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Partners

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in December 1958.

In the letter to the Hebrews chapter 3 and the first verse:

"Wherefore, holy brethren, *partakers* of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus."

I want to put a ring round that fourth word: "partakers" - of a heavenly calling. That is, for the moment, the purpose of this brief meditation; the focal point. But, as you see, it is in the course of a process suggested by the first word of the sentence, 'wherefore'. It is a matter of common knowledge that this letter to the Hebrews is one full of comparisons and contrasts. They are very many. At this point they relate to two houses and two people responsible for and in those two houses. Two houses, as you notice in the immediately following words, on the one side, in the first place, that of Moses in which he was faithful as a servant. On the other side, the house of Jesus in which He is Son and over which He is Head.

The word 'house' of course, is more literally 'an economy', an order of God in this dispensation. So on the one side there is the earthly house, on the other side the heavenly in contrast. On one side the temporal, on the other side the spiritual. On the one side, as it says 'that which came through angels'; on the other side, that which has come through God's Son. The whole letter has that as its object; the superiority, the greatness of the latter over the former.

These words with which this chapter begins tell us something or indicate something as to the constitution of this heavenly, spiritual, so much superior house, when it uses these words: "wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling". Holy brethren... they constitute this house. The holy house then, is comprised and composed of those who are separated from one whole system, realm and nature, unto God; unto another order. Separated from the world, from sin, from death; that is the meaning of the word 'holy', holy - separated.

Brethren - holy brethren. Beautiful title for the house of God! A family of holy ones, of separated ones. This is the superior nature of THIS house. We would like to stay much with that because there's much said about it earlier, about Christ singing in the midst of His brethren and not ashamed to call them brethren, saying "I and the children which God has given me" and so on, all leading up to this: 'holy brethren...' The heavenly, spiritual house is a house of sanctified brothers and sisters. It's a *holy family*.

But then we come to the special point for the moment, the particular designation and conception of those who are of this house. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers..." - an unfortunate translation. In the original it is "partners". Partners - the same word occurs in Luke 5:7 about the disciples and the fishes, "they beckoned unto their partners". That is exactly the same word here; why did they want to change it into partakers instead of saying, "wherefore, holy brethren, *partners* of a heavenly calling"? There are many designations in the Word of God of the Lord's servants. We're familiar with bond slaves of Jesus Christ, ministers of Christ, stewards of the mystery, fellow-workers; and so we could go on - a great number of titles and conceptions of the Lord's servants in the Lord's house. But here is one by itself. And if we could really just catch its peculiar and particular meaning to see that it goes a little further than many of the others... Practically all of those other titles carry the idea of delegated responsibility. A servant, for instance, well, he is entrusted as a servant with responsibility. A steward, he is entrusted with resources, it's something delegated to him. And so all the other titles have that idea bound up with them. But here is something which goes beyond - *partners!* Partners in a heavenly calling... brought into partnership with Christ and with one another concerning this house. This house is a partnership.

I'm quite sure, dear friends, that you are impressed almost every day that you live with the difference between an employee and a partner. We all see it, it shouts at us everywhere. I've been in the house in Kilcreggan during this week while the work has been going on. The employees have been at work. They think nothing of working and then going off to their meal and leaving *all* the electric light on! I saw a young fellow with a large light on, working, putting on his coat and making for the door. I said to him, "Where are you going?" "Going home to dinner." "Why leave the light on?" "Oh, I never thought about that!" You see, "employee" is one thing - I felt the hurt, I've got to meet the liabilities and all that. If he had been a partner - a partner, a co-owner - he'd have been very, very careful about that house, about all sorts of little details, because as a partner he is involved in all the liabilities. There's all that difference, it may seem very simple, but there's *all* that difference in the house of God between employees (servants, in a sense) and partners. And seeing that the partnership here spoken of is a *family* affair, the family is in partnership over the house, over the economy, over the order; a joint family responsibility - that's what's here. A joint *family* responsibility for this house.

It brings the house very near to the heart doesn't it? To *real* concern, *real* watchfulness, *real* jealousy. We're *involved* as partners! You see, the losses are going to be our losses, they're not the losses of the boss, the owner, someone for whom we're working and he's got to bear that; they're OUR

losses. The gains are OUR gains! We are so deeply in this house matter that what touches it, touches us. The losses and the gains, everything to do with it is a matter of our very life, our very life. Joint responsibility, because, and it's a tremendous thing when we hear it said here, *God's house* - God's house, yes it's the house of God and yet it's our house - it's our house. Whose house are we? And it is said we are heirs of God and *joint* heirs with Jesus Christ; this is our house, it is a joint ownership. It belongs to us in a spiritual sense, it's a part of us and we are joint sharers in all the interests of this house.

I put my ring round the word 'partners'; it's all I want to say, you think about it. It conveys a lot. I think it goes to the heart of everything, it really does. It's a beautiful idea, we are no longer just employees of the Lord - servants in that official or professional sense - we are partners. Think about those disciples in partnership on the lake, I'm quite sure that what affected one boat, affected all the partners. What affected one partner affected all the others. It was a joint thing and the loss of any part was the loss to the whole; the gain to any part was the gain to the whole. And when one boat was nigh unto sinking by reason of the greatness of the draught of the fishes, they didn't keep it all to themselves, their blessing; they beckoned unto their partners - they shared their blessing. That's the house of God.

May He just convey to us His own meaning in this: "holy brethren, partners in a heavenly calling".