

that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua – Now Paul gives us the essence of the “mystery” which was hidden in previous generations but revealed to the apostles and prophets, and he does so by using three terms: “fellow heirs” (συγκληρονόμος, *sunklēronomos*), “fellow members” (σύσσωμος, *sussōmos*), and “fellow partakers” (συμμέτοχος, *summetoxos*). Each of these offer specific aspects of the unity that exists between Jew and Gentile believers, a unity that will now be clearly expressed in the ingathering of the elect from the nations, enlarging the *ekklesia* which Yeshua promised to build as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise.

The word translated “fellow heirs,” *sunklēronomos* is found three other times in the Apostolic Scriptures.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Rom 8:16–17)

Heb. 11:9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. (1Pet 3:7)

The Greek word translated as “fellow heirs” is a compound word made up of the preposition σύν (*sun*) meaning “with” in the sense of “accompaniment or association,” and the noun κληρονόμος (*klēronomos*) which has the sense of “one who is designated as an heir, who receives something as a rightful possession.”

It is interesting to note that Paul uses this same word in Rom 8:17 to affirm that believers, as children in God’s family, are “fellow heirs *with* Messiah.”<sup>1</sup> For since Yeshua is *the* Son of God, all who are “in Messiah” are likewise heirs of God’s grace, for it is the will of the Father that Yeshua should be the firstborn of many children.

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1 The Greek συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ is properly translated as “fellow heirs with Messiah,” giving the genitive one of its proper aspects, namely, that of “relationship.” See Blass-DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Univ of Chicago, 1961), p. 89, §162,

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:29)

Thus, all who are truly born again, having been brought into the family of God, have assurance of eternal life through faith in Yeshua as that which belongs to them as their inheritance. It is not something earned but something that is ours as heirs to God's eternal and unchanging grace and love, based upon His infinite righteousness.

Here Paul brings forward a theme he introduced in the opening chapter of this epistle (1:11, 14, 18). The whole idea of an inheritance looks forward eschatologically to the time when all of God's children will receive their inheritance, i.e., eternal life in which there will be no sorrow, no pain, and no death, but rather the never ending joy of being fully able to give glory to God for Who He is and what He has done.

Note also that Peter uses this same word, "fellow heirs," to emphasize that believers, whether male or female, are equally heirs of God's gracious gift of life. In the time of the apostles there was, from the viewpoint of the various extant Judaism, a consideration of all Gentiles as inferior and unredeemable and it also appears that women in general were often looked at as inferior to men. It was in the Gospel message as lived out by Yeshua Himself that male and female, while surely having divinely ascribed roles, were nonetheless equal in terms of their essential worth, both created in the image of God and both "fellow heirs" in the body of the Messiah. And this is emphasized by the next term Paul employs.

This second word Paul utilizes to describe the "mystery" is translated "fellow members," the Greek word *sussōmos* being made up again of the Greek preposition σύν (*sun*) "with," describing "accompaniment or association," and the word for "body" (σῶμα, *sōma*). It therefore carries the sense of "belonging to the same body."<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, we find it nowhere else in all known Greek literature, and it is possible that Paul invented it, perhaps based upon another word with similar meaning.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, it is found only here in all of the Scriptures, include the Greek translation of the Lxx.

By adding the word *sussōmos*, Paul emphasizes that each believer is a necessary and important part of the *ekklesia*, each with its own func-

1 BDAG, "σύσσωμος," p. 978.

2 συσσωματοποιέω, "incorporate, amalgamate," See Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1973), p. 1734.

tion to carry out within the faith community of which one is a member. In using “fellow members” in this verse, Paul is reinforcing what he stated earlier in 2:16, that through the saving work of Yeshua, Jew and Gentile have been reconciled into one body<sup>1</sup> in the *ekklesia*. In these passages Paul is not talking about the “theological idea” of the body of Messiah, or what some would refer to as the “universal church” as distinguished from the “local church.” While there is a very real sense that all believers, from all ages and from all locations, form a unified “body of Messiah,” the expression of this in reality awaits eternity when all who are in Messiah will be gathered together in the world to come as the redeemed people of God.

But when Paul speaks of Jew and Gentile being “fellow members,” i.e., “belonging to the same body,” he is referring primarily to the real and tangible expression of the *ekklesia* in the local assembly or community of believers. It is in the real and visible community of believers that the importance, yes, the necessity of each member can be demonstrated. And it is this unity for which every true community of faith must strive and work to maintain and grown in the expression of this unity.

The third term Paul employs to describe the “mystery” now revealed in the *ekklesia* Messiah is building, is “fellow partakers” and is likewise a compound word made up of the preposition *σύν* (*sun*), describing “accompaniment or association,” and the word *metoxos*, which carries the sense of “someone who shares or participates together with another person, a partner.” In other Greek literature, the word is used of a “business partner.”<sup>2</sup> Within the entire Apostolic Scriptures, this word is found only in our verse and in 5:7.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; (Eph 5:6–7)

In our current verse, the word “fellow partakers” has a positive sense, since all believers are partakers of the richness to be found in the salvation which is ours through the work of Yeshua, made actual through the work of the Spirit Who indwells all who are “in Messiah.” In contrast to this Paul warns in 5:6–7 not to be “fellow partakers” with those who deceive people with their “empty words,” that is, teaching which leads to destruction rather than to the abundant life for those who

1 Cf. Eph 4:4.

2 BDAG, “μετοχος,” p. 643.

know and cling to the truth. Thus, all believers, Jew and Gentile alike, are partners together in our new life which we have in the Messiah, a life marked by service to Him as we live out the life of faith, bearing each others burdens (cf. Gal 6:2), rejoicing together in the goodness of God, walking in the ways of righteousness before a watching world, and persevering in the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (cf. Jude 1:3). As partners together in the body of Messiah, we seek to use the gifts God has graciously given us in order to maintain the success of the community, that the glory of our risen Savior, Yeshua, will be known.

It is clear from these three important words which Paul uses to describe the unity of believers in the body of Messiah that he is not speaking merely of an association, but of something far more integral, substantial, and essential.

Paul makes it very clear that God’s unveiled secret (“mystery”) has to do not merely with an alliance of Jew and Gentile, or perhaps a friendly agreement to live together in peace, or even an outward combination or partnership, but, on the contrary, with a complete and permanent fusion, a perfect spiritual union of formerly clashing elements into one new organism, even a “new humanity” (2:15). In God’s house there are no boarders; all are children.<sup>1</sup>

... of the promise in Messiah Yeshua – Paul has made the bold statement, then, that all who are the redeemed of God, both Jew and Gentile, are “fellow heirs,” “fellow members,” and “fellow partakers” of the promise in Messiah Yeshua. What does Paul intend us to understand by this phrase? What is “the promise in Messiah Yeshua”?

We should remember that Paul has previously referred to “the covenants of the promise” (2:12), to which the vast majority of the nations, Gentiles, were “strangers, having no hope and without God in the world.” What is “the promise in Messiah Yeshua?” It is precisely the covenant promise made to Abraham, that all of the nations or families of the earth would be blessed in his Seed, i.e., Yeshua.

It is important to realize, then, that being “fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua” does not erase or blur the fact that the body of Messiah is made up of people from “every nation, every family, and every language group,” for this is the

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1 Hendricksen, *Ephesians*, p. 155.

very promise of God established in the covenants: the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and culminating in the New Covenant. Gentile believers do not become “Jews” and Jewish believers do not become “Gentiles.” Rather, God has determined to bring into His family the elect from every nation, and all those whom He draws unto Himself and, through faith in Yeshua saves eternally, comprise the “family of God,” all with equal standing in righteousness and all equally having access to the Father through their heavenly high priest, Yeshua. Likewise, all who are truly children in the family of God have the indwelling Spirit and thereby grow in likeness to Yeshua so that He will forever be known as the firstborn within a family of many children.

This is what Paul is demonstrating in the “Olive Tree” metaphor of Romans 11. The nourishment which flows from the root is derived from the covenant promises established by God and made sure by His own omnipotence and righteousness. All branches in the tree, whether natural or grafted in, “partake of the rich *nourishment* of the root” (Rom 11:17). That is, all are “fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers” of the divine promise carried along throughout the millennia by the divine covenants God enacted with His chosen people. And these promises ultimately culminates in the one promise, that is, possessing eternal life obtained through faith in Yeshua, made possible by the sovereign grace of God. And we experience eternal life now, for Yeshua stated that He came that we might “have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10), and by faith we know and affirm that we will live forever in the world to come with Yeshua Himself. For Paul, all of this is summed up in his theologically packed expression: “in Messiah.”

*...of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.*

Paul states here that he was a “minister” of the promise in Messiah Yeshua.” The word “minister translates the Greek word *διάκονος* (*diakonos*) from which we derive our English word “deacon.” The word itself, however, generally means a “servant,” someone who carries out the instructions of his superior.”<sup>1</sup> Paul considered himself the servant of the Lord, always looking to Him for instructions as well as for the strength and wisdom to carry out what he was called to do. In that, he stands as a model for us all, for all who are believers are servants of the Lord.

Further, in spite of the fact that Paul suffered in his role as a “minister” or “servant” of Yeshua, he nonetheless considers his calling as a

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1 BDAG “*διάκονος*,” p. 230.

“gift of God’s grace.” He recognized that his work in taking the Gospel to the Gentiles had eternal dimensions, and he did so knowing that God would use his efforts to accomplish what He had already promised, i.e., the promise to bless all of the nations in the redeeming work accomplished by Yeshua.

Further, the success of Paul’s service for Yeshua was guaranteed because his being called as a “minister” or “servant” of Yeshua was given to him “according to the working of Yeshua’s power.” That is, Paul had experienced a true salvation in Yeshua, expressed by genuine repentance and trust in the risen Savior Who had called him. What is more, he recognized the spiritual power he had been given by the Spirit Himself, and thus was able to face the persecutions which inevitably awaited him at the hands of his Jewish brothers.

**8–9 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Messiah, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;**

Paul refers to himself as “the very least of all the saints,” the Greek word (ἐλάχιστος, *elaxistos*) carries the sense of “lowest in status,” or “relatively smallest in a group or class,” or “of little importance, insignificant.” It seems clear that Paul is referencing the fact that before his coming to faith in Yeshua, he persecuted believers and in so doing likewise sought to persecute Yeshua Himself: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (cf. Acts 26:14).

In a very real sense, Paul could never quite “get over” the fact that he was chosen by God to be a spokesman to the Gentiles of the glorious gospel as centered in the person and work of Yeshua. Paul, the epitome of a Jew who despised the Gentiles and Yeshua Himself, became the servant of Yeshua proclaiming His greatness and glory to the Gentiles.

And thus he revels in the fact that he was chosen by Yeshua Himself to be the voice of the gospel, opening strategic avenues to the Gentiles so that they would hear the Gospel and by God’s grace, the promise would be fulfilled in earnest as the nations were gathered into the *ek-klesia*.

*...this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Messiah* – Paul’s personal testimony constantly speaks of God’s grace, and so it should be for all us. What is more, even when the Lord leads us to serve Him in difficult situations, His calling is a matter of His grace, for what He calls us to do He enables us to accomplish.