

SHARING GOD'S TREASURES

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"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

Recently, as my wife and I sat at a table in a Santa Barbara restaurant, a very attractive waitress approached to ask if we were ready to place an order. She was tall and radiant and evidently anxious to please. The young lady was different from the other employees, and I asked, "Are you a Christian?" She smiled and replied, "Yes, Sir, I am. I have attended church all my life, but last September I entered into a relationship with the Lord, and since that time my life has changed." I shall always remember that young woman who said, "I entered into a relationship with Christ."

Millions of church members profess to have faith in Christ, but unfortunately to some of them, Jesus of Nazareth is only a Person who lived and died centuries ago. Apparently they know little if anything of constant communion with the Lord: hearing His voice, obeying His commands, and enjoying His presence. Knowing Christ is not merely an agreement with religious principles. It is the sharing of His grace which extends through life to embrace eternity.

The word partaker comes from the Greek koinonia, which means to share, to become a partner. It was used in the Old Testament to indicate when a man became unclean, when he shared a neighbor's defilement. Interpreting the word koinoneo, Dr. Mayer says, "It means to come into common fellowship; to become a sharer; to be made a partner." This becomes increasingly interesting when a study of the New Testament reveals progression from the darkness of sin to the splendor of eternity. The word is used in five challenging Scriptures.

Partakers of His Nature (2 Peter 1:4)

This verse written by Simon Peter provides a window through which may be seen the amazing salvation offered by God to sinful people. The apostle was explicit when he reminded his readers they had "escaped the corruption that is in the world." They had been delivered from the power of sin and had received something never previously possessed. Their conversion had been made possible, not because they had accepted a new doctrine, but because they adored a new Deliverer.

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It was never revealed whether or not the disciples were present when Nicodemus interviewed Jesus, but at least they knew what the Lord had said, for John recorded a portion of the Master's message. The ruler of the Jews was an educated clergyman, for otherwise he would not have been the teacher of the Jewish people. There is reason to believe he was a profound scholar, a sincere theologian, an honored citizen. Yet in spite of his attainments, he needed more than he had. The Lord said to him, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Unfortunately, that expression has been brought into disrepute by people whose lives leave much to be desired. Born again Christians are not fanatics whose emotional outbursts discredit their teachings, nor people whose morality becomes offensive. They are sincere, believing, God-honoring people whose personal encounter with Christ revolutionized their lives. That transformation can be seen in their daily conduct. Ideas may be changed by what is heard. A new doctrine can alter a man's thoughts, but personal salvation becomes a reality only when Christ is the center of new life.

Probably Paul was endeavoring to express this when he wrote to the Galatians, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again

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until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). When the Spirit of God implanted seed within the womb of Mary, a process began which reached its climax nine months later in a stable in Bethlehem. The body of the Lord was carefully developed and ultimately brought into the world to fulfill the mission planned in heaven. His birth was a miracle and so is every true conversion. The divine nature cannot be purchased nor deserved. The greatest university in the world cannot supply it, neither can scientists explain it. As parents transmit life to their offspring, God also imparts His life to sinners. Thus begins the process which will never be completed `Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The waitress in the Santa Barbara restaurant had discovered the difference between being a church member and a child of the living God.

Partakers of His Holy Spirit (Hebrews 6:4)

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers

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of the world to come, If they should fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4).

This has been one of the most controversial verses within the Scripture. Those who do not believe in the eternal security of the believer in Christ quote this statement to support their doctrine that even Christians can fall from grace and be lost. Many people find difficulty in harmonizing this utterance with the words of Christ, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). Nevertheless a careful study of the Bible should remove the problems of interpretation.

The writer to the Hebrews proceeded to say, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you" (Heb. 6:9). The letter was sent to Hebrew Christians of whom was said, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10). These early believers had not fallen away, and consequently, the statement about the impossibility of renewal was not addressed to them. The writer, Paul, or whomever he might have been, referred to many Jews who had turned back, as it were, from the gates of the kingdom. They had heard and understood the Gospel, had been mentally enlightened by the power of the Holy Spirit, and to some extent had known the pleasure of association with Christ and His church. Yet, in spite of their proximity to the kingdom of God, they had rejected personal commitment. Their refusal to proceed might have been caused by the destruction of their temple, the interference of legalistic teachers, or the increasing persecution of those who followed the Savior. Like the children of Israel, they had seen the Promised Land and had tasted of its fruit, but their unbelief prevented their entering Canaan.

Even in this twentieth century, many people who actively served the church have become the slaves of lust, and many who preached the gospel are now contaminated by degradation. Their bitter tears of anguish cannot remove the stain from their souls nor relieve the remorse in their troubled hearts. Whether or not they were ever truly saved is open to conjecture, but even if they contemplated the possibility of obtaining God's pardon, they cannot forgive themselves.

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They know "They have crucified the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."

If Jews who were near to entering the church of Christ could be "partakers" or sharers with the Holy Spirit, the fellowship enjoyed by those who have become the temples of God is infinitely greater. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). Faith brings eternal life to the believer, but the indwelling Spirit of God guarantees that Christ will be formed within the human soul. To become a partner with God in such an experience is among the greatest privileges ever given to men and women. The same Spirit that moved upon the face of the waters at the creation of the world also moves upon the chaos in unregenerate life and brings to pass that which is pleasing to the Lord. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, said in her prayer of thanksgiving, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Sam. 2:8). The psalmist reiterated the same sentiments when he wrote, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill" (Ps. 113:7-8). Yet God cannot do this alone; He needs our assistance and for that reason permitted men and women to "partake of His Holy Spirit" and become partners in the greatest enterprise ever conceived in the mind of the Almighty.

Partakers of His Promise (Ephesians 3:6)

"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." It is worthy of consideration that Paul did not speak here of the promises of God. Even in his generation there were innumerable promises that had been made to Israel, and these affected every facet of life. Writing to the believers in Ephesus, the apostle emphasized that his readers had become "fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise," which was fulfilled in Christ and proclaimed through the gospel. That special promise was made by God to Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). This had remained a mystery hidden throughout the ages, but Paul became the messenger through whom it would be explained to mankind.

He affirmed in the opening statement of Ephesians 3:9 that his task was "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery." When the apostle wrote to the Colossians, he repeated the

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message, "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:25-27). The apostle used the word mystery seventeen times in his writings.

The Greek word translated mystery is *musteeron* which means: "a hidden or secret thing; something not obvious to the understanding; a hidden purpose or counsel; a secret will" (Thayer). Paul used the word six times in the epistle to the Ephesians (1:9; 3:3; 3:4; 3:9; 5:32; 6:19) and four times in the letter to the Colossians (1:26; 1:27; 2:2; 4:3). The gospel revealed through Christ was God's special surprise for mankind. He had planned, prepared, preserved, perfected, and presented it. It was the glorious news that He loved everyone and desired to make possible the entry of all nations into His family.

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Even unlovely, unattractive people were appreciated by the Almighty, and through Christ, the most degraded could lean on the bosom of God. To Jews this was unwelcome; it was a stumbling block To the Greeks it was foolishness, but to every Christian it was the most wonderful message ever proclaimed. God's revealed mystery made possible the words of the poet who wrote:

Jesus included me;
Yes, He included me:
When the Lord said `Whosoever,'
He included me.

(Quoted from the author's book *The Exciting Epistle to the Ephesians*, Kregel Publications, 1989, pp. 136-137.)

Partakers of His Holiness (Hebrews 12:10)

"For they [our earthly fathers] verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he [God] for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." Loving fathers would never chasten a child unnecessarily. Their experience enables them to foresee things which might be harmful. Their affection guarantees everything possible will be done to preserve children from danger. The writer to the Hebrews emphasized that if this were true of human fathers, it was even more evident with God's attitude toward His children.

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The Lord desired that we should share (partake of) His nature, become heirs of His vast possessions, and be worthy to enjoy what He supplied. To share His life is a great privilege; to be the recipient of His gracious promise is even better, but to be holy is something that cannot be surpassed. John wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Paul wrote. "That with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:20-21). "Paul's reference to the magnifying glass is most interesting. . . . A magnifying glass does not actually increase the size of anything: it only seems to do this. Actually the object at which a man may be looking is exactly the same size, but the glass brings it into bold relief, and the watcher is able to see it more clearly. It is not possible to make Christ more wonderful for He is the altogether lovely One, and the chiefest among ten thousand. Yet, if by God's grace we can become magnifying glasses—in perfect alignment with the Master and men—they will be able to see Him more clearly when they look at Him through us. All the details of His superb glory may be brought into delightful relief if we are what we ought to be. Paul had a similar thought in mind when he wrote: "Ye are living epistles, seen and read of all men." We read the Scriptures to learn more of Christ. Likewise people read -us in order to achieve identical results" (quoted from the author's book *Bible Windows*, Kregel Publications, 1985, p. 106). When Christians magnify their Lord, they are truly partaking of God's holiness.

Partakers of His Glory (1 Peter 5:1)

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." The word glory, which comes from the Greek word *doxa*, was one of Peter's favorite expressions. He used it sixteen times in his epistles (see two examples in 1 Peter 5:4 and 1 Peter 5:10). He mentioned the eternal glory to which

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Christians are called and indicated that "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." Peter also mentioned, "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

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God gave to the apostle a clear view of what lay beyond the grave. He saw and appreciated the splendor of his Lord. Yet it was even more wonderful to know that he, Simon Peter, in spite of his failures, would share the glory of his Master.

Dr. Paul Lee Tan in his wonderful book *The Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* quotes a remarkable story from the American Civil War. He says, "During General Sherman's last campaign in the South, certain changes in commanders were made. General Howard was placed at the head of a special division. Soon after this the war ended, and there was to be a grand review of the army in Washington. The night before the review, General Sherman sent for General Howard and said: 'The political friends of the officer you succeeded are determined that he shall ride at the head of the Corps, and I want you to help me out.' 'It is my command,' said General Howard, 'and I am entitled to ride at its head.' 'Of course you are,' replied General Sherman. 'You led those men through Georgia and the Carolinas: but Howard, you are a Christian, and can stand the disappointment.' 'If you put it on that ground,' replied Howard, 'there is but one answer. Let him ride at the head of the corps.' 'Yes, let him have the honor,' replied Sherman, 'but you will report to me at nine o'clock in the morning, and will ride by my side at the head of the entire army.' General Howard protested, but his commander's orders were positive. So on that day, in the grand review, he had a place of honor at the head of the entire army."

There is no commentator in the world who can exhaust the meaning of sharing or partaking of the glory of Christ. If a text may be lifted from its setting, then it can be said, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Perhaps Charles H. Gabriel was nearest to the truth when he wrote:

When all my labors and trials are o'er,
And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore
Will through the ages be glory for me.

O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me;
When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.

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