Every one of these expressions is a direct negation of the truth of the secret. In the present administration there is no chosen race. All races are on the same footing. There is no royal priesthood. We need no priests, for we all have access to the Father. There is no holy nation. All nationalities are equally blessed in Christ.

Peter, in his epistles, is upholding the prior place of Israel over the other nations, in flesh, on the earth. Paul reveals the equality of the nations with them, in spirit, in the heavens. Not only Peter, but all of the Circumcision epistles, from Hebrews to Jude, and including Revelation, are saturated with Israel's superiority and base almost all blessing on a physical relationship to Messiah. Paul himself, in his earlier ministries, had "known Christ according to flesh" (2 Cor.5:16). It was not until the conciliation was revealed that the physical was entirely removed from his ministry. In his epistles—not in Acts—we find his distinctive message.

FAVOR CONVEYED THROUGH PAUL'S EVANGEL

Who, then, received the secret? If it was not meant for all, what were the distinguishing characteristics of those to whom it came? As might be expected, the answer is plainly given by God Himself, but men have dimmed its clearness by a defective version. The third item of the secret should read: "*in spirit* the nations are to be . . . *joint* partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel of which I became the dispenser . . ." (Eph.3:6). It would be very trite, indeed, to say that this grace came through the evangel. It would be still more trite for Paul to inform the Ephesians that he was a minister of the gospel. But to assure them that this new favor is conveyed through *his evangel* (and not that of the twelve) is most instructive and needful.

It is not true that the nations are, or ever will be, *joint* partakers of the promises contained in the gospel which Peter preached. Almost every promise in that evangel, apart from personal pardon, is based on the very opposite. The believers among the nations cannot be incorporated in the holy nation, the chosen race, or the royal priesthood, for these are dependent on the presence of faith-

ful gentiles for their existence. Priests must have people in order to officiate. For some time the apostle Paul fulfilled this function in relation to the believing gentiles (Rom.15:16), but, now that the nations are joint partakers, priesthood is impossible.

We have the choice of two distinct lines of ministry, one for the Circumcision and one for the Uncircumcision. To one the very thought of copartnership is repugnant. To the other it is the logical and necessary sequel. Only those who had received the evangel Paul proclaimed were prepared for the reception of this secret. To them it was sent and to no one else. There are many considerations which confirm this. Let us see if we cannot discover the points of contact between Paul's previous preaching and the secret as revealed in Ephesians.

THE PROMISES OF THE EVANGEL ARE IN CHRIST JESUS

There is much significance in the titles of our Lord. "Jesus Christ" lays the emphasis on His humiliation and physical relationship. "Christ Jesus" is the title of His exaltation. As Paul was first introduced to Him in glory, his ministry is associated with His celestial dignities rather than His rejection on earth. The fact that the promises of his evangel are in Christ Jesus clearly cuts out the Circumcision evangel. The twelve apostles seldom used this title, for they were well aware of its significance. Until the Kingdom comes they must proclaim Jesus Christ, the lowly One, the suffering One, and now still the rejected One, so far as the Kingdom is concerned.

The refusal and increasing failure of the Kingdom proclamation was accompanied by the gradual introduction of Paul's evangel, which is based on His exaltation at God's right hand among the celestials, hence is associated with

the title Christ Jesus. The significance of the title is in fullest accord, not only with Paul's preparatory evangel, but especially with its sequel, the secret now revealed. We do not wait for the Kingdom to be set up on earth. Our Head is already glorified in heaven. He is not despised or rejected there as He is on earth. And our destiny is that celestial realm, where He is exalted as Christ Jesus.

The promise in Christ Jesus included such transcendent blessings as justification, reconciliation, and glorification, and all flow from unforced favor. It also includes a future salvation from coming indignation (Rom.5:9), and our assembling to Him before the day of indignation should set in (2 Thess.2:1; 1 Thess.1:10; 4:13-18; 5:9). The Circumcision were never promised such immunity, but some of them will be carried through the time of trial. The hundred forty-four thousand will be protected in it.

WE ARE PRE-EXPECTANT

Thus the expectation set before those who receive Paul's evangel is to be fulfilled prior to that held by the Circumcision. They expect the Lord to come to the air before He descends to Olivet with His holy ones. This is referred to in the twelfth verse of the first of Ephesians, where the Authorized Version reads, "That we should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ." The Revisers changed this to "who had before hoped in Christ." This is still ambiguous, but much nearer the truth. Rotherham is much the same, "we who had hoped beforehand in the Christ."

The statement is not true as it stands in these versions. It is contrary to the facts. Paul and those with him were by no means the first to trust in Christ. Peter and those with him trusted in the Messiah long before Paul was called. The change from "trust" to "hope" does not help much. It would be more in accord with the records to put Paul

among the *last*. He was the last to see Christ after His resurrection (1 Cor.15:8). Paul had not preceded the other apostles in either trust or hope. This cannot be the meaning of the passage.

The CONCORDANT LITERAL NEW TESTAMENT reads, "who are pre-expectant [in a state of prior expectancy] in the Christ" (Eph.1:12). The sublinear has it THE *ones-HAVING-BEFORE-EXPECTED* IN THE ANOINTED. The Greek verb form is *proēlpikotas*. It is in what is called the "perfect" tense. It does not denote a specific act, but the state or condition resulting from an act. The state of those associated with Paul was one of expectancy. As they looked for the fulfillment of it before the return of the Lord to rescue His people Israel, it was a prior expectancy, in the sense that it was to receive a prior fulfillment. The "before" refers to the future, not the past. They were to be snatched away in clouds, for meeting the Lord in the air before the Circumcision would meet Him on the earth.

THE NATIONS HAVE A CELESTIAL ALLOTMENT

To such as had received this prior expectancy the message now comes that, not only was their immediate expectation to be different from that foretold for Israel by the prophets and our Lord, but their subsequent destiny also was to be changed. They were not to come back to the earth to receive an allotment down here, after meeting the Lord in the air. The gentiles among them were not to take a subordinate place to the holy nation on the earth. Instead, they were to be joint enjoyers of the celestial allotment with a few of the Circumcision who also had received Paul's evangel and who had this prior expectation.

It is evident, then, that, speaking broadly, the mystery was received by the nations, the Uncircumcision, and that remnant among the Jews, the Circumcision, who had become associated with Paul. Most of the Circumcision

did not receive it, but followed the fortunes of the Kingdom. They either died in faith, not having received the promises, or drew back and apostatized. Almost all gentile believers did receive it, for the Circumcision reached only a few, such as Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch, who became proselytes of Judaism. The division between the two classes was clearly marked by their future outlook. Those who held to the Kingdom expectation could not receive the secret; those who held the prior expectation could not do otherwise.

The entire context confirms this interpretation. Not merely are our blessings to be among the celestials (Eph.1:3), but Christ Himself is given the place preeminent. He is to be the Head in the heavens as well as on the earth (Eph.1:10). And this exaltation of His is the basis of our blessing, just as His suzerainty of the earth is the source of Israel's sovereignty.

The full force and special significance of "Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11) is lost if we do not see its peculiar application to the Pauline Jewish remnant. They are certainly entitled to a place in the millennial earth. Paul deserves the best place in the earthly Kingdom. What excuse has God to offer for changing his allotment to heaven and thus causing him to forfeit his place in the Kingdom administration on earth? It is this, that He is operating the universe, not only in accord with His revealed counsel, as proclaimed hitherto, but according to the counsel of His will, which includes the secrets now made known.

NO ONE CAN COMPLAIN

Of course, none of the Israelitish remnant can complain. The change is such a marvelous promotion, such a tremendous advance, so much grander and more glorious than the allotment they lose, that they not only acqui-

esce but exult. They do not murmur in disappointment but rejoice in His appointment. There is much to admire in what we may call the arbitrary graciousness of God. He gives, not merely what is expected, but what accords with His high intention.

The Uncircumcision had no promises, no allotment in the land. Yet they also had received the spirit of promise, which was the earnest received by the Circumcision. They had received this spirit, under Paul's preaching, simply on hearing and believing, without baptism or repentance (Acts 2:38) or the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17). Since they had the same pledge, they are entitled to the same possessions, hence are joint allottees.

THE SECRET HAD NO APPEAL TO THE TWELVE

It follows, then, that the secret was received by a special company who had been prepared for its message by Paul's previous epistles, or by his personal ministry in accord with them. It had no appeal to the twelve apostles, no place in their public proclamations or epistles. It does not even make contact with Paul's Kingdom ministry as detailed in the latter part of Acts, which clears the ground, but does not lay the foundation. This is laid in his epistles to the four ecclesias in Thessalonica, Galatia, Corinth and Rome. On these the secret is erected.

To put the matter briefly, we may say, then, that the key to this question is contained in the *written* name *Paul*. Those who received his written ministry also received the secret. Paul, separated from the rest by the spirit (Acts 13:2), learning nothing from them (Gal.1:12; 2:9), receiving added revelations (2 Cor.12:1-4, etc.), the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the nations (Eph.3:1), the fullest expositor of the secret of Christ (Eph.3:4), and the only one who can enlighten us as to the present secret administration (Eph.

3:9)—the name PAUL is the open sesame to the treasures of transcendent truth.

The Circumcision, represented by Peter, found these things "hard to apprehend" (2 Peter 3:16), not because they lacked intelligence or spiritual understanding, but because the secret is outside the sphere where their own blessings are found. If it needs a special spiritual enduement (Eph.1:17) for *us* to perceive these great truths, how difficult and well-nigh impossible is it for those beyond the bounds of its operation to get more than a glimpse of the greatest of all of God's revelations!

GOD'S WISDOM IN A SECRET

Paul knew this secret when he wrote to the Corinthians. It seems that he even made it known in a private way to those who were mature (1 Cor.2:6-10). What else could he refer to when he says, "but we are speaking God's wisdom in a secret, which has been concealed, which God designates beforehand, before the eons, for our glory"? He plainly predicts its public revelation in the twelfth and fourteenth chapters, when not merely individuals would be mature, but the era of maturity should arrive.

It is more than probable that he had received the revelation of it fourteen years before (2 Cor.12:2), when he was snatched away to the third heaven. He knew this secret before he had penned any of his epistles. Hence they were written with it in mind, and with the object of preparing the readers for its reception. God was ordering all of Paul's acts and words in view of the impending deluge of grace, which could not come until the full apostasy of Israel. Then, after the apostle warns the Jews that the salvation of God is dispatched to the nations, and that they will hear (Acts 28:28), he commits the secret to writing.

While, therefore, we are plainly warned that some matters in these epistles are temporary and some would cease,

the great controlling themes, like faith, expectation and love, abide. This is the point in the thirteenth of first Corinthians. Many have been imagining that the maturity there alluded to referred to the resurrection glory of the individual. It is concerned with the great administrative change which is impending. Faith and expectation will not engage us in the glory. They will be replaced by sight and fulfillment. Love alone lingers there. But now, in this secret economy, the signs of immaturity vanish, and the tokens of maturity abide.

SAINTS NEED ADJUSTMENT

The question may arise as to what authority there is for believing that the faith of early believers was modified by later revelations. Can we be sure that the saints themselves are the same, and that the teaching changed? This is evident from Ephesians itself. Teachers were specially given for the *adjusting* of the saints to the new revelation (Eph.4:12). The Authorized Version rendering, "perfecting," contains only a part of the thought. They themselves, however, have rendered it *mend*, *fit*, and *restore*, elsewhere. The saints needed more than perfecting. They needed to be adjusted to these later disclosures. Some doctrines were dropped and others took their place. All matters were modified by the change in administration.

The same adjustment is needed today, and should be the chief function of a teacher who knows the truth, for many believers have not only failed to understand the secret, but they cling to that which has been discarded by it, and even to that which never had a place in any of Paul's writings or ministry. Indeed, the word "adjusting" seems quite inadequate for some, who are almost wholly occupied with matters pertaining to Israel and the twelve apostles. But this does not affect their right to the blessings brought by the secret, though, of course, they cannot

enjoy them until they recognize and appreciate their transcendent treasures.

The question is often asked: "If the Acts does not deal with the body of Christ, who are those of whom James speaks, when the subject of the nations comes up at the apostolic counsel (Acts 15:14)? Is not God visiting the nations now, to take out of them a people for His name?" James is speaking of the place accorded the nations in the prophets. He refers especially to the preaching of the Kingdom by Peter, who was the first to go beyond the Jewish pale in his proclamation. The passage that he quotes has a specific fulfillment at the time of the end, when the tabernacle of David is rebuilt. After the nations are almost destroyed by the judgments, the *rest* of them will seek the Lord.

James and the other leaders of the Circumcision had then no inkling of the secret. The nations themselves took the place of subordination to Israel. For the time being, they occupied the position which would have remained theirs permanently if Israel had repented and the Kingdom had come. The Pauline believers come before us in Acts only as they are related to the Kingdom with which the book is concerned. Therefore, while most of the *persons* immediately concerned probably later became identified with the present grace, they were not so then. They may, even then, have been members of the body of Christ, but it was not then a joint body, which was not known until the close of the Acts activities.

At such times of transition, we should not ask what "class" each company is in, as though that were fixed and changeless. Paul himself was probably in three different "classes" during his career. At first, though called for special service in an entirely different sphere, he was identified with the Circumcision. Later, in his ministry among the nations, he was separated from the Circumcision and

in the one body, in its transitional aspect. Later, he lost his standing in the flesh entirely, and becomes a member of the joint body. There is, to speak accurately, no "body class" now. All are in the "joint body." The "body class" existed only during Paul's pre-prison ministry, and was merged into the present. Now there is only one "class," for grace has unified all who believe, by the Spirit of God.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE RECIPIENTS OF THE SECRET

The secret embraces all who belong to Christ today. Whether Jews or gentiles, Circumcision or Uncircumcision, now all who believe God are the recipients of its far-flung favor. We are well aware that the gospel of the Circumcision is more often proclaimed than the conciliation. We may almost affirm that the secret is never made known. But this is a day of *grace*. And it is not the way of grace to withhold what is not apprehended or appreciated. Men may proclaim pardon now, but God gives justification. They may insist on a new birth, but He makes a new creation. They get what He gives, not what they believe He is dispensing.

It is the fashion today to make God's gifts a matter of reward for service, or knowledge, or some fancied superiority. We trust that all who read these lines will enter into an exultant understanding of the secret we are unfolding. But may He ever shield us from the assumption that a grasp of His truth will give us a place superior to our brethren! As individuals we will receive rewards. But there are no divisions in the body of Christ, even though some, because of special enlightenment, will claim a different or a higher destiny. We are all one! In Christ the most ignorant and useless believer, by grace, has access to all of the treasures which the most intelligent and useful can enjoy.

Knowledge puffs up. Love builds up. Almost every advance in the knowledge of God has resulted in an arro-

gant, self-assertive division among His saints. We witness the sad spectacle of the followers of Christ divided into hostile camps, each proclaiming its own superiority and relegating the rest to an inferior position. Each claims a monopoly of His grace, because of some fancied attainment in faith or faithfulness. Let no one imagine that a knowledge of the secret is requisite in order to receive its benefits. If that were so, how few would ever find the place prepared for them by God!

We trust that many will be led into the enjoyment of this marvelous secret, and open their heart's eyes to apprehend this, the highest revelation given by God to mortal man. It is not only the grandest in glory, but also the greatest in grace. It is our earnest prayer that such a knowledge will be suffused with love. It is our fervent petition that no one will arrogate its benefits to himself and exclude others because they have not yet apprehended its message. *All who believe now* "receive" the secret in the most potent and precious sense of the word. They may never have heard of it, they may not understand it, they may even reject and oppose it. Yet it is theirs, and they will receive it in due time, as determined by the despotism of grace.

Other administrations call for conformity in faith or practice as a condition of participation. The coming era of indignation will have different "classes" to accord with degrees of faithfulness. But in this economy of purest grace, where the only requirement is to admit a lack of all deserts, the most elementary faith is the key which opens the portal to all of God's treasures. Having Christ, we have all. We can enjoy more as we explore what is ours in Him, but we can do nothing to add to our possessions. Hence we are all in the same "Class," we are one in Christ Jesus.

If, however, we press the present aspect of our question, and ask "Who receive the secret?", that is, who accept it, and enjoy it, and exult in its transcendent glories, the Scrip-

tures give us a very clear answer. Two qualifications are necessary, according to Paul's Corinthian letter. He made this secret known to those who were *mature* (1 Cor.2:6,7), and could not reveal it to the fleshly (1 Cor.3:1). Spirituality, as well as "dispensational" maturity, is a necessary condition for the enjoyment of the secret.

Maturity is manifested in the rejection of human wisdom and philosophy, and a recognition of the rudimentary nature of the Kingdom activities. Those who follow a philosophy of human origin, though dealing with the Scriptures, effectually shut themselves up where they cannot receive God's secret. And those who, like the Corinthians, are occupied with the manifestations of minority, the affairs of spiritual childhood, will find it impossible to enjoy the secret in its plenitude and preciousness.

Carnality is chiefly manifested in sectarian divisions, and in walking as men in the flesh comport themselves. In my own experience I have found the futility of even trying to teach the secret to anyone whose heart cleaves to the confusion of man-made divisions, or even claims to be a follower of Christ in a sense peculiar to his own party. Sectarianism effectually destroys the possibility of delving into the secret. It is an impervious coating which truth cannot penetrate. The secret is only for the unsectarian and spiritual.

Indeed, so marvelous is this secret that Paul prayed for the believers of his day, who may not have been either immature or unspiritual, for a *special spirit of wisdom and revelation* for its realization (Eph.1:16-18). I join with Paul in praying for all who wish to enter into the enjoyment of this surpassing secret, the summit of divine knowledge, wisdom and love, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father glorious, may indeed enlighten the eyes of their hearts, that they perceive its call, its allotment and its power.

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