

The First Epistle to the Corinthians.

No.1. Introduction. pp. 3 - 7

The Corinthian letters are the most personal of Paul's inspired writings. In none of them do we see Paul the man more clearly. This was probably due to the close and personal contact the Apostle had with the church at Corinth. Corinth, at this time, was the chief city of Achaia, situated on the narrow isthmus that connected the mainland of Greece and the Peloponnesus. It was on the main trade route from east to west and north to south, being the chief centre of commerce, and so had a continual stream of traffickers, and a mixed population of Roman colonists, Greeks and Jews. It was a strategic centre, and its importance must have influenced the Apostle Paul in his missionary activities.

Corinth's history was in two parts. The original city was destroyed by the Romans in B.C.146. In B.C.46 it was rebuilt by Julius Caesar and given the status of a Roman colony. The old city contained the infamous temple of Aphrodite with its prostitution and the morals of the new one were no better. The Greek word *korinthiagomai*, meaning literally "to act as a Corinthian", was synonymous with immorality. Paul reached Corinth on his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts xviii. 1-17. How unlikely, yet how encouraging it must have been to the Apostle to receive the Lord's words "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace for I have *much people in this city*" (Acts xviii. 9, 10), which only goes to show that no one is too bad or depraved to respond to the gospel of God's love and grace.

Among the first converts were Aquila and Priscilla, who were not Corinthians, but were living there. Paul resided with them and began his ministry in the synagogue, which lasted over eighteen months with the result that many believed (xviii. 8). And so the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus reached Corinth within twenty years of the Crucifixion. Some notable people responded to the gospel, including Crispus, who was no less than the "chief ruler of the synagogue" (xviii. 8). Not only did he believe, but all his house. Then there was Sosthenes (I Cor. i. 1) also described as the "chief ruler of the synagogue", possibly succeeding Crispus (Acts xviii. 7). This must have been a great blow to Judaism and at the same time an impetus to Paul's witness.

The Authorship, Date and Place of writing and the background of the epistle.

Both external and internal evidences point strongly to the Pauline authorship of the letter. Clement of Rome wrote an epistle to the church at Corinth about 95A.D. and refers I Corinthians to "the blessed Paul, the Apostle". This is the earliest instance of the quotation of a N.T. writer identified by name. Other external evidence is provided by Ignatius and Polycarp. The characteristics of style, vocabulary and content harmonize with what is known of Paul and Corinth.

The Apostle wrote the letter from Ephesus and the date many conservative scholars give is 55A.D., though C. K. Barrett suggests early 54 or the end of 53. It will be helpful to reconstruct the background to the writing of the Corinthian epistles, derived from the Acts and from the epistles themselves. Some of these points may be debated and there is no unanimity among Bible scholars here, but we believe the following will not be far from the true facts.

We have already mentioned Paul's visit to Corinth described in the Acts and referred to in I Cor. ii. 1. After this visit he wrote them a letter which has not been preserved (v. 9). We need have no concern that any part of inspired Scripture has been lost. The Apostle must have written letters which do not form part of Holy Scripture and this is one of them. Disturbing news came from believers in contact with the Corinthian assembly and also a communication from them requesting information on certain problems. In order to meet these needs Paul wrote I Corinthians. Apparently this did not solve all the difficulties, and in consequence Paul was forced to pay them a hurried painful visit (II Cor. ii. 1; xii. 14; xiii. 1, 2). Following this the Apostle wrote them a third letter of very severe character (II Cor. ii. 4). His anxiety for the church there concerning their condition and also how they would receive this severe epistle was so great that he could not wait in Troas for Titus, the bearer of the severe letter, but hurried on to Macedonia where he met him and learned with great relief that the letter had produced the needed results and all was well. From Macedonia Paul then wrote the canonical II Corinthians (II Cor. ii. 13; vii. 5-16). After this he paid his last visit to the Corinthian church (Acts xx. 1-4).

Some modern scholars hold that the "severe letter" is contained in II Corinthians and that this epistle is not a unified work. They claim that vi. 14 - vii. 1 is an interpolation, because it breaks the sequence of thought, that chapter ix. largely duplicates what is in chapter viii., and that the last section (x. 1 - xiii. 14) is so different in character from the earlier sections that it must be part or whole of the stern letter Paul sent to Corinth. Against this there is absolutely no manuscript evidence for such a truncated epistle and a close study will reveal that, far from being disjointed, it shows a remarkable unity.

It will be good to look at the background of I Corinthians a little more closely. Apollos undoubtedly worked in Corinth (I Cor. iii. 6) and it is possible that Peter visited it too. Owing to their spiritual immaturity this tended to cause the Corinthians to break down into groups and to range themselves under the name of one of these leaders (i. 11, 12) thus producing disunity. There were problems and abuses at the Lord's Supper (xi. 18-22), public litigation among members (vi. 1-8), a notorious case of immorality (v. 1-5), arguments about eating food that had been sacrificed to idols (viii. 1-13; x. 14 - xi. 1), disagreements about the need for marriage (vii. 1-40) and of morality outside marriage (vi. 12-20). Resurrection was denied by some (xv. 12) and Paul's own apostleship questioned by those who were very likely Judaists (iv. 3; ix. 1). All this was quite enough to produce an unhealthy spiritual state in the assembly and to cause great concern to Paul. Some of this bad news had been brought to Paul by the household of Chloe (i. 11). Additionally a trio, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived from the Corinthian church, probably bringing the problems which Paul was asked to answer

(xvi. 17). These may be seen in the recurring phrase “now concerning” (*peri de* vii. 1, 25; viii. 1; xii. 1; xvi. 1, 2). There were problems too about spiritual gifts. Some were placing too much emphasis upon the gift of tongues and upon these gifts in general, which appeared to be producing pride. Furthermore the gifts were not being used in an orderly or balanced manner. One can therefore readily see that guidance and warning through an epistle was absolutely necessary.

Before we go any further, it will be helpful to give the outline of the epistle as a whole:

- A | i. 1-9. Waiting for the Coming of the Lord.
- B | i. 10 - iv. 21. “IT HATH BEEN DECLARED UNTO ME.”
 - C | v. 1 - xiv. 40. The Body, physically, spiritually, ecclesiastically.
- B | xv. “I DECLARE UNTO YOU.”—the gospel and the resurrection.
 - The antidote to their errors.
- A | xvi. Maranatha. The Lord cometh.

The first section revolves around these words, *calling, confirmation, coming*. The word “call” occurs in the first two verses. In each case the A.V. supplies the words “to be” though they are lacking in the original. Whether they are supplied or not, truth is stated, for Paul was a ‘called Apostle’ by none less than the risen Christ, and so was obviously called to exercise apostolic functions. Likewise in verse 2 the Corinthians were ‘called saint’ (holy ones), through the salvation and grace of God, and certainly should have been saints in their everyday lives, though it is manifest from the epistle that many of them were anything but saintly in their walk. Here is a good example of the difference between *state* and *standing in Christ*. As God sees us in His Son, with all His holiness reckoned ours, we are indeed perfect and complete in Him. In ourselves, and in our experience and walk day by day, we come a long way behind such a glorious position, but it should be a constant concern to us to seek to balance state and standing in the strength of the risen Saviour.

Paul links Sosthenes with himself in the opening salutation. We read of a Sosthenes in Acts xviii. 17 who was a ruler of the Corinthian synagogue and was brought before Gallio’s judgment seat and beaten. The book of the Acts does not tell us that this Sosthenes became a believer, so we cannot say dogmatically that the Sosthenes of our epistle is the same person, but the probability is that he was. Not only does the Apostle refer to the Divine calling of the Corinthian believers, but he states that the epistle is “to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus” (2). The basic meaning of *sanctification* is *separation* in a twofold way: separated *to* and separated *from*. Basically God separates His children to and for Himself and His will. This is the first and positive aspect of sanctification. Secondly, all such are separated from everything that is opposed to His will. This is the negative aspect. We need to take care to stress the *positive* side first. Failure to do this has resulted in a man-made narrowness and finally in nunneries and monasteries. This is a false separation which can lead to barrenness and spiritual pride. Once we have realized fully what it means to be claimed by God for Himself, we shall see clearly that the old sinful nature and the spirit of the world which lies in Satan’s power, must not intrude or be allowed to mix with such a position.

Paul links the believers at Corinth with “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (2). The places he refers to were the meeting places for believers. In the early days it could have been the synagogue within the framework of which Hebrew Christians gave their witness. But more likely it was the homes of believers. In xvi. 19 we have a reference to Aquila and Priscilla and “the church that is in their house”. We must not think of buildings specially erected for Christian worship as we see around us today. These did not come into being until a much later date. The house of the believer was the home of the church, and we can therefore see why an orderly Christian home was an essential qualification of a bishop or overseer; and warm hospitality a necessary virtue (I Tim. iii. 2, 4, 5).

We next come to *confirmation*. The Apostle expresses gratitude to the Lord for the grace that had been given them and also that they were made rich in every respect by a bountiful Lord and Saviour. We are not told they were rich in faith, hope or love, but in speech and knowledge of every kind (4, 5). Speech obviously includes the gift of speaking with tongues, and doubtless prophecy and every kind of Christian discourse. A great deal of attention is given to Christian speech in chapters i. and ii. which we must consider in its place. Knowledge refers to the apprehension of Christian truth and it is important to note that these gifts were peculiar to the Acts period as a means of confirmation to each believer. In the twelfth chapter we have a long list of these special confirmatory gifts which were given by the Holy Spirit, of which knowledge, *gnosis*, is one (I Cor. xii. 8). Here *wisdom* is linked with knowledge and Paul has a great deal to teach about wisdom in the early part of this epistle. The Apostle John evidently refers to the supernatural gift of knowledge in his first letter:

“Ye have an anointing (unction) from the Holy One, and ye know all things the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye *need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things*” (I John ii. 20, 27).

This is obviously not true today, for Divine Knowledge does not come automatically as a gift of the Spirit. We all know that careful, persistent and prayerful searching of the Scripture of Truth is now necessary to arrive at an understanding of what God has written. The special gifts enumerated in I Corinthians were confirmatory miraculous gifts to prepare believers for the great event of the early coming of the Lord:

“So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”
(verse 7).

In Heb. vi. the testing of the heavenly gift, and of the Word of God is linked with “miracles of the coming age”, i.e. the Millennium (powers of the world to come A.V.). These gifts were a foretaste of the kingdom age which would be set up at the Lord’s return and it is obvious from this letter and others written at this period, that this coming was then imminent (see Acts iii. 19-26; I Cor. vii. 29; x. 11; xvi. 22; I Thess. i. 9, 10; iv. 15-17; II Thess. i. 7; Heb. x. 37; I Pet. iv. 7; James v. 7-9; I John ii. 18).

No.2. Confirmation and Coming. pp. 25 - 30

Not only did the confirmatory miraculous gifts of the Acts period look forward to the Kingdom age, but they were a confirmation of the testimony of Christ which He had given to Israel. The miracles which He had wrought on earth were a Divine attestation of His Messiahship to the earthly people:

“Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto Him, Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them” (Matt. xi. 2-5).

“But I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, *the same works* that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me” (John v. 36).

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, *a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs*, which God did by Him in the midst of you” (Acts ii. 22).

The miraculous gifts and signs of the Acts period which followed were a testimony that the twelve apostles were continuing what Christ *began* to do and teach in His ministry to the chosen people:

“. . . . so great salvation, which at the first *began* to be spoken by the Lord, and was *confirmed unto us* by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with *signs and wonders*, and with *divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost*, according to His own will?” (Heb. ii. 3, 4).

“These signs shall follow them that believe; In My Name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and *confirming the word with signs following*. Amen” (Mark xvi. 17-20).

There is no doubt therefore what these miraculous gifts were, and why they were given. They were a Divine confirmation of the earthly kingdom testimony and they only have relevance when kept in this Scriptural setting. To force them into the present time when the earthly kingdom people Israel are laid aside in unbelief and this aspect of kingdom held in abeyance, is an error which can only reap confusion and division.

The Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the last article we referred to no less than eleven N.T. references, chiefly from the epistles written around this time, which describe the Lord’s coming as immanent. This testimony is overwhelming and cannot be ignored by the true student of Scripture. Peter had been authorized by God to declare that the second Advent of Christ only awaited the repentance and conversion of Israel and to this the nation was commanded to respond there and then (Acts iii. 19-26). No one knew whether the Jew would be obedient or not,

but all had the hope that this would be realized in their lifetime. “We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord” was the standpoint of all believers at this time and was the comfort and great antidote for the sorrow resulting from the loss of those who were near and dear (I Thess. iv. 13-18). In the letter we are studying, the Corinthian believers were “waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (i. 7). Here the word “coming” translates the Greek *apokalupsis*, apocalypse. This, together with the word *parousia*, also translated “coming”, but better rendered “arrival”, or “presence”, are the words which the Holy Spirit uses to describe the hope of the church during the Acts. This arrival of the Lord Jesus on the earth had been clearly described by Him in Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii. and Luke xxi. From the words used, it was to be a visible bodily coming, not a spiritual one, and the Book of the Revelation expands it and describes it as being a time when “every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him” (Rev. i. 7). If we note every occurrence of *apokalupsis* and *parousia* and the contexts they are used in, it will be noted that not one of them gives any clear backing to the idea of a *secret parousia*. This idea has been forced upon those who bring the later revelation of the Mystery into the Acts and fail to see in the Acts the close connection with God’s longsuffering to Israel, and His waiting for their response to the command to repent and turn back to Him (Acts iii. 19). This coming back to the earth is the hope of Israel which both the O.T. (e.g. Zech. xiv. 4, 5), and the early epistles of the N.T. deal with and is the dominant hope of all believers during the period covered by Acts.

The confirmation which Paul has referred to, would last “unto the end”, that is of this earthly life, whether terminated by death or the Coming of the Lord, so that they might be “blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 8). This period seems to look forward to the realization of the Corinthians’ hope and the Divine assessment of their service. It is referred to again in the epistle to the Philippians in a similar setting. “Blameless” means “unimpeachable”, literally chargeless, and behind it all was the utter faithfulness of God, the only solid rock to rest upon (9). The pattern of verses 1-9, as C. H. Welch has shown is as follows:

- A | i. 1-3. Called. Fellowship in every place.
- B | 4-7-. Confirmation. Gifts (as in chapter xii.).
- C | -7. Coming. Waiting for the Coming.
- B | 8. Confirmation. Graces (as in chapter xiii.).
- A | i. 9. Called unto the fellowship of His Son.

A new section commences in verse 10 in which Paul reprimands the Corinthian believers for their cliques and disunity, appealing to them to put an end to this sort of thing, which denied in practice union that God has made between His children and makes spiritual growth impossible. We give C. K. Barrett’s translation of verses 10-13:

“I beg you, brothers, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you may be all agreed in what you say, and that there may be no divisions among you; rather, that you may be restored to unity of mind and opinion. I make this appeal, my brothers, because it has been made known to me by the members of Chloe’s household that there are some contentions among you. What I mean is this: each one of you has his own watch-word— ‘I belong to Paul’, ‘I belong to Apollos’, ‘I belong to Cephas’, ‘I belong to Christ’.”

The immaturity of these believers made the devil's work of splitting them so easy. Those who ranged themselves under the name of Apollos were possibly those who admired rhetoric and the polished style of this leader. One can well understand those who rated the gift of tongues highly, being attracted by Apollos who was an "eloquent man" (Acts xviii. 24), coming from Alexandria, a centre of Jewish rhetoric. Those who followed Peter were doubtless the Judaists who followed the Jewish law and ceremonial and the link with Jerusalem. Others chose the name of Christ, and while this appears better on the surface, they were equally condemned with the other factions, including those who said "I am of Paul". It may be that the Christ followers were those who took the attitude that the words of Christ spoken when on earth were more important than those of apostles, an attitude that many adopt today, forgetting that it was the same Christ who later spoke from heaven (Heb. xii. 25) through His servants, just as He had spoken on earth. To turn away from them, was to turn away from Him. "Perfectly joined together" (*katartizo*) was a technical word for setting a broken bone. It is used in Mark i. 19 for the mending of nets, and in Gal. vi. 1 for the restoration of a brother overtaken in a fault. The Apostle insists that these divisions must end and that they should be restored to unity of mind and opinion.

Spiritual gifts do not automatically lead to a spiritual state of mind. No church in the N.T. had such an abundance of gifts as the church at Corinth, yet no other assembly equaled it for carnality and division. As a result Paul had to say:

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" (iii. 1).

This condition made it impossible for them to advance in the knowledge of the truth:

"I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, *neither yet now are ye able*" (iii. 2).

He seeks to bring home to the Corinthians the true meaning of what was happening, by asking a series of rhetorical questions: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" He adds: "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized the household of Stephanas, besides (that) I know not whether I baptized any other".

Here and in verse 17 the Apostle clearly shows the place that water baptism had in his ministry, which certainly was not in the forefront. He was glad he had only baptized a few of them and could not even remember how many! The last thing any truthful critic could say of Paul was that he was careless or unmindful of things pertaining to the truth or the special ministry with which Christ had entrusted him. If water baptism had the importance that many sects have put upon it, these words would have been impossible. Verse 17 is explicit:

"For Christ sent me *not to baptize*, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

The word ‘sent’ is the verb *apostello* and therefore nothing is clearer than that water baptism was *not* an essential part of his Christ-directed apostleship or the gospel that it contained, and makes it quite impossible that the ‘one baptism’ of Eph. iv. 5 can be that of water. As a contrast, Peter’s ministry and that of the eleven to the circumcision was definitely linked with baptism (Mark xvi. 14-18, Acts ii. 38) and this was fitting with a nation so long linked with type, shadow and symbol. While these two servants of the Lord preached the same Christ and the same Saviour, yet there were differences in their ministries which it is foolish to ignore, and only those who have an axe to grind will wish to do so.

Whatever their attitude was to him, Paul was determined to preach to the Corinthians the gospel with which he had been entrusted by the risen Saviour (Gal. i. 11, 12). But he was determined to avoid rhetorical skill (the wisdom of words) lest the cross of Christ be emptied (literally), that is, be emptied of its significance and dwindle to nothing under the weight of rhetorical argument. Paul does not represent himself as a brilliant orator, but a faithful proclaimer of the good news of God in his salvation of sinners. Eloquence by itself cannot save; it rather misleads, and the listener can be carried away by the personality and fluency of the speaker. Paul knew well the attraction that oratory had on the Greek mind and he deliberately avoided it so that nothing could detract from the power of the gospel. He now enlarges on wisdom and uses it in two ways both bad and good, the wisdom of men and the wisdom of God. The word occurs no less than 16 times in the passage comprising i. 17 - iii. 19. The section i. 18 - ii. 5 is laid out as follows:

- A | i. 18. The Power of God.
- B | i. 19-22. The wisdom of the world.
- C | i. 23. We preach Christ crucified.
- D | i. 24-31. Object—that no flesh should boast.
- C | ii. 1, 2. Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
- B | ii. 3, 4. Not with man’s wisdom.
- A | ii. 5. Your faith the power of God.

The wisdom of God is entirely beyond man’s intellect and lies behind the Divine purpose of the ages. It was only the matchless wisdom of God that could have devised such a plan and often in its outworking, the Scriptures comment on it. In Rom. xi., after dealing with the “reconciling of the world” (15) and the “secret of Israel’s blindness” (25), the Apostle concludes with praise to God, specially for His wisdom (33). In Rom. xvi. 25-27 he likewise addresses praise to the only “wise God”. In Eph. iii., after revealing the two secrets: (1) of Christ the Head and (2) the Church, His Body, Paul refers to the fact that even principalities and powers are learning through the out-calling of this church the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. iii. 10). God not only has wisdom beyond the comprehension of man, but also the *power* to carry it out in practice. Hence the preaching of the cross and the salvation accomplished by it, is connected with the *power of God* (I Cor. i. 18) which makes it completely effectual in those who believe, in spite of the opposition and misunderstanding of unbelievers, who cannot frustrate its working, however much they oppose.

Such are perishing; they are on the road to destruction and to them the gospel of God is nothing but foolishness (i. 18). To the Greek with his culture and art the cross was abhorrent. The idea that a dead Jew hanging on a cross, could meet all their needs was utterly stupid to them as well. To the Jew with his idea of a conquering Messiah, a powerful Being who could rid them of the Roman yoke, the cross with its outward portrayal of weakness was equally repulsive; it was a “scandal”, a “stumbling block”.

The only wisdom that man knows is centred in himself and entirely leaves God out of account. The only salvation that he can understand is what he imagines he can work out for himself and for the world. The essential difference between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man is that the former is Christ-centred, whereas the latter is man-centred and because of his sin and poverty of ability it is doomed to utter failure. The Greek mode of thought still persists today and is behind all the man-made schemes for ‘progress’ so-called and the betterment of the world.

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In the section of the epistle we are now considering, i. 18 - ii.5, it is surely clear that human wisdom is set in complete opposition to the wisdom of God. Sin and human limitation have so adversely affected man’s mind, that he cannot grasp the thoughts or ways of God (Isa. lv. 8, 9). Yet in his pride and blindness he deceives himself into thinking that his ideas are best, and does not hesitate to bring even the Creator to the bar of his own puny judgment. No wonder the wisdom of man at its best is looked on as foolishness by God, and the ways of God are looked on as foolishness by men (I Cor. i. 18, 20, 21). “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (21). Note that it does not say “by foolish preaching”. Alas, there is too much of that. More accurately it is “by the folly of the Christian preaching”. It is the *message preached* that appears to be folly to the unsaved, natural man. Whether it was to the Jew, who in his unbelief constantly demanded that God should back up His message by signs additional to those He had already given (Matt. xvi. 1-4), or the Gentile (Greek) who had an inflated idea of his own intellectual capacity. Christ crucified was the only truth that could meet both needs and this was the only proclamation that Paul determined he would give (22-24).

The Apostle now points to the Corinthian church as being a practical illustration of this:

“You can see what I mean, brothers, by looking at your own calling as Christians, for there are among you not many who are wise by human standards, not many who are powerful, not many who are nobly born” (verse 26 C. K. Barrett’s translation).

The Countess of Huntingdon, who did such a fine work with the Gospel in the times of the Wesleys, was reputed to have said she thanked God for the letter ‘m’. The context said “not *many* noble”, rather than “not *any* noble”, for she was a society woman who had

nevertheless been gloriously saved. From what Paul said it was clear that the gospel was spreading most rapidly among the lower classes and this was another reason why it was despised by the elite. In this gospel not only do we see the deepest needs of every man being met, whatever class or race he might belong to, but also that God was engaged in overthrowing the world's false standards:

“God chose what the world counts foolish in order to put to shame the world's wise men; and God chose what the world counts weak in order to put to shame what it counts strong, with what the world counts base and despised, even the things that did not exist God chose, that He might do away with what did exist, that no one might glory in His presence” (verses 27-29 C. K. Barrett).

God has arranged the salvation of men so that they have “no finger in the pie”! If they had, they would surely boast of it, however small it might be, and this is one thing God will not tolerate. He Himself will have all the glory and adoration as Redeemer and Lord.

Paul is not only concerned about the empty boasting of the world; he brings the truth to bear on false boasting in the church where they were “boasting in men” (iii. 21) and putting wrong valuation upon some of their own apostles and ministers (i. 12). They tended to forget that their Christian calling and standing depended not upon the merits of these men, but upon God's call and His grace:

“But of Him (God) are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption” (30).

The verse reads literally “you are from God”, that is, you had your origin in God and His redemptive work through Christ, and *He* is the source of all you need in the way of real wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and men, whether apostles or prophets, are but His servants. Of all the many titles of Christ, that of being the Wisdom of God is apt to be overlooked. In Prov. viii. 22-31 wisdom is personified as being with God at creation. In the Word of God, creation is always ascribed to Christ (see John i. 3; Col. i. 14-17). What more natural then for the Apostle to use Wisdom, not in the abstract as was so often done in Greece, but concretely, as a Person, and summed up in the Creator and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul concludes the section by saying that if anyone is to boast, let him boast in the same Lord. All of us have nothing but what we have received from Him (iv. 7), so it is only fit and right that He should receive our thanks and adoration.

Chapter ii. commences with the emphatic *kago*, which makes clear that the Apostle is continuing his argument and showing how it applied to his own ministry. If human wisdom at its best is foolishness with God and all true wisdom is embodied in Christ, then in line with this, in his ministry and the preaching of the gospel, he purposely avoided mere cleverness or eloquence and anything that could be construed as being showy or outwardly attractive, knowing that this, while it would appeal to the Greek mind, could only detract from the power of the message:

“And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the mystery of God” (ii. 1 R.V.).

The reader will notice that the R.V. reads ‘mystery’ instead of ‘testimony’ (A.V.). It is not easy to decide which is the correct reading, for both have good manuscript backing. The words look somewhat similar in Greek *marturion* and *musterion* and could easily have been confused by a copyist. The balance seems to be in favour of ‘testimony’ and this would line up with “the testimony of Christ” in i. 6. The phrase “the testimony of God” could either mean “testimony about God” (objective genitive) or “the testimony borne by God” (subjective genitive). Lightfoot takes the genitive of i. 6 as objective and ii. 1 as subjective, the testimony borne by God to Christ. One thing is perfectly clear however, that in view of their carnal condition and attraction to clever oratory, Paul determined to proclaim among the Corinthians nothing more than the cross of Christ. As iii. 2 expressly declares, they could only take the beginnings of truth, the milk of the Word. Verse 2 has often been misrepresented by being taken out of its setting and made to mean that gospel preaching sums up all truth, that true ministry should consist of nothing more than proclaiming the way God’s grace can save a sinner. There are believers who will listen to nothing else than what they term a “gospel message”. This conveniently absolves them from any serious Bible study or searching after the deep things of God and apprehending what is “strong meat”. They remain in the immature state of spiritual babyhood, taking nothing but the milk of the gospel and even imagine that this is a virtue!

Such do not hesitate to criticize those who want to go on to maturity (perfection). Many of the present day churches are cluttered up with this type of spiritual infant and it is no wonder that the deep things of God, the unsearchable riches of grace and glory as unfolded in the later prison epistles, are so little known or prized among them.

While the Apostle was forced to limit his testimony to the saints at Corinth, yet he was able to go deeper to some, for in ii. 6 he states “howbeit we speak wisdom among the mature (perfect)”, but, for the most part, this was impossible, and we may be sure that it gave him no pleasure to have to restrict his message in this way. Not only this, but he confesses to personal weakness and fear, which only shows how human he was:

“And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling” (ii. 3).

How encouraging it is for us to realize that this great man of God knew what it was to be afraid and to be conscious of being inadequate and weak in himself. This but makes his faithful ministry and witness an eloquent testimony to the all-sufficient grace and power of God.

Deliberately avoiding persuasive words of human wisdom, he relied entirely upon this power:

“And my argument and my proclamation were not enforced by persuasive words of wisdom, but by a manifestation of spirit and power” (ii. 4, C. K. Barrett).

The Divine conviction and force that accompanied his preaching conveyed a better proof of its truth than external oratory could provide. This concerned its internal effect. Externally it was confirmed, as Rom. xv. 19 declares:

“Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of God.”

No wonder Paul avoided the shallow attractiveness of a golden tongue, especially as I Cor. ii. 5 states:

“In order that your faith should not depend on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”
(C. K. Barrett).

There is only one safe place for faith to rest upon, and that is Christ, His Person and His work which are complete and changeless. To rest it anywhere else is to ask for disillusionment and misery. How often men and women have been swayed by attractive and brilliant speakers in Christian meetings, and been carried away by the messenger rather than the message! We can be certain of one thing, that any results from this are external only. They cannot and do not last, and when the effect has worn off, the listeners feel they have been “let down”.

However, the Apostle declares that, while carnality prevents spiritual growth and keeps such in a state of babyhood, he was prepared to minister deeper truth to mature believers:

“Howbeit we speak wisdom among the mature (perfect): yet a wisdom not of this age (world), nor of the rulers of this age (world), which are coming to nought; but we speak God’s wisdom in a secret (mystery), even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God fore-ordained before the ages (worlds) unto our glory; which none of the rulers of this age (world) knoweth; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (ii. 6-8 R.V.).

God’s wisdom here is practically identical with His truth and His purpose. This, for good reasons, God kept hidden. One of the reasons for the “mystery” (secret) truths of the Scriptures is to hide from Satan and his hosts valuable knowledge about God’s plans, just as in wartime, any facts that would be valuable to the enemy are suppressed. Let us never forget that ever since Satan’s fall there has been enmity and spiritual warfare between himself and God. There is a tremendous battle being fought and redemption has as much to do with its final victory as with the salvation of the individual sinner. Consequently we must be prepared to find that “the rulers of this age (world A.V.)” may mean more than human beings. Satan is described by Christ three times as the “ruler of this world” (John xii. 31; xiv. 30; xvi. 11) and Eph. vi. 12 speaks of “world rulers of this darkness”, “spiritual wickedness in heavenly places”. These are the evil spirit hosts under the control of Satan who are animating unbelievers to carry out their deadly work. From these, God in His wisdom, hides vital aspects of His redemptive purpose, so they shall not have the advantage.

In verse 8 we cannot exclude the earthly rulers, such as Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas the high priest; these were but the tools of evil spiritual foes who engineered the crucifixion of Christ. Neither of these human beings could be truthfully called *a ruler of this age*. Little did Satan realize that in murdering the Son of God, this very act would accomplish his overthrow and destruction, for Calvary means victory over Satan and his hosts as well as over sin and death (Col. ii. 14, 15). Had they known this, they would not

have crucified the Lord of glory. This majestic title ascribed to Christ, is an outstanding witness to His Deity. No Jew would ever address such a title to anyone but God in the fullest sense.

Needless to say, the wisdom of God in a mystery does not refer to the later mystery of Eph. iii. concerning the Body of Christ. It is not THE mystery but *en musterio* “in mystery” literally. It was the wisdom of God that had been hidden. Paul was making known God’s secret hidden wisdom which He had determined before the ages began for our glory and ultimately His.

No.4. pp. 67 - 71

Before we proceed to consider the next section, we will give its structural outline, and for this we are indebted to Charles H. Welch:

- A | ii. 6, 7. What Paul spoke. Wisdom among perfect (mature).
- B | ii. 8. Knowledge. None knew. Had they known.
- C | ii. 9, 10-. Revelation. Eye, ear, heart. But God revealed.
- D | ii. -10-13. The Spirit. |
 - a | Things of God revealed by the Spirit.
 - b | Not spirit of the world.
 - c | But of God.
 - b | Not man’s wisdom.
 - c | But Holy Spirit.
 - a | Things of the Spirit explained by spiritual means.
- C | ii. 14, 15. Discernment. Spiritually discerned.
- B | ii. 16. Knowledge. Known mind of the Lord. The mind of Christ.
- A | iii. 1, 2. Why Paul could not speak. Carnal, babes, milk.

The structure clearly shows the sharp distinction between the hidden wisdom of God which could be revealed to the mature, and the carnality of the Corinthian believers which for the most part made this impossible, keeping them in the state of spiritual infancy with the ability to receive only the ‘milk’ of the Word, the simplest possible truths. In ii. 9 the Apostle makes a Scriptural quotation:

“But as it is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him” (R.V.).

The difficulty here is that this is not an exact quotation, but seems to be a blending of Isa. lxiv. 4 and lxv. 16. The former passage in the LXX reads: “From the beginning we did not hear nor did our eyes see any God but Thee, and Thy works, which Thou shalt do for those who wait (Thy) mercy”, and the second passage thus: “They shall forget their former affliction, and it shall not enter into their mind”. Origen believed that Paul

was quoting not from the O.T., but the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Elijah*, but this would not justify the introductory “it is written” which always refers to the Scriptures. Whatever the answer to the problem is, we may be sure that the Apostle, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, was quoting truth, and therefore we need have no misgiving.

He now stresses what is most important to grasp, namely that *understanding* of the Word of God is something that is beyond unaided human capability, however great this may be. Such understanding only comes from the Holy Spirit Who inspired men to write the Word. The Divine Author alone can be the Explainer:

“But unto us God revealed them *through the Spirit*; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God even so *the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God*. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, *that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God*” (ii. 10-12 R.V.).

Man’s knowledge is confined to human things (verse 11). Only God can communicate the truth about Himself, His purposes and His ways. There is no other means of attaining to this Divine knowledge. Human intellectual capacity and education will not throw one ray of light of itself upon the Word of God. Why? Because it is *spiritual* and can only be *spiritually* discerned, as enabled by the Holy Spirit. A theological course may teach a lot *about* the Bible and its background, but this is no substitute for Divine enlightenment. When will men learn this? A man may come from a university with a brilliant theological degree and in the eyes of Christendom be eminently suited for preaching and teaching the Scriptures, but if he is not a humble believer depending upon God to give him “opened eyes”, he is as blind as a bat spiritually, and merely becomes a blind leader of the blind.

Not that we despise education, but we should know its limitations and keep it in its rightful place. No one knows the things of God save the Spirit of God (verse 11), and He has been given to us in order that “*we might know the things that are freely given to us by God, which things also we speak*”, says the Apostle, “not in words which man’s wisdoms teacheth, but *which the Spirit teacheth*, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (verse 13 R.V.). The spirit of the world and human wisdom and knowledge are less than useless here. The Holy Spirit Himself must be the Teacher, and He communicates His truth to us as we grow in grace and love and compare spiritual things with spiritual.

We may well ask, just what is the meaning of this last phrase? There have been a variety of translations and interpretations. It all depends on the meaning of *sugkrino* translated comparing, and the gender of the adjective *pneumatikos* spiritual. This can be either masculine or neuter. If masculine it will mean “spiritual persons”; if neuter it will be “spiritual things” or “spiritual words”. *Sugkrino* can mean “combine”, “interpret”, or “compare”. It only occurs again in II Cor. x. 12 rendered “comparing”. Darby translates I Cor. ii. 13 “communicating spiritual things by spiritual means”. Knox: “matching what is spiritual with what is spiritual”. Moffatt: “we interpret what is spiritual in spiritual language”. Coneybear: “explaining spiritual things to spiritual

men”. Goodspeed: “giving spiritual truth a spiritual form”. Revised Standard Version: “interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit”, and in the footnote: or “interpreting spiritual truths in spiritual language, or comparing spiritual things with spiritual”.

It is obvious that this verse is difficult to translate. The sense can either be comparing spiritual things, i.e. the words of Scripture, or interpreting spiritual truths to spiritual people or by means of spiritual words. The fact is that all these renderings express truth and it would be safer to take the meaning of them all. It would be useless to try and explain the truth of God to anyone who is not spiritual, that is not a saved person who is walking according to the new nature (spirit). On the other hand, if we want to correctly interpret God’s truth, we must be ready to compare with spiritual words of Scripture and let one passage throw light on or interpret another.

The Apostle makes it quite clear that the unsaved, the natural man, however clever or educated, can never receive or understand the Word of God:

“Now the *natural man receiveth not* the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and *he cannot know them*, because they are spiritually judged” (verse 14 R.V.).

As we have before stressed it is only by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit that saved people can come to a full knowledge of the Truth. Even then this is not mechanical. The carnal Christian will not be given light on the Word. A believer must be ‘spiritual’, with a mind and keen desire for the Spirit’s work, and he must search the Scriptures, for this is the means God chooses to use to bring him to Divine understanding. If a Christian keeps the Bible closed, he cannot expect enlightenment. Paul goes on to assert that the spiritual man judges or investigates all things, but he himself is not open to such judgment by anyone (verse 15). Does he mean by this that the spiritual man must not be exposed to testing? This cannot be, for he says in xiv. 29, “let the prophets speak two or three, and *let the other judge*”. The answer seems to be in iv. 3 where he states expressly that human judgment of praise or blame means nothing to him; his only judge is the Lord. So with the spiritual man; for him the final judgment and the only one that matters, is the Lord’s verdict. And who can know the Lord’s mind, apart from what He is willing to reveal? (verse 16). But we, says the Apostle, referring to himself and his spiritual colleagues, have such a revelation and outlook. In this sense “we have the mind of Christ”.

The Apostle now returns to the present situation at Corinth. He has to lament that their carnal condition with their splits, divisions and jealousies had made it impossible for him to give them anything but the simplest truth which he likens to ‘milk’. They were no better than Christian babies and could take nothing but the milk bottle. Solid food was impossible, though he longed to lead them on into deeper truths (iii. 1-4). He remonstrates with them for ranging themselves in splinter groups under his own name and that of Apollos and says:

“What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him” (iii. 5 R.V.).

The answer to these questions is not that Paul and Apollos are *nothing*, but they are *servants of Christ*, nothing more and nothing less. They are not to be idolized on the one hand, or ignored on the other. They were the channels Christ had chosen to reach them with the gospel, and appreciation of this would have saved the Corinthians from such party divisions.

“I planted, Apollos watered the plants. It was not we however, but God Who made them grow. It follows that neither he who plants nor he who waters counts for anything, but only He Who causes the growth—God” (iii. 6, 7 C. K. Barrett).

Paul likens the ministry of himself and Apollos to gardeners. No gardener, however diligent, can give either life or growth to the plant. This is God’s work alone. The significance is that God accepts his labour and uses it. In himself, the gardener has no independent importance. So it was with the service of Paul and Apollos, and since they were but instruments in the hand of Christ, it was foolish to play one off against the other—“He that planteth and he that watereth are one” (8). That is to say that the aim and result of their work are identical.

This naturally leads to the important question of the quality of Christian service and its final assessment by the Lord, leading either to reward or loss. This line of truth has always to be kept distinct from salvation as God’s free gift by grace apart from works or merit. Much damage has resulted from these two linked yet separate truths being confused, or one being stressed at the expense of the other. Many Bible problems can be solved by ‘rightly dividing’ these two aspects of doctrine and they are principles that run right throughout the Bible, and the importance of correctly evaluating them can hardly be over-stressed. The immediate context here relates first of all to the service of Paul and Apollos, but the argument broadens out to take in all believers:

“. . . . But each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are God’s fellow-workers; ye are God’s husbandry, God’s building” (iii. 8, 9 R.V.).

The A.V. “we are labourers together with God” is possible from the Greek, but the R.V. is to be preferred and fits the context better. It is not so much that the apostles were working together and God was working *with* them (although this was true), but rather that they were united in service and *belonged to* the Lord. They were “God’s fellow-workers”, whereas the church at Corinth was likened both to a field and a building. “Ye re God’s husbandry, God’s building.” They were likened to agricultural and architectural work done by the Lord. The Apostle now drops the horticultural metaphor and goes on to describe them as a structure and builders whom the great Architect was using. He reminds them of their responsibility as such; they could be wise builders or jerry builders using bad materials and becoming shoddy workers. At the end they would have to account to the Master, hence they should think very carefully about their present conduct and quality of service. Grace does not mean that God will overlook bad workmanship or disloyalty to His truth.

No.5. pp. 86 - 89

In the section of the epistle we are dealing with, the Apostle Paul elaborates the theme of Christian service, using the figure of a building, with its foundation and superstructure:

“According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (iii. 10, 11 R.V.).

The exceeding grace of God which had been manifested in his salvation, still continued with him and enabled him to serve faithfully. As a wise or skilled master-builder he had laid the one Foundation, Jesus Christ. This great Foundation is true and unchangeable for all time, and for the whole of God’s redemptive purpose. Paul was the original evangelist through whose ministry the first converts at Corinth had responded. He had faithfully preached Christ and this Foundation had been well and truly laid by him. But foundations are made for erections or superstructures and the Corinthians are now being told that they are all builders, but of what kind? Good builders or otherwise? “Let each man take heed *how* he buildeth thereupon.” The materials used are all-important:

“But if any man buildeth on the Foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire” (iii. 12, 13- R.V.).

The workman may use shoddy materials, and when the future Day of testing comes, there will be no possibility of concealment. Judgment by fire is not new in the Scriptures. “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. xii. 28, 29). The fire of testing will not touch the workman, but his service:

“And the fire itself shall prove each man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire” (verses -13-15 R.V.).

Nothing could be clearer than the distinction here made between the believer who has been saved by grace apart from his works, and his service to the Lord which consists of his works. Because his salvation depends entirely upon the Lord’s redemptive work on the Cross, nothing can affect or alter this. Nothing can separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. viii. 39). But it can be very different with his service. There are unfaithful children of God; there are those whose service has not conformed to the pattern of His will. Wrong motives have entered in. Self aggrandizement, error and other works of the sinful old nature have got mixed up with his actions. All this is likened to “woods, hay and stubble”, which will be completely destroyed in the day of testing. The Apostle goes on to warn the Corinthian church that they constitute a temple of God, inhabited by the Spirit, and if this temple is marred by their conduct, God will destroy the offenders. The local church, a manifestation of God’s

Temple, could be removed under judgment and go out of existence. If it is insisted that Paul is referring to the individual believer rather than the assembly as a whole, then such judgment could end in physical death, as the abuses at the Lord's Table later on clearly show (I Cor. xi. 30). Direct Divine judgment for sin, a characteristic of the earthly kingdom, was still in force during the Acts period (cp. Acts v. 1-10; xiii. 6-11). There was indeed "a sin unto death" (I John v. 16).

Paul now returns to the great contrast between earthly and heavenly wisdom, the conceptions of unredeemed man in spiritual darkness, and the thoughts and ways of God so infinitely above these:

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you supposes that he is wise by the standards of this age, let him become foolish by the standards of this age, in order that he may become truly wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For in Scripture God is described as 'He who catches the wise in their own craftiness'; and again 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are vain'. So let no one make his boast in men, for all things are yours—Paul, Apollos or Cephas, the world, or life, or death, things present or things to come—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (iii. 18-23 C. K. Barrett).

Self deception is the fate of those who imagine themselves to be really wise apart from God, and this delusion is the fruit of estimation by the wrong standards. If anyone wishes to be wise in the truest sense, then he must not expect to experience this by trying to add a little of God's wisdom to his own. His own wisdom must be cast away completely and God's estimation received by a child-like trust. These two are complete opposites and can never be reconciled. This the Apostle states in the sharpest terms:

"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

The conclusion then is inescapable: "So let no one make his boast in men". This is just what the Corinthians had been doing, ranging themselves under the names of various servants of God, stating in effect that they belonged to Paul, Apollos or Cephas. This inverted the truth. They really belonged to Christ, the Lord over all things, and as this was true, then the world, life, death, things present, things to come—all things belonged to them in and through Him. With such a vast heritage, how stupid it was for any of them to follow men, even if these were the Lord's servants!

The fourth chapter commences with advice as to how God's servants, including himself, should be properly regarded:

"How then should a man think of us? As Christ's servants and stewards of God's mysteries (secrets)" (iv. 1 C. K. Barrett).

If we read the first sentence as a question as C. K. Barrett does, then the answer is that Christian leaders are to be regarded as Christ's servants, no more and no less. The servant has no special significance of his own. His work is not his but his master's. He is also his master's steward or household manager (*oikonomos*). This is allied to the word *oikonomia* dispensation, and shows us that a dispensation in the N.T. is not the same as an age, a period of time merely, but a faithful handling and setting forth of some

particular aspect of truth that belongs to God, which He has entrusted to the steward to dispense. What is the chief characteristic that one looks for in such a man? Not intellectual prowess or cleverness, but just complete reliability and trustworthiness, specially when one remembers a steward is handling, not his own property, but someone else's. There can be no deviation from this, or any substitute for faithfulness. The Lord's commendation in the parable was not 'Well done, thou good and *successful* servant', but "well done, thou good and *faithful* servant" (Matt. xxv. 21), and every one of us who seeks to serve the Lord must continually keep this in the forefront of his mind, for it is of the utmost importance.

With the exception of the book of the Revelation, which deals with the future Day of the Lord described by the O.T., and the final winding up of things when the mystery of God will be finished (Rev. x. 7), the Apostle Paul is the only writer who uses the word 'mystery' or secret in his epistles. His ministry deals with a number of secret aspects of the Lord's great redemptive plan, culminating in the great Secret of Ephesians and Colossians of which he alone claimed to be the minister or channel of revelation (Eph. iii. 3-10; Col. i. 24-27). Peter faithfully gave his witness without using the word once. One must therefore take care to distinguish the fundamental truths relating to salvation that are common to *all* the apostles, and those other aspects which are peculiar to the ministry the risen Lord gave each of them and the particular sphere to which they were sent by Him.

Having stressed absolute loyalty and trustworthiness as the basic requirement of a steward of God, the question arises, by whose standards of trustworthiness is he to be judged? So the Apostle continues:

"To me it is a matter of the smallest importance that I should be examined by you, or by any human assize" (iv. 3 C. K. Barrett).

If Paul had been affected by every criticism he received, he would surely have given up his ministry in despair. His argument, which is implicit, is that no fellow-believer can fairly or righteously assess the Christian service of another. Only the Lord Himself, the righteous Judge, can do this (Rom. xiv. 4). It is fairly obvious that the criticism which appears as a full-scale attack in II Corinthians, had already begun. The last words of the above translation are literally "by man's day". If the day of Christ is the time when He will righteously judge His people's service, then man's day is the present time when man has 'all the say' and is judging, or more truthfully, mis-judging. The Apostle is quite indifferent to this, man's poor attempts to do God's work for Him. He even does not depend upon the verdict of his own conscience:

". . . . I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judges me is the Lord" (iv. 4 R.V.).

Even though my own conscience does not reprove me in any way, says the Apostle, I am not justified by this. My only real judge is the Lord Himself. As the Lord's coming during the Acts was imminent, and the Corinthian letters were written during this period, Paul insists that all judgment must be left to the soon Coming One:

“Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God” (iv. 5 R.V.).

“Now, my brothers, I have for your sake made these things seem to apply to Apollos and myself, in order that by our example you may learn the meaning of ‘Nothing beyond what stands written’, so that you may not be puffed up, each on behalf of one and against another. For what makes you different from your neighbour? And what have you that you did not receive? But if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (iv. 6, 7 C. K. Barrett).

The Apostle Paul evidently made the argument of the last few verses look as if they applied to himself and Apollos, so that the Corinthians might learn by their example what the phrase “Nothing beyond what stands written” really means. It is not easy to interpret this today as we do not know all the circumstances that made up the situation at Corinth, but it was evidently easily understood by the believers there. It would seem to be a Christian slogan that was current in the district, whether Jewish or not, we cannot be sure. But it was a good one, advocating no belief but what could be substantiated by Scripture. It would indeed be good advice for all of us. How much error would be avoided if people would refuse to accept anything that is not clearly backed up by the Word of God rightly divided!

No.6. pp. 106 - 109

The Apostle Paul continues his argument in chapter iv. dealing with the splits in the church and the boastfulness of some of its members. He reminds that what knowledge they possessed had been given them by the Lord and did not originate in their own capability, so that they really had nothing to boast about in themselves:

“. . . . that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other. For who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? But if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory (boast), as if thou hadst not received it?” (iv. 6, 7 R.V.).

The Apostle now turns to irony. The Corinthians were prepared to sit in judgment on Paul and his fellow workers and put them in their place. They imagine that they enjoyed the culmination of blessing and had received *all* the gifts of the Spirit, not merely some, and were acting as though the earthly kingdom had already been consummated and they had entered into it without the help of Paul or those associated with him:

“Already are ye filled (literally reached satiety), already ye are become rich, ye have reigned without us: yea and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you” (iv. 8 R.V.).

In one sense the Apostle could have wished this was true, for had that been so, many problems would be resolved. But the real position was very different:

“For I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (iv. 9 R.V.).

The apostles are presented by God to the world like the unfortunate beings, brought on at the close of a display in the arena, and as such condemned to death by mortal combat with one another, or with wild beasts. The word “spectacle” is *theatron*, theatre, the place where such spectacles were presented. The sense is “for we became a spectacle to the whole world, angels and men alike” (C. K. Barrett). How very different from the picture conjured up in the Corinthians’ boastful minds! Paul now goes on to contrast himself and his fellow workers with the self-satisfied believers at Corinth:

“We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye have glory, but we have dishonour. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and we toil, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; beings defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things, even until now” (iv. 10-13 R.V.).

The Corinthians may have imagined that they had come into their kingdom and the problems were over. Not so the Apostle. For him there was no relief from labour, privation or suffering. Going hungry, thirsty and naked possibly resulted from the depredations of robbers in his frequent journeyings and through sheer lack of supplies. He includes ‘perils of robbers’ in his long list of sufferings for Christ (II or. Xi. 26). His language here in I Corinthians reminds one of The Sermon on the Mount, returning good for evil.

He ends this section by describing himself as the world’s scapegoat, no better than the scum of the earth. This was the price he was willing to pay in order to be a faithful servant and witness of Christ! How very different from some of the Christian leaders at Corinth! As they read this epistle, describing what Paul was undergoing, they ought to have been ashamed, though Paul insists that he did not deliberately set out to shame them, but rather to warn them as his dear children (verse 14). They might have thousands of tutors in Christ, yet not many fathers; for the relationship of father and son is much closer and intimate, and it was through his faithful preaching of the gospel when he first visited Corinth that they came to spiritual birth and a personal knowledge of Christ our Saviour. Paul had begotten them through the gospel. He does not use the word ‘regeneration’ for this is God’s work. The Apostle only uses this figure of begettal to stress the closeness of his relationship to the believers at Corinth. He can therefore ask them to be ‘imitators of me’ (16). In xi. 1 he again exhorts them to copy him, even as he imitated Christ. A man must live very closely to the Lord to be able to use such language with truth and without hypocrisy. But there was no doubt that this man’s practice squared with his preaching and therefore he could sincerely make such a tremendous statement without any idea of advertising or exalting himself. We should see to it that we are worthy representatives of the Saviour in the same way, for the unbelieving world around us knows Him not. It would indeed be a great thing if they could see some reflection of Christ in us in the way we act and speak.

Because Paul is so concerned with the Corinthians saints he is going to help them to this end, by sending Timothy:

“For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall put you in remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church” (iv. 17 R.V.).

Chapter xvi. 10 (“If Timothy come”) seems to be a difficulty, but we do not know all the circumstances. If we did, there would doubtless be an explanation. The possibility is that there were some reason that *might* prevent him reaching Corinth. We have already seen the dangers of traveling in those days apart from anything else, so we need have no misgivings about this.

While the Apostle Paul loved these converts at Corinth, yet his wisdom ensured that, when they needed firm handling, this was forthcoming. He now tells them that he knows some among them had taken the view that he would not bother to come to Corinth again, so that they need not be unduly concerned about the state of the church:

“Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will; and I will know, not the word of them which are puffed up, but the power” (iv. 18, 19 R.V.).

“Puffed up” is a characteristic word of this epistle and it expresses the sad state of arrogance in the Corinthian assembly. When he came he would be able to assess and deal with these conceited critics of his. There was evidently a good deal of talking going on at Corinth, but Paul now contrasts this and the carnal power behind it with the real power of the Spirit that operates and develops the kingdom of God, “for the kingdom of God is not (i.e. does not operate) in word, but in power” (20). He then throws out a challenge:

“What would you like? Am I come to you with a rod? Or in love and a spirit of gentleness?” (iv. 21 C. K. Barrett).

There was no doubt which the Apostle preferred, but it was for the Corinthians to decide. If some did not mend their ways, then he, as the spiritual father, must punish and discipline them with his apostolic power.

A new section now develops in chapter v. in which Paul deals with immorality inside and outside the assembly. We must remember that the state of morals at Corinth was low indeed and immorality was not considered to be a very bad thing. With the rapid drifting away from Christian standards, we have a similar situation developing in our day. If this trend goes on, we shall see fornication and adultery being universally advocated as something desirable. This is clearly a manifestation of the Babylonian lie, where standards are deliberately twisted and altered. Good is represented as being bad, and bad is represented as being good, and all this is a symptom of the terrible degeneracy both spiritual and natural at the end of this age which the Word has foretold.

Paul writes and tells the Corinthians that he has heard of immorality among them, in that one member was living with his father’s wife. The Apostle does not call it adultery, from which we may conclude that either the offender’s father was not living or that he had divorced his wife. Such a relationship was even condemned by the Gentiles, and what was so distressing was not just the sin itself, but the arrogant way and the levity

with which the Corinthian church had treated it. Doubtless they regarded this as real “freedom”. They were now not under law and could do what they liked:

“And ye are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, that he that had done this deed might be taken away from among you” (v. 2 R.V.).

But Paul had already come to a decision. Although he was not personally present at Corinth, in thought and spirit he was there and had already made up his mind regarding the one who had sinned:

“When you have been gathered together, with my spirit, in the name of the Lord Jesus, we should, with the power of our Lord Jesus, hand over such a man as this to Satan, for the destruction of his flesh, in order that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (v. 4, 5 C. K. Barrett).

Paul was desirous that this severe judgment should not result from his apostolic power alone, but that it should be the judgment of the *whole church*, acting under the power of Christ as Lord. They would not only meet in the *name* of the Lord Jesus, but with the intention of acting in obedience to Him as Lord and with His power underlying them. We must remember that grace as a dispensation or administration, had not yet fully come. The definite judgments of God among believers during the Acts period (as Ananias and Sapphira) are evidence for this.

What does handing over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh mean? It does not envisage perishing eternally for the spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord. It cannot mean the flesh as the sinful old nature, for only the cross of Christ can deal with this (Rom. vi. 6) and in any case it would not be in Satan’s interest to destroy the old nature, for this is the very thing he seeks to work on and ensnare the believer. It can only mean the physical flesh, and in this case Satan would be permitted to inflict severe bodily suffering and possibly death. That Satan can attack the body of the believer with God’s permission, Job and even Paul himself are sufficient evidence (II Cor. xii. 7). Just how far he can go is certainly by the Lord.

Here Paul was concerned for the final salvation of the erring member and also with the purity of the church as a whole.

No.7. pp. 131 - 135

We have seen, in the section of the epistle we are dealing with, that the Apostle Paul was concerned not only with the sinning member of the Corinthian assembly, but also with the effect on the church as a whole. He tells them that their boasting (glorying) is not good, and that sin is like an infection—it can spread:

“Your boasting (glorying) is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened” (v. 6, 7 R.V.).

We have before noted that leaven or yeast in Scripture is always used in a bad sense, and is a picture of sin. The Apostle makes the same quotation in Gal. v. 9. Here he is about to introduce the illustration of the O.T. Passover feast, where leaven was not only prohibited in the bread, but had to be removed even from their houses (Exod. xii. 8, 15-20). In Matt. xvi. 6, 11, 12 the Lord Himself uses leaven to represent evil doctrine. In view of this, such popular phrases as the ‘leaven of the gospel’ used by some Christians must be avoided. It needs only a *small* amount of yeast to permeate a large lump of dough, and from this we can gather that the Corinthian believers were taking a light view of the sin in their midst. Just as the O.T. Israelite had to remove or purge out any yeast that had been introduced into the house before Passover, so the believers at Corinth must deal with this sin and remove the erring brother. They would then be like a fresh lump of dough without leaven and would approximate more nearly in practice to their ‘unleavened’ position in Christ. This could only be experienced because the true Passover Lamb had been sacrificed:

“For besides, our Passover lamb, Christ, has already been sacrificed. So let us celebrate the feast not with old leaven, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened loaves of sincerity and truth” (v. 7, 8 C. K. Barrett).

There is no doubt that, primarily, man cannot atone for, or deliver himself from the bondage of sin. Still less can he do it for someone else (Psa. xlix. 7). God Himself must bear the burden of His people’s guilt and He does so in the Person of Christ. All the believer in Christ can do is to give continual thanksgiving to God for this mighty act of deliverance from sin’s slavery and penalty, and must express it not only in words, but in everyday life. It is quite likely that Paul was writing at Passover time, in which case his illustration would be more pointed.

From the next verse we can see that the Apostle had already written to the Corinthian church on the subject of immorality, but some there had misunderstood him. We need have no misgiving that part of inspired Scripture has been lost. It is not necessary to assume that every letter Paul wrote in his lifetime was “God-breathed” or inspired by the Holy Spirit. But every one that had this hall-mark has certainly been preserved by God in the N.T. He had previously written to them that they should not keep company with fornicators. This, in the absolute sense, would be impossible in a place like Corinth. To

carry this out perfectly, one would have to go out of the world, which would be impossible:

“No: what I now write you is that you should not mix with anyone known as a Christian brother who is a fornicator, or rapacious man, or idolater, or abusive man, or drunkard, or robber, with such a man you ought not even to eat” (v. 11 C. K. Barrett).

It is significant that Paul gives no encouragement to the monasticism that arose in the early centuries, the idea of which is that one can escape the world and its pollution by withdrawing into solitude or religious community life. What such people do not realize is that they take their greatest enemy in with them, namely their sinful old nature! In the same way the Lord Jesus prayed:

“I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John xvii. 15).

And if all God’s children retired into monasteries, how could the testimony to His truth spread and His light shine out to a world of darkness? Paul now goes on to instruct the Corinthians that it is their duty to correctly assess and deal with the problem in their midst. This is what he means by the word ‘judge’, and this must not be done in any spirit of censoriousness or fault finding. This type of judgment is often too prevalent, alas, and must be avoided. Their concern should be towards ‘those within’ (i.e. the church, namely, believers). Those outside (unbelievers) must be left to the province of God to judge (verses 12 and 13). Meanwhile, they must exclude from their company the wicked person who was causing all this trouble (13).

Chapter vi. starts with another failure in the church at Corinth which had probably been reported to him by the household of Chloe, or through Stephanas and his friends. Believers were going to law with each other before pagan courts, and so giving a thoroughly bad witness to an unbelieving world. This should not be necessary for (1) they should be able to settle their own disputes among themselves and (2) these disputes would never arise if they were walking in love and Christ-likeness. The Apostle commences with a strong word (*tolmao*) as Rom. v. 7 and xv. 18 show:

“Does any one of you dare, when he has a suit against his fellow, to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?” (vi. 1 C. K. Barrett).

The ‘unrighteous’ and the ‘saints’ are clearly the unsaved and the saved. The N.T. writers do not use the word ‘unrighteous’ (*adikos*) for a believer in Christ. When such slip into sin, Paul describes them as ‘carnal’; they are walking according to the sinful old nature. The *sin itself* is of course unrighteous. One must not glamorize sin. The ‘unjust’ or ‘unrighteous’ (either of these translate *adikos*) are those who know nothing of righteousness imputed by God, as set forth in the epistle to the Romans. They are the unsaved; whereas the saved are righteous *in Christ*, in the sense that Romans uses the term and ‘holy’ in Him (i.e. saints) although, like the Corinthians, they may be far from holy or righteous in their walk day by day.

Paul now follows with an astounding statement:

“Or know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world is judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more, things that pertain to this life?” (vi. 2, 3 R.V.).

Here is what is known as a *majori ad minus* argument. If at some future time God’s children are going to join with Him, not only in the tremendous task of judging the world, but angels too, then what a poor thing if they could not settle their petty differences amongst themselves here and now! These angels doubtless include those who are being reserved in everlasting chains for the future judgment of “the great day” (II Pet. ii. 4; Jude 6). Not only are the sinning angels being *reserved* for this future judgment, but Peter assures us that the unrighteous (*adikoi*) are being likewise *reserved* for the day of judgment to be punished (II Pet. ii. 9), and he gives a vivid description of some of these throughout the chapter.

When the Corinthians realized that they were to take part in such future judgment as that of angels, Paul hopes that they would be ashamed of themselves in their resort to heathen courts:

“I say this to move you to shame. Is it so, that there cannot be found among you one wise man, who shall be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?” (vi. 5, 6 R.V.).

Such conduct was absolute failure in Christian practice (‘fault’ A.V., ‘defect’ R.V.). It would have been much better for them to suffer wrong and put up with the consequences. If it meant being defrauded, this was better than bad spectacle of believers quarreling in a public court before a pagan, unbelieving world. To do wrong is the greater evil, to suffer wrong the less. The Apostle could have referred to the Sermon on the Mount as confirmation of this (Matt. v. 39-42), but he does not do so. In any case he spoke with the Lord’s authority. They were indeed ‘doing wrong’ (8), and now he vividly reminds them in verse 9 that wrong doers such as he lists in verses 9 and 10 cannot look forward to possessing any future inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Some of them in their pre-conversion days had been in this category.

“But ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (vi. 11 R.V.).

The R.V., as is often the case, is more accurate in rendering the Greek tenses, for the cleansing, sanctification and justification look back to the moment of salvation and quickening into spiritual life, resting, as it does, upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary. Paul now works back to the theme of sexual license which he left at the end of chapter v.:

“All things are lawful for me; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any” (vi. 12 R.V.).

“All things are permitted me.” It would seem that this was a phrase used at Corinth and it seems very up to date! Paul quotes it with certain definite reservations. He was the first to champion Christian freedom (Gal. v. 1) but this was always to be encircled by Christian love, and never meant that the believer was free to do just whatever he liked

and to indulge in sin. Such a phrase might well have been used as a watchword by a pre-gnostic party in the Corinthian church. We know that the developed gnosticism of the second century sometimes moved in the direction of asceticism and sometimes in that of libertinism. Its disparagement of the material led to an indifference to morality—the body was material and therefore its acts did not really matter—“all things were lawful”, and this spirit could easily have invaded the Corinthian assembly. A believer could be a glutton or immoral; it did not really matter. Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food (verse 13), but, far from this, the body as a whole is for the Lord and therefore not for fornication or for uncontrolled gratification of its desires. “I will not be overpowered by any of them” is the Apostle’s attitude, for if this is so, it nullifies redemption from bondage and brings back the old slavery. If the Lord has redeemed us, and purchased us for Himself, this includes our bodies, and we have no right to act as though they were exclusively our own possession. This the Corinthians had yet to learn.

No.8. pp. 148 - 152

Having made it quite clear that the “all things are permitted me” did not include anything sinful, the Apostle now shows that, as redemption includes our present bodies, fornication is not only a sin against the Lord but against the body itself:

“. . . . Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (vi. 18 R.V.).

Such a person certainly sins against the Lord, for the Holy Spirit indwells him (19). The human body of itself is neutral; it can either be dominated by the sinful old nature, or controlled by the Spirit of God. To whichever of these it yielded, it becomes *united*, either for evil or good:

“. . . . know ye not that he that is joined to a harlot is *one body* (with her)? But he that is joined unto the Lord is *one spirit*” (vi. 16, 17).

Thus the Corinthian believers are urged to flee from fornication (18), and to learn to glorify God even in their bodies (20). It is to be noted that Paul calls things by their proper name. He does not falsify matters by calling immorality “making love” as is done today, thus putting a glamour upon sin, and turning it from black to white and making it appear respectable and desirable. One of the most insidious things around us at the present time is this deliberate falsifying of standards of conduct, making wrong appear right, and right appear wrong. This is Babylonianism coming right out into the open. No wonder individual, national and world problems are increasing apace. A society which permits this sort of thing is sowing the seeds of disintegration and destruction.

Paul now turns to behaviour within marriage, for this is one of the problems concerning which the church at Corinth had written for guidance (vii. 1). A married couple have *equal* conjugal rights (verses 3 and 4), which should not be denied, lest they should be tempted to fornication (2). Incidentally, verse 2 is a prohibition against

polygamy, which finds no place in the N.T. The Apostle goes on to refer to himself and to state:

“Yet I would that all men were even as I myself” (vii. 7 R.V.).

This does not mean that celibacy is necessarily ideal. What Paul desired was that all had the capacity for resistance to sensual allurements that he himself possessed. Yet he recognized that this was not so, and that it was “better to marry than to burn” (in desire, verse 9). However, there was a far more important reason even than this, and that was the possibility of the early return of the Lord, according to the conditions and promises of Acts iii. 19-26. There was little point in taking on the obligations of marriage if the Lord might come at any time. If one was unmarried, it was far better to remain so providing continency was maintained. On the other hand, marriage was not a sin:

“Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned” (vii. 27, 28 R.V.).

But as the end of the age was near with its tribulation, such would have ‘trouble in the flesh’ (28). If the problem of separation arose, owing to one of the partners being an unbeliever (one being saved after marriage), providing the unbeliever was willing, such separation should be avoided (verses 12-14). Divorce between believers must be avoided at all costs. Paul uses two words in this context, *chorizo* separate, and *aphiemi* divorce. In Judaism only the husband had the right to divorce, but here the Apostle uses the word for both sexes, “. . . . and that the husband *divorces* not his wife” (11), “. . . . and the woman which hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not *divorce* her husband” (13). A word must be said concerning the difficulty of verses 14 and 15:

“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy” (R.V.).

It is surely obvious that Paul was not teaching that an unbelieving partner in marriage was automatically saved by being so linked with a believer, nor that children of such a marriage were likewise automatically saved, for this would be entirely contrary to all his teaching regarding salvation by grace and faith in Christ and the tenor of the N.T. generally.

The uncleanness here is the ceremonial uncleanness of the O.T. The reader should note the argument on such uncleanness in Hag. ii. 11-13. The linking in marriage with a foreigner in O.T. days would have resulted in uncleanness and being cut off from the covenant relationship. The Apostle is now saying that the O.T. principle of the communication of uncleanness does not hold in this case. And there was also the possibility that the believing partner might be the means of leading the unsaved one to a saving knowledge of Christ (16).

In any case, the general principle, youching every sphere of life, is to abide in one’s calling, providing this was straightforward and acceptable to God (18-24). Even slaves

were advised to be willing to stay as they were (21, 22). This was the wisest way of being prepared and ready for the imminent coming of the Lord, which was the overriding consideration.

A new section now commences. The *peri de* indicates that an answer follows to another of the church's problems, concerning which they had written him. Three groups are now dealt with (1) the unmarried young (25-35); (2) the parents or engaged couples (36-38); and (3) widows (39, 40). With the Lord's coming in mind, celibacy was desirable but not enforced. The single man was wiser if he did not marry. Conversely a married man should not seek release from marriage (27, 28). In giving his advice, Paul had only one thing in mind, sparing them trouble and anxiety (28). If wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, pestilence and famine, were at hand, as the Lord Himself predicted before His second coming (Mark xiii. 7, 8, 17), then to take on the obligations of marriage was a foolish act tending to multiply difficulties.

“But this I say, brethren, the time is shortened” (vii. 29).

The end of the age was near. In chapter x. 11 the Apostle asserts that the ‘conclusion of the ages’ had arrived. The Apostle John in his first epistle stated that it was the “last hour” (literally ii. 18), and Peter, that “the end of all things is at hand” (I Pet. iv. 7). There can be no doubt that the age was drawing to a close, and the end, which would be terminated by the Lord's coming, was imminent. It behooved every believer to be on the alert, waiting for the Son from heaven (I Thess. i. 10), and to see to it that they were as loose as possible to all earthly relationships and cares that would distract them from their final witness and service for the Lord, so that they might “attend upon the Lord without distraction” (35). In the married state the tendency is for the married man to be anxious (careful R.V.) as to how he may please his wife, and likewise the wife her husband (32-34), whereas the unmarried can more easily be taken up with the things of the Lord and how to please Him first and foremost.

Verses 36-38 creates a problem. What does the word ‘virgin’ mean in this context? At least three ideas have been put forward (1) a father and his unmarried daughter is in view. (2) A spiritual marriage in which people went through a form of marriage, and yet lived together as brother and sister. We know that such relationships existed later in the history of the church, though it is very doubtful if it took place as early as this, and also it is difficult to conceive that such a union would have received Paul's approval. (3) An engaged couple who are in doubt as to whether they should marry or not under the circumstances. As for (1) the father had control of his daughter's marriage and this interpretation is possible, though “his virgin” is a peculiar way of referring to his daughter. The second interpretation (2) can be discounted. Taking everything into consideration, the fewest difficulties seem to be raised by the third view (3). If such a couple found the unmarried state too much of a strain, then marriage was desirable and not a sin. On the other hand, were they able to exercise self-control, to stay as they were would be better, for the reasons given before.

The Apostle now deals with the problem of widows. Marriage is a life-long tie (39), but if a woman loses her husband by death, she is perfectly free to marry again, though

the then exceptional times made it better if she did not do so (40). It is very important to note that Paul limits her marriage and choice of a husband to being “only in the Lord”. This means that she can only marry *a believer* and further than that, *a believer who was the Lord’s will* as far as she was concerned. In his second letter marriage with unbelievers is expressly forbidden:

“Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?” (II Cor. vi. 14, 15 R.V.).

We need to remember that God’s prohibitions are not with the object of denying us pleasures, or anything of value. They are to save us trouble, anxiety, and misery; and to keep us in the best conditions to serve Him fully and faithfully. Never was this Divine rule for the marriage of believers needed to be stressed more than now. We have seen so many cases of tragedy, life-long unhappiness and spiritual fruitlessness in young people result from its disobedience, and to everyone who is contemplating marriage with an unbeliever, we would say *don’t*. The unsaved one may be very attractive in many ways and the believer may delude himself into thinking that after marriage “it will all come right” and such a one will be saved, *but this is just wishful thinking and nothing more*. Marriage must never be looked at as a kind of god to which everything must be sacrificed. How can the Lord bless a union which He has forbidden? And how can there be any lasting happiness for a believer in a life-long relationship without His blessing? For it needs to be stressed that God’s children cannot take the lax view of marriage and divorce that the unbelieving world does. If every detail of our lives is a concern to the Lord (and it surely is), then we can say with absolute certainty that such an important and lasting step as marriage must be controlled by Him and He will certainly indicate His will in this matter, if we will only have patience and wisdom *to await His leading and providing*. Failure to do this not only means unhappiness and frustration, but spiritual decline and backsliding, and a life of no real testimony for the Lord Who has redeemed us.

This may sound harsh and unsympathetic, but it is not really so. As with Paul of old, we wish to save believers from “trouble in the flesh”. Is not the Lord worth trusting in this matter, and for everything else in this life?

No.9. pp. 165 - 169

In chapter viii. Paul deals with another theme which apparently had been raised in the Corinthians' letter to him, concerning food which had been sacrificed to idols; and he returns to it again in chapter x. 14-33. This was a problem confined to apostolic times, but nevertheless a pressing one for believers. Much of the food offered for sale had passed through the rites of heathen temples. Being associated with idolatry, it was offensive to the Jewish mind, but would not be a particular problem to a Gentile. What was the answer to this difficulty in a close community consisting of Jews and Gentiles? First of all, the Apostle deals with knowledge as a whole, possibly with special regard to a 'gnostic' section in the Corinthian church, which held a conceited idea of their intellectual attainments. Knowledge without divine love is valueless. It merely "puffs up" the old sinful nature, and therefore can be dangerous:

"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth. If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth not yet as he ought to know; but if any man loveth God, the same is known of Him" (I Cor. viii. 1-3 R.V.).

Love builds up, and is the antidote to a barren knowledge which merely puffs up. Moreover, it is the sign that God has taken the initiative. It is His love that comes first, just as John wrote in his first epistle, "We love Him: because He first loved us" (I John iv. 19). But returning to the theme of idolatrous food and idols themselves, Paul writes "we know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no God but one" (verse 4 R.V.). This does not mean that idolatry was not a reality, but it was the *conception* of the idolater that was wrong. There was not an idol in the sense such a person regarded it, for the gods they thought the idols represented were nothing more than demons. The word *god* was in common use in the ancient world, which was thickly populated with so-called divine beings who, though their natural home was thought to be in heaven, from time to time appeared on earth. But these 'many gods' and 'many lords' had no real existence, and were in direct conflict with the stern monotheism of the Scripture (viii. 4, 5). This thought the Apostle now expands:

"Yet to us there is *one* God, the Father, of (*ek*) Whom are all things (*ta panta*), and we unto (*eis*) Him; and *one* Lord, Jesus Christ, through (*dia*) Whom are all things (*ta panta*), and we through (*dia*) Him" (viii. 6 R.V.).

From the prepositions used, the Father is brought before us as the *source*, and the Lord Jesus as the *mediator* of creation and redemption. We must be very careful to avoid the idea that the mediatorial position of Christ gives Him a lower place as regards the Godhead than the Father. In a similar passage in Col. i. 16 we read "all things (*ta panta*) were created by (*dia*) Him (Christ), and FOR or UNTO (*eis*) Him (as the goal)". In Rev. iv. 8-11 the (R.V.) ascription of praise is to "*The Lord God, the Almighty*, which was and which is and which is to come (Christ, i. 8) for Thou didst create all things (*ta panta*), and *because of Thy will* they were, and were created". It should be noted too that in neither of these contexts do we find the plain *panta*, all things. This

could include evil. The more defined expression, *ta panta*, excludes this, and either refers to creation in its perfected form, or is limited to whatever the context is dealing with, and then means *all (these) things*.

Now, wrote the Apostle, all men have not this knowledge (7), and some who are in this category are weak in the faith and they must be considered by those who are stronger and more advanced. This is real love—love and consideration for others *in practice*. The weak ones, when eating food which had been consecrated and sacrificed to an idol, would have a distressed and defiled conscience. Others who are stronger and with more knowledge could eat such food without any objection, realizing that such a thing as food in itself will not bring us under condemnation with God. They would be neither better nor worse before God as regards what they ate (verses 7 and 8). However, there was one thing that the stronger ones must consider, which should influence their actions, and that is *the effect of their conduct on the weaker brother*. Take care, said the Apostle, lest this authority (liberty A.V.) of yours becomes a stumbling-block to those who are weak (9). The word *exousia*, authority, obviously means the authority to eat *any* kind of food. Paul now gives a concrete illustration:

“For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, sitting at table in an idol-shrine, will not his conscience be fortified to eat things sacrificed to idols? For the weak man perishes by your knowledge, your brother, for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against your brothers, and wounding their conscience, weak as it is, you sin against Christ” (viii. 10-12, C. K. Barrett).

Nothing is clearer from this than the fact that our conduct affects other people. We may stress our liberty and stress it wrongly, for liberty must always be regulated by love. If the Lord loved the weaker brethren enough to die for them, then the strong ought to love them well enough to be willing to forego some of their rights. They should be ready to do this, not because the weak demand it, but rather, that this is the way of self-effacing love as the Lord has loved. The word ‘perish’ is strong and may refer to the ‘sin unto death’. If the weak brother continually offended his conscience, he would be persistently sinning, for “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. xiv. 23, and the whole of this chapter should be read as it deals with a similar context). Paul brings his argument to a climax by saying:

“And thus, sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, *ye sin against Christ*. Wherefore, if meat maketh my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh for evermore, that I make not my brother to stumble” (viii. 12, 13 R.V.).

Let us face the fact that by pushing our liberty too far, *we can sin* not only against fellow-believers, *but against the Lord*. We are not bothered today with the problem of food sacrificed to idols, *but the principle of all this is still true*. The mature Christian’s attitude to Sunday and various pleasures for instance, needs to be constantly examined in the light of this, and we should always remember the practical example of the Apostle, who was even willing to curtail his rights rather than cause someone weaker in the faith to stumble.

Chapter ix., on the surface, seems to change the theme, but if we carefully consider what underlies these verses, we shall see this is not so. Paul now makes it clear that even an apostle should be ready to renounce his rights for the sake of the truth of the gospel and those to whom he ministers. He could say:

“Nevertheless we did not use this right that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel without charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the gospel to the Jews I became as a Jew to the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak; I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some” (ix. 12, 18, 20, 22 R.V.).

This is a summary of the section now before us. How different Paul’s ministry and witness would have been if he had continually insisted on his rights as an apostle and leader! But as always, he was willing to put self into the background with a view to the blessing and building up of others. Doubtless at Corinth there would be some who would not be pleased with his teaching concerning the restriction of Christian liberty, specially those whose watchword was freedom at all costs, irrespective of the effect on other people. Such would question Paul’s own authority and say that, if he were a true apostle, he would not allow himself to be restricted in this way. It is certain that the Apostle would hardly have spent so long on the subject of apostolic rights, if this had not been queried at Corinth. He deals with this situation by a series of challenging questions, as though in debate:

“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord?” (ix. 1 R.V.).

Do you think (you Corinthians) that because I limit my freedom out of love, my freedom does not exist? Is not my apostleship real? An apostle must have *personal* dealings with the risen Christ to be a true witness. I have actually seen Jesus Christ our Lord and been commissioned by Him! And as a practical result of my apostleship, you Corinthians are the product of my labours! Even if others do not recognize my apostleship, yet at least to you I should be a real apostle, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord!

So Paul reasons with them in a way that was unanswerable to those who were willing to face facts. He deals now directly with his critics:

“My defense against those who would like to cross-examine me is this”
(ix. 3 C. K. Barrett).

Again, he throws at them a series of rhetorical questions:

“Have we no right to eat and to drink? Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas (Peter). Or I only and Barnabas, have we not a right to forbear working? What soldier serveth at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?” (ix. 4-7 R.V.).

What he says in effect is this. As true apostles, Barnabas and I have the right to (1) have our food provided by the Christian community. (2) We could bring wives with

us as other apostles do and claim that they should also be supported by the community. (3) We need not work for our living, but have a right to maintenance from the churches. As soldier on service expects to be maintained. Why not an apostle? The owner of a vineyard expects nourishment from the ground on which he bestows his labour. Why not an apostle? A herdsman who looks after cattle expects some of the milk the flock yields. Why not an apostle? These human analogies are right to the point. But there is something even stronger, namely, the teaching of Scripture:

“Saith not the law also the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. Is it for the oxen that God careth, or saith He it altogether for our sake” (ix. 8-10 R.V.).

It was only natural that an animal when threshing should take what mouthfuls of food it wanted while it was working. God had this in mind in the law, but also something more. Is He not speaking simply on our account, asks the Apostle? If the farm worker expects practical results from his labours, should not an apostle, who has sown spiritual things, expect the necessary material things? If others share in authority over you Corinthians, should not I the more? (who was the means used for the founding of the church at Corinth?). *“Nevertheless we did not use this right; but we bear all things (i.e. endure hardship, etc.), that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ”* (verse 12 R.V.).

At last Paul comes to his main point. If he did not claim the full rights of an apostle, it was no reflection on his true apostleship. He refrained in the interests of the Gospel itself. Others might appear to make a good thing out of their missionary work at Corinth and so give a bad impression to the outsider. The Apostle took great care that this kind of conduct could never truthfully be leveled at him. He would rather work night and day with his own hands at tent-making and so be independent, rather than the enemies of truth should make capital out of the exercise of his apostolic rights.

How wise was this man! True wisdom is what we all need in abundance if our Christian witness is not to be spoiled by human failing or short-sightedness.

No.10. pp. 184 - 188

The Apostle Paul sums up the section of the epistle we have been dealing with, relative to the believer's rights and his voluntary limitation of these for the sake of weaker brethren, by saying:

“. . . I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some” (ix. 22 R.V.).

His utter unselfishness and consideration for others made such an attitude a constant experience with him. As long as there was no compromise with truth, he was willing to go as far as possible with both Jew and Gentile in spite of their totally opposite backgrounds, with one object, that some of them would be won for Christ (20, 21). We notice that Paul gives no hint of universal salvation. He knew only too well that in spite of his faithful proclamation of the gospel of Christ, only some would respond; nevertheless he did everything for the sake of the gospel, that in it we might be a joint-partaker (23 R.V.). It was a privilege indeed to have any share in its witness, and this led on to the thought of service and its outcome. The Corinthians seemed to believe that as long as they were saved, this was all that mattered. The Christian life and service afterwards counted little with them, otherwise they would never have tolerated the condition that existed in their midst. Now the Apostle has to remind them that, although salvation is by grace, quite apart from works, the practical response after salvation would be taken account of by the Lord and all would be finally answerable to Him for this. So once again he introduces the teaching concerning reward for faithful service, as he had already done in chapter iii. (iii. 10-15), and for this uses the illustration of the games which would be universally understood in the Greek world. Paul is fond of using the “race course” as a concrete example of what faithful Christian witness should be like. He does so in Hebrews (xii. 1, 2), Galatians (ii. 2; v. 7), Philippians (iii. 13, 14) and II Timothy (ii. 5; iv. 7, 8), and to these we might add Acts xx. 24.

The believers at Corinth evidently thought that there was an automatic connection between running and winning; in other words, to be saved meant automatically being rewarded by the Lord, and there are not wanting today Christians who think likewise. Some even reject the possibility of reward entirely and so stress grace that reward is impossible. Such should carefully ponder the Apostle's argument here:

“Do you not know that all the competitors in the stadium run, but only one of them receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Everyone who takes part in the contests disciplines himself in every way. They do it to receive a perishable crown, we to receive an imperishable one” (ix. 24, 25 C. K. Barrett).

The entry into any race does not in itself guarantee a prize either in athletics or in Christianity. But we must not deduce from Paul's illustration that only *one* believer can win God's prize, or one out of each group. The point at issue is that the believer must not only *start* correctly. He must *continue* correctly, press on, and reach the goal. No runner can afford to drop out of the race for any reason if he desires to breast the tape and win. Likewise for the believer, the *whole* of human life is like a racecourse. Service for the

Lord is not for a part of our lives on earth, it must absorb the all of it, from salvation to either death or the realization of our hope in glory.

As we are not machines or puppets, but moral creatures who have the inestimable benefit of being freed from the dominion of sin by redemption, we are thereby accountable to the Lord for our practical response to Him day-to-day. If this were not so, the command to ‘walk worthy’ would be empty indeed. The Word of God makes it quite clear that, while all of His children are His servants, some are good servants and others are bad ones. Some are faithful, while others are unfaithful. It matters not whether we are dealing with the O.T., the Gospels or Epistles, this is most clearly taught. Now a God of righteousness and justice will surely take account of this, and if such justice must be seen to be done (and this certainly will be so), then there must be a reckoning day for all the Lord’s servants (II Cor. v. 9, 10; Rom. xiv. 10-12).

Paul reminds the Corinthians that every athlete disciplines himself in every way in rigorous training. This was not a hardship to any keen runner. He regarded it as the greatest of privileges to do so, and possibly to obtain the wreath of pine with all the honour attached to it as a symbol of victory. The Corinthians therefore must take stock of themselves and realize that (1) God’s prizes are worth having, and (2) that they are not obtained cheaply.

The Apostle now transfers the figure to himself and not only alludes to the controlled effort needed in a race, but the purposeful energy used in a boxing match:

“So, for my part, that is how I run—not as if I did not know where I was going; that is how I box, not as though I were beating the air. But I buffet my body, and bring it into slavery, lest, when I have preached to others, I should myself prove to be rejected” (ix. 26, 27 C. K. Barrett).

The successful runner does not wander aimlessly. He keeps his eye on the course and the tape at the end, and presses straight towards it with all speed. Likewise, the believer cannot afford to be negligent with regard to his service and witness for the Lord. There can be no holidays from this, or periods when he can afford to slack. It is useless being a spasmodic runner. It is only consistent effort that finally wins. Or take a boxer. He does not waste his strength in dealing ineffectual blows, for this would be just beating the air and would achieve nothing. *Every blow must tell.* And the one whom Paul is fighting is not another person, *but himself.* He buffets or disciplines his body, so that it becomes his slave. He is in complete control of himself as he takes God’s grace and strength so to be. Too many of us are ruled by our bodies. They can be the most demanding of masters, and unless we are careful, their whims can turn us this way and that, and so affect our running in the heavenly race.

To some, verse 27 is a problem, for, on the surface, it seems as though Paul feared lest he could lose his salvation at the end. The A.V. ‘castaway’ is too strong. “Rejected” or “disapproved” is better. The word *adokimos* is the negative of *dokimos*, approved, occurring in II Tim. ii. 15, “Study to show thyself *approved* unto God, a *workman* that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth”. Here again the context is

dealing with a *good workman*; in other words it speaks of *service*. When the Lord finally tests “every man’s work of what sort it is” (I Cor. iii. 13), all will be in two categories: faithful, with the Lord’s approval, or unfaithful, with His disapproval. The former will receive the Lord’s eternal reward, symbolized by a *prize* or *crown*, the latter will be denied it (II Tim. ii. 11-13). This doctrine then is to be distinguished from salvation by grace, apart from works. It is additional to salvation and must never be confused with it. Failure to do this has resulted in the teaching of being saved today and possibly lost tomorrow. Such an idea undermines the whole redemptive purpose of God and would make this dependent on the creature, rather than on the almighty power and wisdom of the Creator and Saviour of men.

On the surface, it looks as though the subject changes at the beginning of chapter x., but a careful examination shows that this is not so. Having clearly taught that a believer can be securely saved, yet lose the Divine prize through slackness or unfaithfulness, the Apostle now illustrates this by appealing to Israel’s past history in the wilderness:

“For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, how that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ. Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (I Cor. x. 1-5 R.V.).

Nothing was more certain than that *all* Israel were delivered from the bondage of Egypt and typically redeemed. Yet it is equally clear that *only two* out of the great multitude who were rescued from Egypt attained the promised land, i.e. Caleb and Joshua. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us why. They could not enter because of their unbelief (Heb. iii. 16-19). And unbelief means more than not believing; it includes active disobedience. Entering the promised land was equivalent to “going on to maturity” of Heb. vi. 1, and represents the prize element which they lost.

In these verses one should note the stress on *all*, and then contrast it with *most of them* in verse 5. *All* the Israelites enjoyed the privileges of redemption, i.e. freedom from bondage and the provision of all their pilgrim needs in respect to food, drink, clothing and protection. *All* of them ate the manna, so wondrously provided every day by the Lord. This was *spiritual* food, as likewise the water from the smitten rock was *spiritual* drink, and the rock itself was spiritual (verses 3 and 4). This is an interesting and instructive usage in the Scriptures of the word “spiritual”. So many seem to think that this word always designates something shadowy and unreal, but the manna and the water were definitely literal and material. They were ‘spiritual’ as well, which shows that they had a further significance in addition to their material function as food and drink. In other words they were *typical*; they represented spiritual truth as the Lord’s great discourse in John vi. 30-42 clearly shows.

The O.T. record sets forth the ten times Israel provoked the Lord by reason of which they lost their prize—entry into the promised land. The Corinthian believers were therefore to take warning. They need not think that they would escape such a penalty if they provoked God in a similar manner. Their fathers lusted after evil things. They

became idolaters and fell into vice (verses 6-8). They tempted the Lord and perished through the snake bites (9). They tried to see how far they could go into sin without the Lord intervening. They continually grumbled about the Lord's leading and dealings with them. We may think that grumbling is not nearly so bad as idolatry, but the Lord took a different and solemn view of this. They wearied Him with their constant complaints and dissatisfaction. It is no wonder that we, as members of the Body of Christ are warned against this sin, and we should note that it is in the epistle concerning the prize, namely Phil. ii. 14, that we are told: "Do all things without murmurings and disputings".

The Apostle sums up by saying:

"Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (x. 11 R.V.).

Some of the Corinthians apparently thought that, because they were saved, they could get away with idolatry and sin, so that this was of little account in their estimation. Paul is at pains to show the falsity and danger of such a conception.

No.11. pp. 204 - 208

In x. 11 Paul uses the striking expression, "the end of the ages". The whole verse translated literally would read, "Now these things happened to them by way of example; and they were written for our warning, upon whom the ends of the ages have arrived". Such a drastic expression can only be understood in the light of the early Second Coming of the Lord as a possibility during the Acts period (Acts iii. 19-26). Nothing less than this would warrant such an expression, which would otherwise be a gross exaggeration. The Apostle had already stated that the "time was short" (vii. 29), and he instructed believers to wait daily for the return of the Saviour. We have seen that this was the united testimony of all the early epistles and it is difficult to understand how this has been ignored by expositors and believers generally over the centuries.

It is true to say that the early epistles cannot be understood properly without a recognition of this tremendous fact and its implications at the time of writing. The Apostle has been stressing the responsibility to the Lord that Truth brings, and the need for its practical outworking, in terms of a heavenly race. This was to counter the complacency of some of the Corinthian believers. However, to balance things up, lest this responsibility should appear too great, he now brings forward a Divine promise of great encouragement:

"No testing has fallen upon you but what is the common lot of men: But God can be trusted not to allow you to be tested beyond your power; on the contrary, along with the trial He will provide also the way out, so that you may be able to endure" (x. 13 C. K. Barrett).

God knows even better than the believer just how much testing he can endure, and never will He allow the burden to become too great. Sometimes we may feel that we

have come to the limit of our capability of endurance, but if this promise is true, this is not really so, otherwise the Lord would have lightened the burden. He indeed can “suit the burden to the back”, and if we can see behind it all our need for His loving discipline, we shall not fail Him by becoming impatient or bitter. The second part of the promise is given a wrong slant in the A.V. If a “way to escape” is made for us, then we are not bearing the trial. *Ekbasis*, literally way out, can mean the end, issue or outcome, and the word only occurs twice in the N.T. (here and Heb. xiii. 7). The promise means that He Who has led us *into* the trial has all of it, and its *outcome*, securely under His control. It will not continue one moment longer than is necessary, and we can be brought out of it “more than conquerors” by His grace and strength. This gives great assurance even though there may be details of the trial we cannot understand.

Paul now sums this section up: “Wherefore (or the conclusion of this) my beloved (is), flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise (or sensible) men; judge ye what I say” (verses 14 and 15 R.V.). Idolatry must be avoided at all costs and therefore there should be no direct contact with it if it could be avoided. “Run away from it”, said the Apostle. In direct contrast to this was the New Covenant feast, the Lord’s Supper.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion (sharing) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion (sharing) of the body of Christ?” (x. 16 R.V.)

The cup of blessing was one of the cups of wine which were drunk at the Passover meal. As many may not be familiar with the procedure which prevailed at the time of Christ we give a summary:

- (1) Those celebrating the feast gathered together with the head of the house blessing the cup of wine which all partook.
- (2) The followed washing of the hands accompanied with a benediction.
- (3) The table was set with the Passover lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs and sauce.
- (4) The head of the house, and then the others, dipped a portion of bitter herbs into the sauce and ate them.
- (5) The dishes were then removed and a cup of wine brought, followed by an interval for asking questions concerning the feast, and then the wine was drunk (see Exod. xii. 26, 27).
- (6) The table was again set, the head repeating the commemorative words which opened what was strictly the paschal supper, and Psalms ciii. and civ. were sung (the first part of the Hallel).
- (7) The second washing of the hands followed with a short blessing, breaking one of the two cakes of unleavened bread, with thanks. The bread was partaken, after dipping it, with the bitter herbs, into the sauce.
- (8) The flesh was then eaten with the bread and another blessing, together with a third cup of wine, known as “the cup of blessing”.
- (9) Then came the fourth cup, with a recital or singing of Psalms cxv.-cxviii., from which this cup was known as “the cup of the Hallel”, or of the Song.
- (10) There might be, in conclusion, a fifth cup, provided that the great Hallel was sung over it (possibly Psalms cxx.-cxxxviii.).

In connection with all this, the student should read Exod. xii. 1-27 which gives the original instructions concerning the Passover.

When we compare the above ritual with the institution of the New Covenant feast by the Lord, we find it throws a certain amount of light on the procedure, although we cannot be certain of every detail. To (1), (5) or (8) we may refer the first words and the first distribution of the cup (Luke xxii. 17, 18); to (4) or (7) the dipping of the sop (John xiii. 26); to (7) or an interval during or after (8), the distribution of the broken bread (Matt. xxvi. 26; Mark xiv. 22; Luke xxii. 19; I Cor. xi. 23, 24); to (9) or (10) “after supper” (Luke xxii. 20); then the thanksgiving and distribution of the cup, and the hymn with which the whole was ended.

There have been differences of opinion as to whether the meal which the Lord instituted was actually the Passover or an anticipation of it. But it seems quite clear from the Gospel narrative, that it was the actual Passover (Matt. xxvi. 2, 17, 18, 19; Mark xiv. 1, 12, 14, 16; Luke xxii. 7, 8, 11, 13, 15); and that the Lord was giving it an added significance with a view to His impending death and sacrifice of Himself, and connecting it with the New Covenant of Jer. xxxi. 31-37 made with Israel and Judah. It should be noted that the Passover was celebrated once a year only, and the Lord gave no direct indication of the frequency of the new feast (“Do this as oft as ye drink it”, I Cor. xi. 25). Even if it could be proved that it was definitely kept once a week by the early disciples, there was certainly no Divine command so to keep it.

Another factor which must be recognized and without which a correct assessment cannot be made of this meal, is its early connection with the *agape* or love-feast. One great feature of the original Pentecost of Acts ii. was that the disciples learned to share everything, their possessions and even their food (see also Acts iv. 32). This was indeed a Divine communism with Christ in the centre. What we see today called “communism” is the Devil’s counterfeit without Christ. The newly saved gathering of Acts ii. expressed their brotherly love in this practical way:

“And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and *had all things in common* (i.e. *shared*); and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, *did eat their meat (food) with gladness and singleness of heart*” (Acts ii. 43-46).

The ‘breaking of bread’ was a common Jewish idiom for simply partaking of a meal. It is quite a mistake to limit it, as some do, to the Lord’s Supper. The flat, round Jewish loaves were always broken and not cut, hence the origin of the phrase (see Matt. xv. 36; Mark vi. 41; Luke ix. 16). In Acts ii. 46 “breaking bread from house to house” is explained by the next phrase “did eat their food with gladness”, and shows this was a communal meal and came to be known as an *agape*, a love-feast. There were other practical expressions of brotherly love, such as almsgiving, and the kiss of greeting of man to man, and woman to woman (I Pet. v. 14; Rom. xvi. 16; I Cor. xvi. 20; II Cor. xiii.12; I Thess. v. 26). By the time of Acts vi. 1 the growth of the Jerusalem assembly led to the appointment of the seven to serve tables, which apparently included the responsibility for arranging the common meals. Early the practice arose of ending the communal meal with the Lord’s Supper, though again this was done without any Divine command recorded in the N.T. Soon this began to be abused. There was over-eating and

gluttony and this necessitated the sharp rebuke of the Apostle in I Cor. xi. Jude 12 likewise warns of these excesses (“There are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts” R.V.), and possibly II Pet. ii. 13, where there is a variant reading of *agapais*, love-feasts, for *apatais*, deceivings. The church Fathers refer to these feasts, among them Ignatius, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Chrysostom.

The love-feast later on became separated from the Lord’s Supper. Such edicts as that of Trajan against secret societies, led to this. The *agape* was adjudged by the Emperor to pertain to secret clubs. By the fourth century the *agape* came into disfavour through various reasons such as disorders and the increasing emphasis placed upon the Eucharist — which finally degenerated into the Roman Mass. The Council of Laodicea (363), the third council of Carthage (393), and the second council of Orleans (541) led to finally prohibiting feasting in churches, though the rite still persisted in the Eastern Church. John Wesley introduced the practice within Methodism, but it has not survived. The practice of the Sovereign distributing Maundy money is a relic of the *agape*.

It is important to note that the Lord Jesus, either substituted or added the ‘washing of the feet’ to the Passover ritual. He may have substituted this for one of the hand washings of this Service. Now we are often told that “all the commands of Jesus” are binding on the church today and that, in instituting the Supper, He was giving an example for all time to believers. If we notice carefully what He said in connection with that wondrous and lowly act of washing the disciples’ feet, we shall indeed wonder why those who talk like this have turned a blind eye to this important part of the Supper:

“He riseth from Supper, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded He said unto them, know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well: for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. *For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you*” (John xiii. 4-17).

There can be no doubt as to the meaning of the Lord’s words. He was expressly giving an example for the disciples to follow. Why has not the professing church been keen to put this into practice then? Can it be that washing people’s feet is too lowly an act and is not nearly so thrilling as sipping wine and engaging in all the ritual that has accumulated through the centuries and obliterated the real meaning of this simple feast?

Coming back to I Corinthians, we shall not find it easy to distinguish between the love feast and the Lord’s Supper, but it is essential to have this background of knowledge if we are to understand properly the situation at Corinth with which Paul was dealing. There is no doubt that, because of human failing and infirmity, all ritual can become dangerous and finally gain an importance that it was never meant to have. The senses are entertained by it, and finally feeling is substituted for faith. We should be grateful that we belong to a heavenly calling where all shadows have vanished and we have all the fullness and spiritual reality in Christ.

No.12. pp. 225 - 229

Having glanced at the connection of the *agape*, the love-feast or communal meal, with the Lord's Supper, we return to the Apostle Paul's argument in I Cor. x. 16:

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion (sharing) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion (sharing) of the body of Christ? Seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread” (x. 16, 17 R.V.).

In the last study we pointed out that the cup of blessing was a technical Jewish term for the cup of wine drunk at the end of the meal with an appropriate grace: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, Who givest us the fruit of the vine”. In the Passover meal, this was the third of the four cups that had to be drunk. The Apostle is now going to argue that the symbols of the wine and broken bread set forth the broken body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus, the redemptive benefits of which they all shared together by faith in Him; this fact binding them into one body or company of believers. This was set forth pictorially, by their drinking the cup and eating the broken bread. In this sense they had a common participation in the body and blood of Christ. The phrase ‘one body’ used here is explained: “Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, form one body, for we all partake” (verse 17 C. K. Barrett). The common participation bound them into one company, and so, as Rom. xii. 5 later expressed it, they were “one body IN Christ, and every one members one of another”. Note, Paul does not say they were the Body OF Christ. *In Christ* is positional, such as we have it used in II Cor. v. 17. The joint-Body (*sussoma*) of Ephesians was a later revelation: the latter word is not used in the Acts epistles, and we need to be very accurate in our reading of the context we are studying. Let us not forget that the discussion concerning the Passover meal and the Lord's Supper arose from the warning to flee from idolatry (x. 14), and to avoid as far as possible food offered to idols. Any participation in these things after sharing in the tremendous benefits that flowed from the Lord's death, symbolized by the broken bread and the wine, would be treachery indeed.

Paul now points to an analogy to re-inforce his argument:

“Behold Israel after the flesh; have not they which eat the sacrifices communion with the altar?” (x. 18 R.V.).

In some of the O.T. sacrifices, the priests and the offerer shared together in the eating of the sacrifice. They were “partners at the altar” and equally partook of the benefits. But no such idea of blessing could be read into idolatry:

“Well: what do I mean by this? That food sacrificed to an idol is anything? Or that an idol is anything?” (x. 19 C. K. Barrett).

Idolatry was dangerous from many aspects, but chiefly because behind all idolatry was demonism and Satan worship: “the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons (devils), and not to God; and I would not that ye should have communion

(fellowship) with demons (devils, verse 20)". Let us not forget that there is only one Devil or slanderer, but there are multitudes of demons, evil spirits, under his control. All idolatry, whether ancient or modern, is only another form of the worship of Satan, and is the very thing that he covets most of all. The very thought of sharing in the redemptive blessings that flow from Calvary and sharing in Satan worship was abhorrent in the extreme:

"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons. Or are we to provoke the Lord? Are we stronger than He?" (x. 21, 22 C. K. Barrett).

We must remember that many of the Corinthian church were formerly pagans who had enjoyed the heathen sacrificial worship in their temples. Possibly this still had a fascination for them. But, said the Apostle, there must be a clean break. Eating food which had been sold in the market, after previously being used at an idolatrous feast, was one thing; but direct participation in such feasts was quite another. Furthermore, they had the warning of the provocation of the Lord of Israel of old, and the punishment that followed. Did they think they could provoke the Lord and get away with it?

In the section that follows, the Apostle sums up his teaching concerning food offered to idols which was one of the problems the Corinthian church had written to him about. There was a situation in which it might be harmless to eat food which had previously been offered to an idol. On the other hand it might be wrong so to do. The circumstances in each case must be taken into account, with the over-riding consideration of "his neighbour's good" (24).

"Whatsoever is sold in the shambles (market), eat, asking no question for conscience sake; for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. If one of them that believe not biddeth you to a feast, and ye are disposed to go; whatever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, this hath been offered in sacrifice, eat not, for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: conscience, I say, not thine own, but the others" (x. 25-29 R.V.).

The sense of these verse is clear. Meat sold at the markets would almost surely contain a proportion which had been sacrificed in heathen worship. The Christian was not under any obligation to make a searching enquiry as to the origin of such food. In the final sense it was the Lord's, Who is the Creator and to Whom all things of the earth belong. In these circumstances there was nothing wrong in buying and eating it. But if anyone pointed out that a particular portion of meat or food of any kind had definitely been used in idol worship, then a believer must abstain for the sake of the informant, whoever he was. It was really a case of practical Christian witness and self-limitation so as not to cause anyone else to stumble, which conduct has been previously emphasized by the Apostle. In passing, we should note that the words in verse 27 "to a feast" are supplied and are not in the original. It is better to limit the word to "invite", that is, to give an invitation to a meal in another person's home.

Verses 30 and 31 are difficult in their connection with what has gone before. It may be they are an interjection by someone with a strong conscience, asking why his liberty must be regulated by someone else's attitude of mind, and why should his action be

misinterpreted? The answer is of course practical love, which ever considers the effects of one's actions on other people, and is willing to forego rights for the sake of others. The summing up is:

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give no occasion of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God: even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved” (x. 31-33 R.V.).

How near this man must have been walking with the Lord to be able to say without self-advertisement: “Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ” (xi. 1)! This verse belongs more naturally with the end of chapter x. and should be kept with it. Paul gives a similar injunction in Phil. iii. 17; I Thess. i. 6, and II Thess. iii. 7, 9. Would that all of us who profess to know Christ could do likewise.

In chapter xi. the Apostle deals with the public worship in the assembly, either touching problems concerning which they had written him, or what he realized they needed, judging from the reports he had received of their actions and spiritual condition. We have seen that when he can praise and encourage, he always does so. He is glad to know that they were holding fast the tradition of truth which he himself had delivered to them, that is, his oral teaching; and this method occupied a very important place in passing on the truth before the written Word was completed. This is tradition in a good sense, and is used similarly in II Thess. ii. 15; iii. 6. It is only when *extra*-Scriptural things are taught as being truth, that tradition becomes so dangerous and blinding to those who receive such ideas. Modern Christendom is rife with this sort of thing, and the progressive Christian continually has to disentangle the Truth of the Scriptures from it.

Before he deals with some aspects of their behaviour in their assembly, Paul defines the God-given relationship between man and God, and man and woman:

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (xi. 3 R.V.).

How are we to understand the word “head” here? It can represent metaphorically the outstanding part of a whole, or in the Greek usage, the *origin* of things. The Lord Jesus Christ, as Creator and last Adam, is the “head” of the human race. Man is the “head” of the woman. Paul does not teach that man is woman's *lord*, or that there is inequality in the sexes mentally or morally; but man is the origin of the woman, as Gen. ii. 18-23 shows. He is the explanation of her being. The position of the Messiah in the Godhead is explained by “the head of Christ is God”. Thus a chain of relationships is set up—God, Christ, man, woman. This is the foundation for the regulations he is going to give respecting public prayer and prophecy. If a man prays (publicly) with his head covered, he dishonours or disgraces his head (4). Does the second occurrence of “head” refer to his head physically, or metaphorically to Christ (the Head)? If it is the former, then the meaning is that his uncovered head is a mark of his relationship to God as his Head, and it would be wrong for this to be concealed with a covering. If the latter, then the sense is that the man who is a believer, with his unveiled head, reflects the glory of Christ. If he covered it (like Moses was compelled to do) he would hide this glory. It is difficult to

decide which is correct. It is possible that there is a combination of both meanings. What is clear is that men must be bareheaded in public worship. What of the women?

“But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoureth her head: for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven. For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn: but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled. For a man indeed ought not to have his head veiled, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man” (xi. 4-7 R.V.).

This passage is without meaning unless women from time to time took part in the worship of the assembly, and this in spite of xiv. 34, 35 which will be considered in its place. If it had been wrong for women so to do, the Apostle would certainly have forbidden the practice. He reminds the Corinthians that man came originally from God and displays typically the authority and glory of God on earth. Woman came originally from man, with the express purpose of being a helper for him, and she finds her fulfillment in this. As such she is “the glory of the man” (verses 7-9). From this the Apostle goes on to deduce:

“For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels” (xi. 10 R.V.).

This verse is indeed difficult to interpret. What does Paul mean, and how does this fit in as a reason from what has gone before? There are at least two differing explanations of the reference to angels. (1) They are the wicked “sons of God” of Gen. vi. (2) They are good angels who are the guardians of God’s people (Heb. i. 13, 14) and they would be offended by any improper behaviour in worship. We will consider this in our next article and seek the true meaning in relationship to the passage.

The First Epistle to the Corinthians.

No.13. pp. 6 - 10

In our exposition we have reached one of the problem verses of the N.T.:

“For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels” (I Cor. xi. 10 R.V.).

We must remember that social customs are bound to play a part and affect Christian witness, and unless they are definitely contrary to Biblical doctrine, they cannot be ignored by the believer in his daily life. The social customs at Corinth during N.T. times are, of course, different from ours, but the factors involved, specially in public worship, are the same, namely modesty, propriety and orderliness. Among the Greeks, only prostitutes, so numerous in Corinth, went about unveiled in public. If Christian women discarded the veil in the assembly, they automatically placed themselves on this level, thus losing their reputation, and bringing the whole assembly into disgrace.

The Greeks wore no head covering in private prayer, whereas the Jewish men wore the *tallith*, “a four-cornered shawl having fringes consisting of eight threads, each knotted five times” (Vincent) to show reverence to God and their unworthiness to look on Him. However, Maimonides (*Mishna*) excepts cases where (as in Greece) the custom of the place was different. But the Apostle has more than custom to consider in his regulation of conduct in the Corinthian assembly. His first regard was for truth and the right relationship between God, man, and then woman. Hence the argument of verses 3-16.

As we have seen, the relationship between Christian men and women is not one of superiority or otherwise, but of God-given position, and this, the Apostle argues, should be evident in dress and deportment. A man ought not to have his head veiled inasmuch as he is a representation of the image and glory of God. If the *tallith* was customary *at this particular time* for Jewish men in worship (we are not absolutely sure about this) then this was revolutionary teaching so far as they were concerned. But not so with the woman, as we have seen. It would have been revolutionary for her *not* to wear a veil in public, and as man was constituted by God to be her “head” (verse 3), the wearing of a veil, showing this symbolically, made it even more right and proper.

This is what Paul means when he says she should have “a sign of authority on her head”, where “authority” is put by metonymy for “the veil” or head-covering. The Apostle does not stop here, but adds “because of the angels” (verse 10). The explanations of this clause have been legion. Here are some of them:

- (1) The angels are “presidents” or leaders of the assembly, just as some interpret the “angels of the seven churches” in Rev. i. 20.
- (2) They are good angels who are present at worship and would be offended by indecorous conduct of women.

- (3) They are good angels who might be ensnared as the “sons of God” were in Gen. vi., when they contemplated unveiled women.
- (4) They are the fallen angels of Gen. vi. who worked such havoc with humanity which finally resulted in the Flood.

No.1 we can reject outright. When the Lord Jesus interprets the symbol of “stars” as “angels” in Rev. i. 20, we have no right to re-interpret his interpretation and make them human leaders. This is opening the door to error and not light and understanding.

No.2 is popular with many evangelical expositors, but when we take it to the test of Scripture, what do we find? Just where do we have any command in the Old or New Testament to avoid offending angels? And even if angels were offended by the behaviour of some of the Corinthian believers, what practical effect would this have had on this church? To avoid offending God is of supreme importance, but we have no divine commands concerning the effect of human conduct upon angels.

View No.3 may be possible, but again, we have no clear teaching of Scripture as to the attitude of angels towards humanity, and therefore we cannot accept this idea.

We are left therefore with view No.4, and lest any should think that this is one of the cranky ideas of modern dispensationalists, we would point out that it was put forward as early as Tertullian (160-222A.D.). The Apostle has already used Gen. i.-iii. in his arguments concerning the relationship of the sexes. What more natural that his thoughts should travel on to chapter vi. of the same book where, in the Septuagint, *angeloi*, angels are used of the “sons of God”? These “kept not their first estate” (Jude 6) and co-habited with women, which resulted in the evil Satanic seed who were physical monstrosities (giants Gen. vi. 4), and finally produced the conditions which necessitated the Flood.

If this is what Paul is referring to, it will fit in with his arguments and the context we are now considering. It should be clear that neither men or women are safe in the spiritual conflict that surrounds us unless they abide in the position that God has placed them in, the one to the other. If a woman steps out of her God-appointed relationship with the man, then she puts herself in danger. Refusal to wear the veil would have been tantamount to doing this, and such a woman would then have been open to the powers of darkness who would not have been slow to take advantage. There is plenty of evidence in the Acts of active demonism, and the time was not without its dangers, just as it will be at the end of this age (II Tim. iii. 1).

Paul goes on to state the right relationship of the sexes (verses 11 and 12) and to point out that all these things (*ta panta*) have their origin in God. Even naturally and bodily, the man has been made different to the woman. Relating to the hair of the head, women grow considerably longer hair than men, so nature (or the God of nature) teaches us that woman has been given a natural covering which men lack (15). Nothing is clearer than the fact that, whatever similarities men and women may have, they also have definite differences which distinguish them and this is according to God’s will.

Many modern tendencies and fashions in the way the hair is treated and in dress, obliterate these distinctions between the sexes and are definitely bad. Believers should take care with such modern fashions, and see to it that they are not being enslaved by these things and so becoming conformed to this age (Rom. xii. 1, 2).

Having made the relationship between men and women clear (even appealing to nature and custom of the Greek world at the time of writing), he now asks:

“Judge ye in yourselves: is it seemly that a woman pray unto God unveiled? but if any man seemeth to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God” (I Cor. 13-16 R.V.).

The Apostle does not say that it was unseemly for any woman to engage in prayer, but to do so *unveiled* would be unseemly and even dangerous, because of the evil spirit world. In addition there was no other church doing these things in this way, so the Corinthians who were doing this, could not appeal to such action elsewhere in support of their own.

Paul, all through this section, is regulating the conduct of the Corinthian assembly. The Holy Spirit had distributed his evidential gifts to both men and women (xii. 4-6). The Apostle had written to the Thessalonian church that these gifts must not be quenched (I Thess. v. 19). There is no possibility of man quenching God here. “Spirit” is put for His gift which could be neglected. However, the *way* these gifts were used in the meetings together, must be regulated so that all was done decently and in order. Later on in this epistle Paul returns to the use of these gifts, with special reference to tongues and prophecy.

A new section commences with verse 17, where, instead of commending as in verse 2, the Apostle is compelled to censure them for their bad conduct in connection with the Lord’s Supper:

“But in giving you this charge, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that divisions exist among you, and I partly believe it” (xi. 17, 18 R.V.).

The situation was so bad that Paul tells them that their coming together in assembly, instead of being a help, had become a hindrance by reason of their behaviour. We need not assume that the divisions here were the same as those mentioned in iii. 3. They seem to have arisen in the context of chapter xi. out of pure selfishness and greed. It is essential to remember that the Supper itself was preceded by the communal meal, the *agape*, which has its origin in Acts ii. 42-47. This we have dealt with in a previously study to which the reader is referred. The abuses obviously commenced with this love-feast, which, instead of being a practical expression of love and sharing, became an opportunity to indulge in gluttony and disgraceful conduct. Paul said that he had heard of all this (doubtless from Chloe’s house, i. 11; or from Stephanas and his friends, xvi. 17), and he partly believed it. Most people believe *more* than they hear. The gracious Apostle believes *less* than has been reported to him. On the surface, it seemed impossible

that such scandalous behaviour could occur among Christians, but Paul knew to what depths such could sink when the old sinful nature is indulged.

He uses two words for divisions, *schisma* and *hairesis*, which, while having different shades of meaning, can only refer to the same thing here. Divisions resulted in separate parties being formed, evidently antagonistic to each other. The only good thing about this sorry state of affairs was “there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved (*dokimoi*) may be made manifest among you” (verse 19). In other words, people’s true characters are exposed in such a situation; those walking worthy and therefore approved by the Lord, being manifestly distinct from the backsliders. The Lord Jesus, in His lifetime, had hinted that such divisions would occur, but that those responsible would come under judgment (Matt. xviii. 7). Alas, the history of the professing church right through the centuries, has been strewn with such happenings.

The Corinthian communal meal was certainly a meal of sorts, but it was not the *Lord’s* Super in the way the believers at Corinth were treating it. The word *Lord’s* is the adjective *kuriakon*, “relating to the Lord”, and here is emphatic. Instead of the Lord being in control, the sinful flesh as dominating, and this meal, which could have beautifully set forth their practical oneness in Christ, was being used for gluttony and selfishness. No wonder Paul was so indignant. The chief offenders appeared to be the rich, who were in a position to set an example in generosity and thoughtfulness for the poorer brethren. Instead of this, they were grossly over-eating and drinking, even to the point of getting drunk, with the result that the poor were left without food and went hungry (verses 20 & 21).

“What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the Church of God, and put them to shame that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not” (I Cor. xi. 22 R.V.).

This disgraceful behaviour was bringing Christianity into contempt and Paul charged them to remedy this at once.

No.14. pp. 26 - 29

The Apostle Paul has been severely reprimanding the Corinthian believers for their gross abuses of the Church's common meal, the *agape*, and the Lord's Supper that followed it. This behaviour was even worse in view of the fact that the love feast was so closely connected with the New Covenant feast, which was a memorial of the Lord's atoning death for them; and to link such conduct with such rich and solemn symbols was intolerable.

The Apostle now elaborates this:

“For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, This is My body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of Me”
(I Cor. xi. 23, 24 R.V.).

That the actual words of the Lord Jesus at this Passover supper were handed down from the apostles to their disciples and then to others there is no doubt, and it is possible that they could have reached Paul in this way. But in view of Gal. i. 12, with its great stress on the Lord's revelation to Paul independently of any human source, it is better to take the words “I received of the Lord” as meaning that the Apostle received this record directly from Christ.

There should be no need to stress that this meal was directly connected with the Passover, as all the four evangelists make perfectly clear. Likewise its connection with the New Covenant of Jer. xxxi. is plain, and that covenant is specially related to Israel and Judah (Jer. xxxi. 31). It is tradition that wrenches this feast away from its divinely Israelitish setting, so much so that many Christians have never realized that, in its inception, it was connected with the Passover at all!

The Lord gives the symbolical meaning to the broken bread and the wine by the figure *Metaphor*, in which the verb “to be” means “represents” (see *Figures of Speech used in the Bible* by E. W. Bullinger, D.D., p.738). “This (broken bread) *represents* My body, which is for you”. The ghastly failure of the Roman Church to recognize this fact has resulted in the blasphemy and bondage of the Mass that has enslaved and deceived thousands down the centuries.

The twelve apostles were exhorted to keep this feast as a “memorial”—“do this as My memorial” (I Cor. xi. 25 literally). Now both the Passover and this feast were memorials, the one reminding Israel of their miraculous deliverance from the bondage of Egypt (Exod. xiii. 9), and the other of a greater deliverance at Calvary from the bondage of sin and death. In both cases blood was shed stressing death, the former a type of the great reality, the precious life of Christ, voluntarily laid down in bearing the penalty of the sins of His people. This figure *Metaphor* would have been readily understood by these

twelve Jews, to whom the eating of the literal flesh and blood of the Lord would have been revolting and utterly contrary to the Law.

These symbols not only looked back by faith into the past. They looked forward too, to the *completion* of the saving work which they represented, at the expected early coming of Christ, when the goal of salvation would be attained.

“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord’s death till He come” (xi. 26 R.V.).

It should hardly be necessary to say, in view of our past studies, that the second advent of Christ, *as yet future to us*, could not have been in their minds. During the Acts, the coming of the Lord was imminent as practically all the early epistles clearly teach (cp. Acts iii. 19-26). Paul, together with the Christian groups of believers, expected to see and participate in this great event. Therefore this supper was a *proclamation of the nearness and reality of the second Advent*. This sacrificial meal then linked *both* the comings together, and had real point at this time.

Moreover, this typical meal was not one-sided. If it spoke of basic truths which conferred eternal blessings, it also brought great responsibility upon those who partook of it and it was this that Paul wanted to bring home to those in the Corinthian assembly who were so grossly abusing their great privileges. One of the big mistakes that evangelists have made is to teach that the *age of grace* commenced at Calvary. God certainly *acted in grace* and longsuffering to Israel during the Acts period in giving them yet another opportunity to repent and turn back to Him. The gospel Paul preached was one based upon grace, but as a dispensation, grace did not operate in all its fullness until after the laying aside in unbelief of the chosen nation, and as such it was then made known in the first letter written after this event which occurred at Acts xxviii., namely Ephesians (Eph. iii. 2).

During the Acts, divine judgment was as much manifest as it had been in O.T. days. James, stressing the imminent return of Christ, had declared that His coming drew near, and as Judge, He was then standing before the door (v. 7-9). It is quite wrong to regard the second Advent as one of blessing only. Many Scriptures reveal the fact that it is also a time of judgment for sin. During the time we are considering (the period covered by the Acts), the Lord was already judging among His people. His severe dealings with Ananias and Sapphira were typical. We remember this resulted from their telling lies, not the worst of sins in the estimation of many people, and one wonders what would happen amongst Christians today if we were still living in the same dispensation! And yet this *would* be happening if the present dispensation had commenced at the Cross.

The Apostle is now going to warn the sinning Christians that their abuses of the supper of the Lord would certainly come under His direct judgment, and had already done so in a solemn way on some of them.

“Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and

drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body. For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep" (xi. 27-30 R.V.).

Those in the Corinthian assembly who were so grossly indulging the sinful old nature by gluttony and drunkenness were playing with fire. The Lord could not be indifferent to such conduct, and as a result, a great number of them were ill, and some had actually been visited with death.

This was the Lord's judgment indeed beginning at the house of God (I Pet. iv. 17), and was an earnest of the Kingdom age when, not only will there be world-wide blessing, but divine judgment and discipline too so that sin may be restrained, and without this, such a Kingdom and blessing would be impossible of realization.

Again we would point out that this direct judgment for sin is not typical of this present age of grace. When one considers the errors in connection with the Roman Mass participated in by many thousands; the many unbelievers who regularly have taken communion over the centuries, "not discerning the Lord's body", one wonders again just what would have happened in Christendom down the centuries had the Lord been dealing with His people in the same way as the time we are here considering. As one has said, undertakers could not have coped with the work! Yet Paul warned the Corinthians that he who did not discern the spiritual teaching underlying the meal relating to the Lord's body "eats and drinks judgment unto himself", and this judgment was not one in the far future at the last day, but *was taking place at that very time in a drastic way.*

This fact, together with other features, should make it clear to the discerning believer, that the Acts is a separate dispensation, even though we have the fundamental gospel of grace, true for all time dealing with sin and death, preached throughout the period. The solemn conclusion of all this is stated in verse 31:

"But if we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, wait one for another. If any man is hungry, let him eat at home; that your coming together be not unto judgment. And the rest will I set in order whensoever I come" (xi. 31-34 R.V.).

If the believers at Corinth would only turn the searchlight of judgment upon themselves instead of on others, they would have disciplined themselves and avoided the Lord having to discipline them, although this discipline, even if severe, was better than being condemned with the unsaved world around them.

It is still true today, believers should never judge or harshly condemn one another. It is easier and more pleasant to judge someone else than to rigorously judge and discipline ourselves, but this is the only condemnation that God allows us! How much more pleasant the history of the professing Church would have been if only this had been carried out consistently! In this blatant age, when self-discipline is so little known, it behoves the believer to give a witness that his faith in Christ has taught him to control himself, remembering that this is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v. 23, where

‘temperance’ should read ‘self-control’), which should be on the ‘tree’ of our lives, bringing glory to the Lord.

A new section dealing with spiritual gifts commences with the next chapter, and to this we will address ourselves in our next study.

No.15. pp. 50 - 52

After reprimanding the Corinthian assembly for their abuses of the *agape*, the shared love-feast, the Apostle Paul adds to the solemnity of his warning by recalling the words and acts of the Lord Jesus when He instituted the New Covenant Supper under the shadow of Calvary. This occupies xi. 23-30. There is no need to debate whether the Apostle received the facts in unbroken tradition from the Twelve, or whether he received it from the Lord without any mediation. In view of his strong language in Gal. i., where he discounts any human origin in his knowledge of the Gospel, having received it directly from the risen Lord Himself, we see no good reason why it is not so in this particular case.

The facts of the ritual are in accordance with the Gospel records. We have already seen its direct link with the Passover, both being *memorial* feasts, one looking forward to the real deliverance at the Cross by the real Passover Lamb (“Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us”, v. 7), and the other looking back in faith to the same great act. Paul reinforces his warning by impressing on them that to partake of this ritual feast unworthily, that is with the moral failings of selfishness and gluttony rampant among them, was to eat and drink God’s judgment to themselves rather than to receive His blessings (verses 27-29).

This judgment was already evident in their midst:

“For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep” (xi. 30 R.V.).

We have already pointed out that this Divine discipline was typical of the Acts period, where the possibility of the earthly kingdom was still in view. It is not typical of this age of grace where grace is reigning and direct judgment is held back. While this is a fact, we would point out that the normal consequences of sowing to the flesh or the spirit remain unchanged (Gal. vi. 7-9).

This section of the epistle ends with the Apostle exhorting the believers at Corinth to wait for one another (33). It is obvious that there was no spiritual hierarchy in the Corinthian set-up who could have forced obedience of the rank and file. They were not told to wait for their leaders to arrive, but each to wait for the other, thus bringing responsibility to all. Any undue hunger should be first satisfied at home (34), so that their conduct might be worthy, and the painful experience of the Lord’s judgment avoided.

Paul now commences an important section dealing with spiritual gifts. It is clear that the Corinthian church had an abundance of these gifts, and this in spite of their carnal state. To teach that the possession of these gifts today is a mark of spirituality, or of some special filling of the Spirit, is quite contrary to Scriptural facts, as we shall see. It is possible that the believers at Corinth had raised the matter concerning gifts in their communication with him. As this matter was directly connected with their public worship, the Apostle now deals with it.

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that when ye were Gentiles, ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit” (xii. 1-3 R.V.).

The word ‘gifts’ is not in the original; it could be rendered “spiritual matters”, but as the context makes clear that it is special gifts of the Holy Spirit which are being discussed, it is better to supply the word “gifts”. There was evidently a large Gentile section in the Corinthian assembly, for the Apostle refers to their pre-conversion days as idolaters under the domination of the evil Satanic spirits that were behind the dumb idols they worshipped.

While redemption had delivered them from this bondage, it was a mistake to suppose that there was no danger now from Satanic activity. In one sense these gifts constituted a danger, for Paul makes it clear in this epistles and the one that was to follow, that Satan, as an angel of light, can travesty these gifts and so deceive the unwary. It is quite wrong to imagine that the great enemy of God and His children, gave believers a holiday, as it were, till the second century with its developed Gnosticism. The battle between light and darkness never ceases, and the error that the Apostle combated at Colossae, the warnings contained in the Pastoral epistles and the command of the Apostle John to “test the spirits whether they are of God, *because many false prophets are gone out into the world* (I John iv. 1) and that the spirit of antichrist was *already present* (ii. 18), show quite clearly that this was so, and therefore the danger existed of being led astray.

We wish that those today who are anxious to bring back *some* of these gifts, in particular tongue speaking, would bear in mind the danger of what they are seeking to do.

In N.T. times ecstatic heathen worship was a *fact*, as it is still today in dark centres of heathendom. Paul either knew that this had already entered the Corinthian church, or there was the possibility of it doing so.

Thus he states categorically that no one under the influence of God’s Spirit can say that Jesus is accursed, nor would anyone under Satanic domination own His lordship, for this is the very thing that Satan covets for himself, and he certainly would not allow any of his dupes to advertise the supremacy of Christ!

It seems clear that the Apostle had the worship of the assembly in mind in this long section dealing with spiritual gifts, which occupies this chapter and also chapters xiii. &

xiv. In consequence, he is not referring to every day speech (although what he said would cover this) but speech in the assembly, which would be either under the guidance of God, or under the Satanic influence. Anyone of course at any time could *pronounce* the words “Lord Jesus”, whether saved or unsaved, but no one in the assembly’s worship could use this phrase in *teaching or witness* and be under the control of the evil one.

Having made this clear, Paul now goes on to discuss the spiritual gifts themselves:

“There are distributions of gifts, but the same Spirit; there are distributions of services, and the same Lord; and these are distributions of operations, but the same God who operates all things in all men. To each one is given his own manifestation of the Spirit, with a view to mutual profit. For to one there is given, through the Spirit, a word of wisdom; to another, in accordance with the same Spirit, a word of Knowledge; to another faith, in the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing, in the one Spirit; to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the power to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these things the same one Spirit puts into operation, distributing individually to each one as He wills” (I Cor. xii. 4-11, C. K. Barrett).

There is no difficulty with the main theme of this section. Note that Spirit, Lord and God are used interchangeably. However varied the gifts may be, they have one source, the Holy Spirit of God. They were not distributed to give any feeling of superiority, but for the mutual profit of the whole church (7). Just as there was no uniformity of experience, neither was there of gifts. Nor were these gifts the privilege of the few who had had some *special* spiritual experience. *To each one* of the assembly is given his own manifestation of the Spirit (7) and the Spirit divided these gifts exactly “as He willed”. No believer was responsible for the kind of gift he received, but he was certainly responsible for the way he used it, which primarily was meant for the Lord’s glory and the common good. In view of the attempts to revive tongues speaking today apart from the gifts *as a whole*, it is significant that Paul puts speaking in tongues at the bottom of the list. It was probably coveted by some because of its outward showiness, but the Apostle commences with one that is infinitely more important, but without any external attraction, that of *wisdom*. Why? *Because wisdom is fundamental in the practical outworking of any gift or service for the Lord*. Who is going to give away anything of real value to foolish people who will only misuse it?

It is noteworthy that, in his prayer for the Ephesian believers, Paul again puts wisdom first (Eph. i. 17). “If any man lack wisdom (and we all do to some extent) let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally” (James i. 5), so there is no excuse for any believer to remain foolish, or to think or act foolishly. This only hinders the Truth, and lets the Lord down before an unbelieving world.

No.16. pp. 77 - 80

In the section of the epistle now before us, the Apostle Paul is dealing with the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, among believers of the Acts period, distributed according to His will. We have seen the all-important gift of wisdom comes first, whereas the more showy gift of tongues is put at *the bottom of the list*. The idea of some who have a leaning towards tongue-speaking, that this is a mark of spirituality or of a special baptism or filling of the Spirit, is shown up as false when one remembers that, of all the churches Paul dealt with, the Corinthian assembly was the most carnal! We shall have more to say about speaking in tongues later on.

The next evidential gift of the Spirit in chapter xii. is *knowledge*. That this was given without human mediation is clear by the context, where the gifts come directly from the Spirit of God. I John ii. 20 refers to this by saying, "But ye have an unction (anointing) from the Holy One (i.e. The Holy Spirit) and *ye know all things*". And again in ii. 27, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, *and ye need not that any man teach you*".

One of the gifts of the ascended Christ for His Body is 'teachers' (Eph. iv. 11), but there is no mention in this epistle of any supernatural gift of knowledge without human effort, such as existed in the church at Corinth. We may wish there was such today, but now we find we have to search the Scriptures patiently, comparing spiritual things with spiritual; we need to pray for enlightenment too before such Divine knowledge becomes our personal possession. While there were teachers in the churches during the period covered by the Acts, it is evident that some who had the special gift of knowledge were independent of them, though not in a schismatic sense, for the will of God was for all to work together as members of a body, in united witness.

Faith is the next special gift, and it is obvious this cannot be the initiatory faith of the sinner believing in Christ as Saviour, for such a faith could not be possessed by some believers but not others. It would be rather the faith of the pioneer, willing to undertake new and possibly difficult work for Christ, not only in the assembly, but outside. We have a modern example of this in George Muller and his work for destitute children.

Now follows gifts of healing, and the Act is full of concrete examples of this. (Acts iii. 7, 8; iv. 16, 30; v. 15, 16; viii. 6, 7; ix. 33, 34; xiv. 8-10; xix. 11, 12; xxviii. 8, 9). Note that the healing was *instantaneous and complete*, and we may be sure that there was no relapse! When modern healing campaigns are compared to this, their pitiful inadequacy is only too obvious. And yet they claim to be fulfilling the same ministry as obtained in the Acts! How folk can be so duped as to believe this only goes to show the utter ignorance of the N.T. that abounds today.

The healing ministry we are dealing with has its roots in the O.T. in God's promises to Israel:

“. . . . If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God *I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians*” (Exod. xv. 26).

“And ye shall serve the Lord thy God, and He shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and *I will take sickness away from the midst of thee*” (Exod. xxiii. 25).

“Thou shalt be blessed *above all people and the Lord will take away from thee all sickness*” (Deut. vii. 14, 15).

There is no doubt that definite Divine healing was promised to this earthly people of God. This was repeated in the Lord’s commission of the Twelve to Israel:

“And as ye go, preach, saying, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons*” (Matt. x. 5-8).

This very healing ministry was also performed by the Lord day by day, as the Gospel records clearly show, and the same ministry continues without a break till Israel is laid aside at the end of the Acts. After this, Paul’s healing ministry, so effective before (see Acts xix. 11, 12), no longer obtains (Phil. ii. 25-27; I Tim. v. 23; II Tim. iv. 20).

This divine healing was one of the foretastes of the coming earthly kingdom, where there will not only be abundant spiritual blessing but physical health and blessing as well. If we are aiming for truth and not wishful thinking, we shall keep this ministry where the Bible places it—with Israel and God’s earthly kingdom purposes. To wrench it from this setting as so many have done is to get difficulty, and disillusionment, as well as confusion in our understanding of the Divine plan of the ages.

The next of the Spirit’s evidential gifts is the working of miracles, and again there is no need to argue as to what today can be regarded as miraculous. The Acts of the Apostles is full of what the Holy Spirit means by the working of miracles and the following Scriptures should be carefully verified as they are too long to quote in full here. (Acts ii. 22, 43; iv. 29, 30; v. 12; vi. 8; viii. 5-7, 39; ix. 37-41; xii. 7; xiii. 10, 11; xiv. 3; xvi. 16-18, 25, 26; xx. 9-11; xxviii. 3-9).

There can be no doubt that we do not live in such an age today. The power to work such miracles was another earthly kingdom evidence, and to some at Corinth this divine gift was given by the Holy Spirit. There is another reference to this gift in Paul’s early letter to Galatians:

“He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and *worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*” (Gal. iii. 5).

It is important to note that these miracles were not just displays of great power which overwhelmed or stupefied those who saw them. They were *signs*, that is they signified and gave a special message; hence their evidential value to Israel who had the countersign, the O.T. Scriptures.

The reader who has carefully perused the above list of references, cannot fail to note the number of times the word ‘sign’ is connected with the word ‘miracle’.

The Apostle follows this gift with that of *prophecy*, and it is important to remember that a Bible prophet was a *forth-teller* as well as being a *foreteller*. Prophets in the N.T. were linked with apostles as a foundation ministry by the risen Christ (Eph. iv. 11), and this was essential for the delivery of truth to God's people until the great foundation of inspired Scripture was complete, through which God could speak to men and meet every need by the Holy Spirit's enlightenment. No further additions to God's complete Word are necessary or can be allowed. Our task is the *proclamation* of this completed revelation, and we no longer need the ministry either of the apostle or prophet, the sure foundation now being the Word of God and the Christ of the Word.

The ministry of the prophet during the Acts ranked high in the Apostle Paul's estimation (I Cor. xiv. 3-5) in importance above the gift of tongues.

In view of the satanic spirit of deception concerning which Christ so clearly warned (Matt. xxiv. 4, 5, 11, 24 and see II Thess. ii. 7-10), a divine gift of discrimination was needed at this time to distinguish the true from the false; thus *discerning of spirits* was an important gift and we have already seen the Apostle John's command to test the spirits in view of false prophets (I John iv. 1-3). Thus those who claimed to give a word of wisdom, or knowledge, or prophecy could be infallibly sorted out as to whether their utterances were actuated by the Spirit of God or by some satanic and demonic power.

The last on Paul's list is tongues and their interpretation. We shall have more to say about this gift when we read chapter xiv. where the Apostle deals with tongue speaking and its proper place in the assembly, so that everything could be done "decently and in order".

The Apostle now stresses the *source* of all gifts—the Holy Spirit Himself who is sovereign in his distribution of them:

"But all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as He will" (xii. 11 R.V.).

He alone chooses what gift *each believer* should have, so that none should have ground either for boasting or for being inferior. Nor were they given just to the "spiritual". All were necessary at this time for the great Kingdom testimony. This naturally leads to the thought of the Pentecostal church as a whole and what the working of every part could achieve for the Lord. What better illustration could be given than a human body, with its various members working together harmoniously for the body and the person as a whole? This the following verses elaborate.

No.17. pp. 86 - 89

Having described the various sign gifts distributed sovereignly by the Holy Spirit to believers in the Acts period, the Apostle Paul now deals with their functioning with regard to the churches as a whole, and for a concrete example, what better illustration can he use than a human body, which is a unity in diversity? This illustration was by no means unique. It was frequently employed in the ancient world and we find allusions to it in Socrates, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Marcus Antoninus. The Apostle writes:

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is *the* Christ” (I Cor. xii. 12).

The A.V. and R.V. omit the expressed definite article before “Christ”. Many expositors can see that “the Christ” cannot refer just to Christ *personally*, for how can He be likened to a human body which has uncomely as well as comely parts? (23). “Christ” (*Christos*) means anointed, and “the Christ” can be used as the title of a church which has been specially anointed. The believers to whom the Apostle John wrote were told “Ye have an anointing” (*chrisma*) (I John ii. 20, 27), and this gave them the supernatural gift of knowledge which we have already seen is contained in the list detailed in verses 8-10 of the chapter with which we are dealing. In his second letter to the Corinthian church the Apostle wrote:

“Now He that *confirmeth* us with you in Christ, and *hath anointed us (chrismo)*, is God” (II Cor. i. 21).

This ‘anointing’ is very much to the point in I Cor. xii. 12. Moreover, the above reference acquaints us with the fact that these supernatural gifts were *confirmatory* in character as well as being *signs*. The teaching then in I Cor. xii. 12 is clear. Just as a human body has many members, and each member has a particular part to play, not independently, but for the well-being of the body as a whole, so should the Corinthian assembly have functioned. The cliques which had come into being at Corinth and the misusing of some of the spiritual gifts were rendering this unity null and void in practice, and it is this unity which was so important and which Paul has stressed from various angles.

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (xii. 13).

To be baptized into a special company was no new truth. We have already had the baptism of all Israel unto Moses in I Cor. x., and this baptism was a *spiritual* baptism without water, which united them with Moses and all for which He stood, and had its origin in God’s action, not in anything that Israel did. So it is here. The words ‘baptized’ and ‘made to drink’ are in the aorist tense denoting that the action is past (not something future to be sought) and was true of *all* believers at that time irrespective of their condition. It was an action never to be repeated, being the work of the Holy Spirit.

It cannot refer to water baptism, for Paul had already told the Corinthians that water baptism *did not form part of His Christ-directed ministry* (I Cor. i. 17), and no kind of water baptism would ever effect this *spiritual unity of the believer with God*. Nothing less than the Holy Spirit's work could do this. Such a unity certainly did *not* depend upon the work of man in carrying out any external ritual.

In proceeding with the illustration of a human body, Paul stresses the inter-dependence of the various members. We have seen that this usage of the word 'body' was not confined to the Scriptures. In spite of a superficial likeness, the Apostle is not describing the Body of Christ, yet to be revealed in all its fullness after the Acts in Ephesians and Colossians. At this time it was still a secret, hid in God from all past ages and generations of people (Eph. iii. 9 R.V., Col. i. 26 R.V.) and there is not a hint in these Corinthian epistles, or for that matter in *any* epistle written during the Acts, that such a secret of God is being unfolded. If we carefully note the language of I Cor. xii. and Rom. xii., we shall note differences from Ephesians. One which should be obvious is that the one Body of Ephesians is distinguished from Christ as the Head. The likeness of the Corinthian church to a human body and its members, speaks of eyes, ears and nose, all members of the human head and illustrative of those in the Corinthian church (17-24). Every member of the Body of Christ in Ephesians is "accepted in the Beloved", but the body of I Cor. xii. has "uncomely" parts which certainly is not true of the former. If Paul is teaching here Ephesian truth, then he is using the figure of a human body in a very careless way and we cannot accept this for a moment.

Moreover, he asserts in Ephesians that the Church related to the Mystery is a "*joint-Body*" (*sussoma*), a unique word (iii. 6). No such body, *where every member is equal in size and importance* had ever existed before, either naturally or spiritually. It never occurs in any Acts epistle, and in fact could not be used while the position at this time symbolized by the olive tree (Israel) and the wild grafts (Gentiles), was true (Rom. xi. 16, and note verses 18 and 22). We should also realize that the gifts set by God in the Corinthian assembly are different from those of Eph. iv. 11, insomuch that gifts of healing, helps, governments and diversities of tongues are omitted in the Ephesian list, healings and tongues being specially linked, as we have seen again and again, with the earthly kingdom ministry of which Israel is the centre and form no part of the heavenly calling of Ephesians. Apostles, prophets, and teachers *are* repeated after Acts xxviii. which shows clearly that there is a definite selection by the Holy Spirit, repeating what was *continuous*, and leaving out that which was *transitory*, for so many of these Acts gifts were such, and never intended to be permanent (I Cor. xiii. 8).

The whole point of Paul's argument concerning these gifts is that no one is responsible for the *kind* of gift he has, and even if some are more important, *all* are necessary for the proper functioning of the assembly in Christian witness. None should feel any sense of superiority or inferiority whatever gift he possesses, and all should lead, above all, to *unity*. After showing the diversity in unity of the human body, he says:

"Now you are Christ's body, and, individually members" (xii. 27, C. K. Barrett).

Both the A.V. and R.V. translate “Now ye are *the* body of Christ”, but there is no definite article in the Greek. We cannot translate it baldly “you are *a* body of Christ”, for this does not give the sense. The only way is, as Dr. C. K. Barrett renders it, “you are Christ’s body”.

At first sight this seems to upset the distinction between the Pentecostal church and the Body of Christ after the Acts period, but we should ask ourselves, how could one of the many assemblies existing at this time be *The Body* of Christ? What of the rest? Paul uses the phrase “one body” again in Romans, and this helps us to understand the usage of the word “body” in the Acts as applied to believers. “So we, being many, are one body IN Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom. xii. 5). Note he did NOT say “we are the one Body OF Christ”, but “one body (of believers) IN Christ”, which is a very different thing and shows *the standing* by grace of the Roman church in Christ. So with the Corinthian assembly. They were a company (body) of believers belonging to Christ (Christ’s body); like all the other churches; they were not part of the *sussoma*, the joint-Body of which Christ is the Head. Nothing is said about the Headship of Christ in these Acts epistles. If we are absolutely accurate in our reading and note just what the Apostle wrote under inspiration, not adding in our minds what was to be revealed later, we shall have no difficulty with this context, or try to identify what God has made to differ.

The God-given human gifts of ministry commence with the foundation work of apostles and prophets. As we have seen, these were necessary to lay the foundation of truth until the written Word of God was complete and then the completed inspired Word took over. The gifts that follow are secondary and fall in line with the super-natural gifts already detailed. “Helps” *antilempseis* is a common word in the papyri, but only used here in the N.T. It probably referred to the work of the deacons, assisting the poor and the sick. “Governments” (*kuberneseis*), speak of ruling or leading, and Paul doubtless has in mind the overseers (bishops), the outstanding leaders of the local assembly.

The questions asked by the Apostle refer back to verse 14 and its argument that the human body is not one member, but many and all essential. In each question *me* in the Greek demands the answer “no”. It is significant that ‘tongues’ comes at the bottom of the list and the answer “no” deals a death-blow to the modern Pentecostal argument that tongue speaking is a sign of the fullness or special baptism of the Spirit for spiritual Christians. “Eagerly desire the *greater* gifts” said the Apostle (verse 31) and there can be no doubt that Paul unhesitatingly ranks some spiritual gifts above others and tongue speaking certainly is not one, as this context and chapter xiv. clearly reveal. But there is something even better. “I show you a supremely excellent way” a way *par excellence* which exceeds all that has been given before. *It is the way of Divine love*, and those who have the mind of the Spirit will always put the emphasis on this first and foremost. Just what this involves is made clear in the poetic hymn to love which follows.

No.18. pp. 113 - 116

The Apostle Paul has been dealing with the supernatural sign-gifts of the Holy Spirit which were characteristic of the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles. We have seen that the Corinthian church, on Paul's own declaration, was mostly carnal, yet it abounded with these gifts, which clearly shows that they were not a mark of spirituality or of some special "filling of the Spirit", as Pentecostals today so often assert.

What is definitely more important in God's eyes is the practical "fruit of the Spirit" of Gal. v. 22, 23. It is *fruit* that the Lord wants upon the tree of our lives, and without this our heavenly Father cannot be glorified by us (John xv. 1-8). The first in the list of fruit is *love*, and to the church at Corinth, Paul is now going to show that "supremely excellent way", which was better even than the evidential gifts they possessed.

This "way" is now set out in the wonderful hymn to love of chapter xiii. In this poem, a contrast is first made with the gifts and one great and essential difference is stressed, namely, that the gifts including that of tongues, were temporal and passing, whereas love abides and is eternal:

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal" (xiii. 1 R.V.).

It is clear from chapters xii.-xiv. that the Apostle did not rate the gift of tongues highly. Even if the believers at Corinth were able to understand the speech of angels, and all other languages, this would be meaningless and valueless without practicing love. It would be no better than the paganism that surrounded them, just an empty noise. Let this be made clear from the start. We must empty our minds of all human conceptions of love if we wish to understand I Cor. xiii. If ever a word has been misunderstood and grossly debased and misrepresented it is the word "love". Today it has sunk so low as to mean little more than the physical.

The character of divine love is clearly stated in the Scripture. It is pure unselfishness which gives to the limit for others. "A studied denial of self in the interests of others." "God so loved *that He gave His only begotten Son*" (John iii. 16). "Walk in love, as Christ also hath *loved* us, and *hath given Himself* for us" (Eph. v. 2). Real love does not merely give of one's possession; *it gives no less than one's self* for others. The Lord Jesus not only gave *out* of His inexhaustible fullness, but even more, He gave no less than *Himself* for us.

It is this conception of love that obtains in I Cor. xiii. Anything less is a mockery, and this was what so lacking in the Corinthian assembly. Plenty of gifts, plenty of show, but so little real fruit of the Spirit evidenced in the practical out-working of Divine love. Speaking in tongues without such love was just a jangling noise that accomplished nothing.

“And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries (secrets) and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (xiii. 2 R.V.).

The Apostle ranked prophecy much higher than the gift of tongues (xiv. 1-4), but even prophecy or such faith that could accomplish what was seemingly impossible (‘remove mountains’), was useless without love, and rendered such a person as nothing, an absolute zero.

One could give away all one’s goods to the poor and needy, and even be willing to suffer a martyr’s death (whether by being burned or by self-immolation is not clear), *and it would profit nothing*. There is an alternative reading “that I may glory”, as the reason for acts of charity, which would nullify its virtue by the wrong motive of self-aggrandizement (note the R.V. margin).

There is no record of martyrdom by fire before the persecutions under Nero, but in spite of this it is quite likely that the Byzantine text of the A.V. is right and that Paul is taking his instruction to a climax in saying in effect, “Even if I give myself up to the most painful of deaths in some great cause, but have no divine love, it would do me no good.” This is startling but true, and it means to say that all of us should be honest with ourselves and make sure of our *motives* for Christian service. Is it being done to please ourselves in some way, because it appeals to us? Are we doing it in order to please others? Do we want to give an impression before others of being a splendid charitable character? All these motives are wrong, and in the Lord’s assessment for service, will profit NOTHING. There is only ONE motive that the Lord will accept, and that is *real love for Him*. It is the “love of Christ” that “constraineth us”, said the Apostle (II Cor. v. 14) and this is the only reason for service that counts with our Master.

Paul now proceeds to describe such a love *in action*. It is easier to say what love will or will not *do*, rather than to state what it *is*.

“Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth” (xiii. 4-6 R.V.).

This love does not lose patience with others, however provoking they may be (“long-suffering”). It is always kind (*chrestos* from *chraomai*, to use), meaning gracious, useful. Love is not envious or jealous, a bad sin that can creep insidiously into the heart of a believer and blight his thinking and Christian activities.

Love does not brag (“vaunteth not itself”), is not arrogant and full of self-importance (“puffed up”). It does not behave in an unseemly or indecent way, nor is it selfish, seeking its own interests. Love does not get irritable (“provoked”), or put evil down to any one’s account. It does not rejoice at unrighteousness, taking pleasure at being censorious, or having a sense of superiority, but rather rejoices in what is opposite, namely, the truth.

The Apostle now treats with the *extent* to which love operates and uses *panta*, all things, four times. This is a word that always needs great care in the N.T. All sorts of false conclusions can be adduced from this word unless the nearer and remoter context is carefully considered. “All things” is not equivalent to “everything universally”. Here we are told “love believeth all things” (verse 7). Does divine love believe *everything*? If so, it must believe the false as well as the true! Is it just credulous, or does it carefully select what it believes? Surely it should be obvious that “all things” here is limited to everything that is in accord with *truth*, and nothing outside of it.

Divine love covers, protects, supports all things that relate to truth (“beareth all things”). It never ceases to hope (“hopeth all things”); it endures all things. No hardship or rebuff affects it. In other words, *love never fails* (verse 8). It survives everything, and like God Himself (I John iv. 8), it is eternal: in contrast to the evidential gifts which were only temporary and destined to pass away:

“Whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away: whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away” (xiii. 8-10 R.V.).

The modern revivers of tongue-speaking and those who mistakenly wish to emulate them, should consider these statements seriously. Tongues shall cease. The verb is the future middle indicative and means they shall make themselves cease, or cease automatically and we know from the testimony of the Acts and the Pauline epistles written afterwards that this is what actually did occur. There may have been a few sporadic outbursts late on but these were confined to heretical groups like the Montanists. As we have seen, there was no more need of prophecy when the N.T. and the whole of the Scriptures were completed, neither was there for tongues when the earthly kingdom testimony ceases. This was when Israel finally failed and was temporarily set aside by God at Acts xxviii.

The Corinthian believers who were putting a false value on tongues and possibly the gifts as a whole, were reminded again that this was a mark of spiritual babyhood (see iii. 1-3). “That which is perfect”, *to teleion*, refers to maturity, full-growth, not merely to a *future* period of time when the Lord returns—as some teach, but a *present* personal possibility (compare ii. 6 and xiv. 20 margin). This is reinforced by Paul’s *personal experience* which he now gives, contrasting his thinking and speaking as a child to his present adulthood. He can now put away the things that once were necessary to him when he was an infant. This was also true spiritually. He is now well on the way to full growth (Phil. iii. 12-14). He can walk by *faith* and not by *sight or sense*. He can indeed come into the category of blessing which the risen Lord indicated, when He said to Thomas, so limited by his *sense experience*: “Because thou hast *seen* me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that *have not seen, and yet have believed*” (John xx. 29).

No.19. pp. 123 - 125

We have been considering the “more excellent way” of Divine love that the Apostle Paul had set forth to the Corinthian believers, being far superior to all the evidential gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of tongues, which apparently this assembly was rating far too highly. This gift, with the others, was transient and passing, but the love which comes from God is eternal and abiding.

Moreover, these gifts were not necessary to spiritual maturity. When one grows up, one can put away the things of childhood (I Cor. xiii. 9-11). This maturity is a reflection of the complete perfection of the glorified state in resurrection.

“For now we see in a mirror, darkly (lit. in an enigma); but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I have been known” (xiii. 12 R.V.).

This verse gives facts that must ever be borne in mind. However much we know of God’s truth *it is partial*, not complete, and will not be so until our hope is realized and we are with the Lord with bodies fashioned like the body of His glory (Phil. iii.), and the present limitations of comprehension gone for ever. It is this very human limitation that causes so many of our present problems, specially in regard to our understanding of the Scriptures. What we are seeing now is likened to a reflection in a mirror and often puzzling at that (“in an enigma” literally).

This should stop us from acting and talking as though we have *all* knowledge now and can solve every problem that comes our way, specially those concerning God’s person and His being! In this present life, God has been stooping in condescension in His revelation of Himself and His ways, having respect to our great limitations of comprehension. We can only know a small part *now*. What is beyond us can be covered by faith in Him, for we know that He has the answer to all problems, and in the next life He will justify all His dealings with mankind which are incomprehensible now.

Meanwhile we can thank Him for the *abiding* gifts of faith (in Him and His word), hope (the certain fulfillment of all His promises) and love, the supreme expression of the Lord and His gracious purposes which is now shed abroad in our hearts. This must ever be the fruit of all fruits, dominating our lives and witness for Him.

In chapter xiv., the Apostle returns to the evidential gifts, specially that of tongues. First of all we shall note his assessment of this gift, and the way it should be controlled in the Corinthian assembly. In view of the fact that Pentecostalism and tongue speaking in particular seems on the increase today, we shall give this too a Scriptural consideration as to whether it is a bad thing, or a good thing to be sought after.

Actually the Apostle never counsels the Corinthians to seek for the gift of tongues separately as though it was the highest and best of the gifts (as most Pentecostalists assert). What he does do is to emphasize once more the importance of *love*.

“Pursue love as you aim. Strive for spiritual gifts, and specially that you may prophesy” (xiv. 1, C. K. Barrett).

Love must be sought for with the eagerness of pursuit. No half-hearted regard will do. This comes first always in importance where Christian witness and service is concerned. It is quite obvious from what follows, that Paul is down-grading the gift of tongues; not that it had no value, but it was *not* the most important gift, and the Corinthian believers were over-rating it.

We must first of all point out there is no justification for the word “unknown” in the A.V. throughout this chapter. The word is not in the original and should be omitted as in the R.V. and modern translations for it is misleading. How are we to understand the word “tongue”? There are two divergent views on this. One is that it refers to *languages*. Another is that the reference is to *ecstatic speech*. The best way to decide this is to go back to the inception of tongues at Pentecost, and here there is no doubt whatsoever that languages or dialects are meant. The opening verses declare that there were Jews gathered at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost from “every nation under heaven” (Acts ii. 5). Luke goes on to tell us that they were confounded because “every man heard them speak in his own dialect (language)”. They ask, “how hear we every man *in our own dialect* (language), wherein we were born?” (verses 8 and 11).

The Lord had told the eleven disciples that they were to be witnesses for Him “in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (i. 8).

In order that this should be rapidly accomplished, God removed the speech barrier to the spread of the Gospel and the Kingdom message. This was a reversal of the confusion of tongues at Babel. Seen in this light, the gift of tongues makes sense and was one of the miraculous signs that accompanied the earthly Kingdom ministry in the Acts, first to Israel and later on to the Gentiles who were admitted as wild olive grafts into the true olive tree, Israel, in order to “provoke them to jealousy” and stir them up to obey the Divine command to repent and turn to God (Acts iii. 19-26) so that, through their mediation, the restoration of the earthly Kingdom to them might become a fact and then be realized all over the earth, with the Lord’s Second Advent an accomplished fact.

Some insist that the gift of tongues at Pentecost was recognized languages, but at Corinth it was different, being akin to ecstatic speech. But this is by no means proved; Corinth was a port and would have a mixed flow of races passing through it. That strangers visited the assembly is clear from I Cor. xiv. 23, where the Apostle refers to “unlearned and unbelieving” coming in. These would certainly need a message in their own language if of foreign extraction, and a believer with the gift of tongues could minister this, followed by another with the gift of interpretation so that the whole assembly could benefit. It is interesting to note that *hermeneuo* can mean “translate” as well as “interpret” (see Arntd and Gingrich). *The New Bible Dictionary* states that the Greek words for “interpret” always mean “translate” except Luke xxiv. 27 (p.1287). It is a good principle of interpretation that the unknown should be interpreted by the known,

in which case I Corinthians should be interpreted by the Acts of the Apostles, which is the historical book dealing with this church from its beginning.

Paul's and Luke's terminology agree, for both use the word *glossa*, "tongue", and Luke further defines it as being a *dialektos* (Acts i. 19; ii. 6, 8; xxi. 40; xxii. 2; xxvi. 14), which in every case refers to a language of a nation or region, and it is most unlikely that the experience of tongue speaking, described by the two writers in identical terms, would be dissimilar.

Moreover, the Divine intention was that this gift should be a sign to Israel (I Cor. xiv. 21, 22) as prophesied in Isa. xxviii. 11, and took its place with the other Kingdom signs of the Acts period. In what way could unintelligible ecstatic speech be such a sign? Such speech occurred in the excitable worship in the pagan temples around and therefore would not speak with Divine conviction to any Jew.

When one sees *glossalia*, or speaking in tongues *in its Scriptural setting*, it makes sense and falls in line with the evidential miracles of the Acts period, when Israel was being tested after the Lord's earthly ministry to them, giving them a further opportunity of repenting and becoming useable, in order that they might take the knowledge of the Lord as Saviour and King to the ends of the earth. To take the gift of tongues out of the place that God put it originally is misleading and dangerous, and this is just what Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals have done. We shall look at some of their arguments in the next article in this series.

No.20. pp. 147 - 151

We have been dealing with the Divine setting of the gift of tongues in our exposition of the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians. We found that it was one of the evidential sign gifts of the Acts period accrediting the earthly Kingdom message, and speaking in a special way to the unbelieving among Israel. Today, however, we see it being revived without the other gifts which accompanied it, and at a time when the nation of Israel, the centre of the earthly Kingdom, is spiritually blinded and hardened and declared by God to be *Lo-Ammi*, not my people.

Not only does speaking in tongues occupy an important place in the present day Pentecostal movement, we see it now occurring in other denominations and certain evangelicals are doing their best to promote it in every Christian quarter.

Pentecostals, for the most part, teach that one may be saved apart from the baptism of the Spirit, but without this experience which they claim is subsequent to salvation, one does not have full consecration or power for service, so that one's Christian life is incomplete and one's ministry hampered. If this is true, one has a right to ask *why such spiritual giants as Luther, Calvin and many others accomplished so much for the Lord*

without the gift of tongues? Pentecostals should honestly face up to this. They are often exhorted to “tarry before the Lord” in order to receive this special baptism of the Spirit, the outward evidence of which, they teach, is speaking in tongues.

Luke xxiv. 49 is adduced as Scriptural ground for this, but this is a misuse of this verse. The eleven were not kept waiting to prove them or to encourage them to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit accompanied by tongues. They had to wait *because the feast of Pentecost was Divinely dated*, being 50 days after Passover (Calvary, Lev. xxiii. 15, 16).

What Scriptural backing has the Pentecostal view that the baptism of the Spirit should follow salvation? Some turn to Eph. i. 13:

“ Christ, in Whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation: in Whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”

On the surface, this looks as though there is some ground for such teaching but the A.V. is not accurate. Here we have a verb in the aorist tense (*esphragisthete*), preceded by an aorist participle (*pisteusantes*). Professor F. F. Bruce writes:

“The words ‘having also believed’ mean when you Gentiles believed in your turn, as we Jewish Christians had already done. The participle ‘having believed’ is identical with that occurring in Paul’s question to the disciples at Ephesus in Acts 19:2 ‘Did ye receive the Holy Ghost *when ye believed?*’ it is called by grammarians the coincident aorist participle because it denotes an action coincident in time with that of the main verb” (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p.36).

In other words the believing and the sealing *occurred at the same time*, not at some future date. This is made clear by the R.V. and many modern versions. If Pentecostals would carefully read Acts x. 46 they would see that the bestowal of the Spirit’s gift of tongues was *simultaneous* with the coming to faith both of Cornelius and his group. It was an extension of Pentecost, as was the experience of the disciples at Ephesus in chapter xix., who had only heard of John the Baptist’s ministry.

There is no clear Scriptural teaching for the idea that the Spirit’s baptism, evidenced by tongues, is something to be sought for *after* salvation. Nor in the Scriptural record do we find *glossalia* always following the work or filling of the Holy Spirit. If the reader will consult the following passages in the Acts which refer to the filling of the Holy Spirit, *he will not find one occurrence that is accompanied by tongues*—Acts iv. 8, 31; vi. 3, 5; vii. 55; ix. 17; xi. 24; xiii. 9, 52, and he certainly will not find any occurrence in Scripture of tongue speaking after the Acts period.

It should be quite clear for every unbiased student of the Word that the Holy Spirit, far from aiming to give the gift of tongues to all believers as a special experience after salvation, *did not intend all the saved to have this gift*. As we have seen, the seven questions of the Apostle in I Cor. xii. 29, 30 demand, in the Greek, a *negative answer*. “Do all speak with tongues?” The answer is “no”, and God never intended that all should do so, but distributed tongues with other gifts, some more important, like prophecy, “severally as He willed” (I Cor. xii. 11).

Nor was the ability to speak in tongues a necessary requirement for leaders and teachers in the N.T., *nor do we find one instance of any believer specially seeking this gift*. In I Tim. iii., there is a list of “musts” for the office of a bishop or overseer, but tongues are not mentioned. Some Pentecostalists link their conception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with sinless perfection, what they call “entire sanctification”, and so one error leads to another.

We are amazed that any true believer who loves the Word of God and bases his all upon it, could ever accept what is so patently unscriptural and also false to experience. If what these people say is really true then they have advanced far beyond the great characters of the Bible and the great saints that followed.

A fine upright character as the prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord in glory, and we take it that his character was up to the standard of any modern believer, and the result was to make him confess “Woe is me! for *I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts*” (Isa. vi. 1-5). The Apostle Paul declared that “in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth (present tense) *no good thing*” (Rom. vii. 18). The Apostle John wrote “if we say that we have no sin, *we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (I John i. 8). Pentecostalists who claim sinless perfection have obviously advanced in experience beyond these outstanding children of God.

The trouble with these so-called sinless Pentecostalists is that, unlike Isaiah, they have never really seen the Lord Jesus in the blaze of His glory and holiness (see I Tim. vi. 15, 16). Had they done so, they would have nothing but shame for what that searching light would inevitably reveal. They can have little conception of the burning holiness of God. Sinlessness and incorruption is *put on at resurrection* (I Cor. xv. 53, 54) *and not before*, and it is self-deception to think otherwise. If tongues and holiness go together, then the Corinthian church should have been the holiest, but in reality they were the most carnal and immature (I Cor. iii. 1-3), which gives the lie to such Pentecostal pretensions.

One danger that results from the teaching that tongue speaking is an outward evidence of a special baptism of the spirit, subsequent to salvation, and that believers are sadly lacking without this, is the psychological and spiritual tensions which this teaching creates. When a believer does not receive this “baptism”, he tries a little harder to get it. When, after several attempts he still does not receive it, he begins to feel frustrated and depressed and many have become physically and mentally ill because they failed to “receive”.

One hears too of such people being accused of some hidden sin or failure which accounts for this, all of which is deplorable and unnecessary, and is in itself the sin of judgment which we are warned against. Another danger is the emphasis this kind of teaching gives to “*feeling*” *and emotional experiences* at the expense of faith. “We walk by faith and not by sight”, said the Apostle, but this doctrine leads to the opposite. One can see very little difference between the unsaved doing things for “thrills” and the

believer who hankers after the special spiritual thrill of the separate “baptism of the Spirit”. When one grows spiritually, feelings give way to absolute trust in *what the Lord is in Himself* and this is changeless.

We should know too, that *glossalia* can be psychologically induced and therefore is no proof whatsoever of the Holy Spirit’s work. A Christian psychiatrist writes:

“The product of our analysis is the demonstration of the very natural mechanisms which produced glossalia. As a psychological phenomenon, glossalia is easy to produce and readily understandable.”

(E. Mansell Pattison, “*Speaking in Tongues and about Tongues*”).

The Encyclopaedia Britannica has this to say:

“The gift of tongues and their interpretation was not peculiar to the Christian Church, but was a repetition in it of a phase common in ancient religions. The very phrase *glosais lalein*, ‘to speak with tongues’, was not invented by the New Testament writers, but borrowed from ordinary speech. Virgil (Aen. vi. 46,97) draws a life-like picture of the ancient prophetess ‘speaking with tongues’ the same morbid and abnormal trance utterances occur in Christian revivals of every age, e.g. among the mendicant friars of the 13th century, among the Jansenites, the early Quakers, the converts of Wesley and Whitefield, the persecuted Protestants of the Cevennes, the Irvingites and the revivalists of Wales and America. Oracular possession of the kind above described is also common among savages and people of lower culture” (pp. 288, 289, 1963 edition).

No wonder then Satan can use tongue speaking in order to deceive! With regard to the Irvingite movement which was the beginning of modern Pentecostalism, Sir Robert Anderson gives a detailed account in his *Spirit Manifestations and the Gift of Tongues*.

Edward Irving (1792-1834), a pastor of a London church, founded the Catholic Apostolic Church and began to introduce tongue speaking into his ministry. Sir Robert Anderson shows the excesses to which this finally led. Richard Baxter, a lawyer, first took an active part in the movement, but when prophecies made failed to be fulfilled, his eyes were opened and he broke away after telling Irving “we had all been speaking by a lying spirit and not by the Spirit of the Lord”. Scores of people were deceived by this ‘angel of light’ teaching.

Irving relates that the power of the Holy Spirit came upon him irresistibly, so much so that he was compelled to put his handkerchief into his mouth to stop the sound so that he should not alarm others. This in itself should have been a warning to him for “the spirits of the prophets *are subject to the prophets*” (I Cor. xiv. 32); in other words the power is *controllable* by the prophet. The Holy Spirit does not force people or lead to such excesses that have occurred from time to time in Pentecostal meetings.

One of the great dangers of such Pentecostal teaching is that it exalts the Holy Spirit *at the expense of Christ*, so that the Lord Jesus in effect is subordinated to the Holy Spirit. The Saviour said:

“He shall *not* speak of Himself *He shall glorify me*: for He shall *receive of mine: and shall show it unto you*” (John xvi. 13, 14).

The main object of the Holy Spirit then is to *glorify and exalt the Lord Jesus*, so that in *all things He might have the preeminence* (Col. i. 18), and whenever He is put in His rightful place of ALL (Col. iii. 11) and “First and Last”, the Holy Spirit is certainly there. Where the Spirit is unduly stressed and the Lordship of Christ unknown we have not truth, but error which comes from the father of lies.

If modern tongue speaking is really of God, where are those who undeniably have the gift of interpretation (without which tongues are useless) and also *the discerning of spirits*, that is the divine ability to sift the true from the false? (I Cor. xii. 10). This was God’s check against the work of Satan during the Acts when tongues were valid. Without this, the whole thing can be highly dangerous, for as we know so well, Satan can travesty and copy the work of God. Not even miracles, by themselves, are a proof of divine origin:

“Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name?
and in Thy Name have cast out devils? and in Thy Name done many wonderful works?
And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me”
(Matt. vii. 22, 23).

The Apostles Paul and John warn us of the *deceptive miracles* of Satan at the end time of this age so that, even in the Acts period, tongue speaking was not without its dangers (II Thess. ii. 8-10; Rev. xiii. 11-14) and the Lord Jesus Himself likewise forewarned of the terrible deception of this most dangerous time (Matt. xxiv. 4, 5, 11, 24), and many believers feel, as they look around on world conditions, that we are fast approaching such a period.

But some will say, many Pentecostalists testify to the blessing they have received from speaking in tongues. The answer to this is simple and clear. If we want nothing but Truth and to avoid such deception, *we must base our beliefs solely on the Word of God which is Truth, and not on human experience*. We may not begin with a certain type of religious experience and then proceed to build a doctrine on it. We dare not build on *any experience primarily, but on the teaching of Holy Scripture which is true and changeless*.

If the importance of a doctrine in the N.T. is shown by the Divine emphasis upon it (and this is surely true) then we must face the fact that tongue speaking is only mentioned in *one* of the 21 epistles and even then it is not held up as a mark of spiritual growth, or something to be sought after.

Those believers who go on to know and enjoy the exceeding riches of grace and glory revealed in the prison epistles of Paul will certainly not be attracted by speaking in tongues. When one has tasted the best, one does not want the second-best! In the high and holy calling revealed therein Christ is ALL and each believer FILLED TO THE FULL in Him (Col. ii. 10; iii. 10, 11) to which nothing can be added, for there is nothing higher or possible beyond this revealed in the whole length and breadth of God’s Word. In our long Christian experience *we have never known anyone grounded in this glorious truth and in conscious enjoyment of it, ever to desire or turn to tongue speaking*.

While we are forced to be critical of the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism and glossalia, we readily acknowledge that many Pentecostals are keen to proclaim the gospel and bring others to a saving knowledge of the Lord. If only they would put more emphasis on the *fruit of the Spirit* (Gal. v. 22, 23) rather than isolated *gifts* of the Spirit which belonged to the Acts period!

The gift of tongues was temporal and was to cease (I Cor. xiii. 8). It was put at the bottom of the list in importance by the Apostle Paul. Prophecy was certainly of more value (I Cor. xiv. 4). Taken out of its Divine setting tongues can be highly dangerous and those attracted to it should ponder over the words of the Apostle:

“Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding *than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue*” (I Cor. xiv. 19).

No.21. pp. 165 - 170

Having considered the N.T. teaching concerning the gift of tongues and seen the false importance the Corinthian church were placing on this gift, we next note that the Apostle Paul makes perfectly clear that prophecy was preferable if only for the fact that it edified *others* as well as the speaker. Tongue speaking by itself at the best only brought benefit to the one who uttered it:

“For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; *for no man understandeth*; but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, and comfort, and consolation. He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church” (I Cor. xiv. 2-4 R.V.).

From this it is perfectly clear that that the gift of tongues without interpretation was of no benefit to the church as a whole, whereas prophecy gave a message of comfort and edification to all who heard it. When explained by the Divine gift of interpretation so that all could benefit, it was acceptable; otherwise it remained true that he who prophesied was greater than any who spoke in tongues (5). As this was so why is it that Pentecostals do not put more value on prophets rather than tongue-speakers? The Apostle reinforces this point by saying that even if he himself gave them a message in another tongue, what good would it do them unless it was accompanied by revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching? (6). This is stressed still further by the illustration of a musical instrument, which can either produce distinguishable notes or just a noise. Furthermore each instrument has its own “tone colour”. If this was not so, it would be impossible to distinguish between them (verses 6-12). Tongue speaking, unless understood by others, was merely “speaking into the air” (9) and made the one who uttered it as a foreigner (barbarian), someone who could not be understood by others. The real value of all the evidential gifts of the Acts period was their *witness to other people and the building up of the church as a whole*.

“So also ye, since ye are zealous of Spiritual gifts, seek that ye may abound *unto the edifying of the church*” (xiv. 12 R.V.).

This was the crucial test, not what each individual got out of the experience for himself.

Tongue-speaking in connection with prayer.

The Apostle now deals with tongue speaking as it affected prayer. He wrote:

“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding (or mind) is unfruitful” (xiv. 14).

Paul seems to be using here the word “spirit” for the new nature. In this case the mind was unfruitful or inactive, that is, it contributed nothing to the process. Now the mind is extremely important to the believer as a study of the word *nous* as used by Paul will make clear. When writing to the Roman church, he insisted that the believer should be “transformed by the renewing of the mind” (Rom. xii. 2) and it is only by this mind that one can prove what is “that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”; and thus render service and witness that is well-pleasing to Him.

Intercession for others is one of the highest expressions of the prayer life of the believer, and how can one engage in this effectively without the renewed mind being consciously employed? The Apostle puts his finger on a danger point when a tongue was employed in prayer without the conscious use of the Spirit-renewed mind. This would mean that a most important part of the believer remained out of action, which would be neither good for him or for his fellow-believers and others with whom he came into contact.

“What is to be done then? I will pray with the spirit, *but I will pray with the mind too.* I will sing praise with the spirit, *but I will sing praise with the mind too*” (I Cor. xiv. 15, C. K. Barrett).

We ask again, how can the ministry of intercession be engaged in, when, knowing the needs of others, something unintelligible goes on in the believer concerned and his mind is completely inactive?

When Paul asks for prayer for himself, he tells the assemblies of his needs in plain words, showing them what to pray for on his behalf. (Rom. xiv. 30-32; Eph. vi. 18-20; Col. iv. 2-4). There is not the slightest idea in these contexts that such prayer could be rendered automatically in an unknown tongue, with the believers concerned being unconscious of what they uttered. Furthermore, such a condition would be one of real danger. There cannot be a hiatus or blank in the human mind and its activities. It must be controlled by *somebody* or *something*. If the believer’s thinking is not consciously controlled by the renewed mind produced by the Holy Spirit, then Satan and the powers of darkness have an opportunity which they will not be slow to use.

That a believer's mind and words can be activated by the evil one is clear from what the Lord said to Peter in Matt. xvi. 22, 23. One moment Peter's words expressed the revelation of the Father (17); a moment later *Satan was directing his thoughts and his words!* (23). This is solemn indeed. So many keen Pentecostals seem to be very ignorant of Satan and his wiles (Eph. vi. 11, 12) and the warning that Scripture gives the believer of this great enemy and his deception, which is going to be world-wide at the time of the end, inasmuch that, if possible, the very elect will be deceived (Matt. xxiv. 4, 5, 11, 24). Hence, the importance of the Divine gift of *discernment* in the Acts which separated the true from the false (I Cor. xii. 10). Where is this gift today without controversy or argument?

The Apostle Paul insists, therefore, that the believer's *mind* must be actively engaged either in prayer or praise (I Cor. xiv. 15). He goes on to argue that if a Corinthian believer utters a blessing and someone who is a simpler listener (unlearned A.V. and R.V.) hears it, how can he respond intelligently with an Amen? for he does not *understand* what is being said. It is therefore perfectly clear that Paul expected the Corinthian assembly as a whole, to hear, understand, test and control all that took place in their gatherings and this would be impossible without words being spoken that could be understood by all. He continues:

“For thou verily gives thanks well (in a tongue), but the other (man) is not edified (built up)” (xiv. 17).

The whole value of the gift was not what it did for the one who uttered it, *but what benefit it conferred upon others*. Even with himself Paul, who could speak in tongues more than any of them, states most definitely:

“Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak *five words with my mind, in order to instruct others*, than *ten thousand words in a tongue*” (xiv. 19 R.S.V.).

In other words, *the employment of the mind was essential for fruitful witness and was infinitely of more importance than the act of speaking in a tongue*.

We cannot help but note the insistence of this context that *the renewed mind* must be employed with the spirit. “I will pray with the spirit, but *I will pray with the mind too*. I will sing praise with the spirit, but *I will sing praise with the mind too*” (I Cor. xiv. 15, C. K. Barret), and also verse 19 “I had rather *speak five words with my mind* than ten thousand words in a tongue”. Keeping this in the forefront we are amazed to read in a booklet entitled *Speaking in Tongues* by Larry Christenson, a pastor of a Californian Lutheran church:

“. . . . what possible value can speaking in tongues have, if a person has no idea what he is saying? According to the Bible even though one does not understand what he is saying, his spirit is in a state of prayer (I Cor. 14:14). In other words, for the person himself, *speaking in tongues is praying not with the mind*, but with the spirit” (page 4 italics ours).

“One speaks with tongues, for the most part in his private devotions. *This is by far its most important use and value* Although one does not know what he is saying as he prays in tongues, he does have a clear sense that he is praying to God” (page 8).

Much of this is obviously a direct negation of the teaching of Scripture above. Yet it is “according to the Bible” we are told! Moreover how the mind can be completely inactive and words used which are not understood by the speaker yet “he has a clear sense he is praying to God”, is past comprehending.

On page 9 the writer continues:

“In order to speak in tongues, you have to quit praying in English you simply lapse into silence and resolve to speak not a syllable of any language you have ever learned. *Your thoughts are focused on Christ* you take no thought of what you are saying. As far as you are concerned it is just a series of sounds” (italics ours).

Again we ask, how can the *thoughts* be focused on Christ, and yet the mind be bypassed or remain inactive? There is surely confusion here and we can say with certainty that *the N.T. knows nothing of such methods of prayer*. There is not a single command to the believer in the N.T. to connect tongue-speaking with prayer. Did the disciples on the day of Pentecost have to prepare themselves and practice in this way in order to receive the gift of tongues? Was not this rather the sovereign act of the Holy Spirit, distributing this gift “as He willed” (I Cor. xii. 11), this being the N.T. way this gift was always received? There is not the slightest indication that there had to be practice and effort in order to obtain this gift as the booklet suggests.

We do not believe that anywhere in the Bible can God’s truth and blessing be received apart from faith and *understanding*. “*With all thy getting, get understanding*” (Prov. iv. 7) and note carefully the following passages:

“Jesus saith unto them, Have ye *understood* all these things? They say unto Him, Yea, Lord” (Matt. xiii. 51).

“Then opened He their *understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*” (Luke xxiv. 45).

“. . . . the eyes of your *understanding* being enlightened; that ye may know” (Eph. i. 18).

“Whereby, when ye read, ye may *understand* my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. iii. 4).

“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but *understanding* what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. v. 17).

“that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual *understanding*” (Col. i. 9).

“Being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of *understanding*” (Col. ii. 2).

“. . . . the Lord give thee *understanding in all things*” (II Tim. ii. 7).

These verses and contexts make it quite clear that a measure of understanding is absolutely vital both to the reception of truth and its practice. This being so, if the Lord wills to teach anyone, He will do so in the language that person uses and can understand and receive His truth, otherwise it would be meaningless. This was surely the object of the original gift of tongues at Pentecost, for the hearers said, “how hear we every man *in our own tongues, wherein we were born?*” (Acts ii. 8) not “what are all these unintelligible sounds we hear?”

Moreover those at Corinth who placed so much value on tongues were still in the infant stage spiritually. In iii. 1-3 he had severely reprimanded them for their immaturity and carnality, and the over emphasis they were placing on a showy gift, like tongue speaking, was only another evidence of this.

“Brothers, do not be children in intelligence. In wickedness be mere infants, but in intelligence be mature” (xiv. 20, C. K. Barrett).

Teleios, mature (‘men’, A.V. and R.V.) is one of an important group of words, signifying adulthood or maturity as opposed to babyhood. The N.T. has some very stringent things to say about believers who do not grow up spiritually (see Heb. v. 12-14). The things of the nursery can be very delightful for infants, but for grown-ups they are entirely out of place and unbecoming. Moreover, what can babies achieve in Christian witness? The need for constant growth in grace and knowledge of the truth should be a continual challenge to us all.

Paul does not hesitate to back up his argument by an appeal to the O.T.:

“In the law it is written, by men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers will I speak unto this people; and not even thus will they hear Me, saith the Lord” (xiv. 21 R.V.).

Here the ‘law’ is a term for the whole O.T. rather than the Pentateuch, as it is also in John x. 34, where a citation from the Psalms is termed the ‘law’ (see also xii. 34, xv. 25 and Rom. iii. 19). The Apostle quotes freely from the LXX of Isa. xxviii. 11. Possibly he was using another version known also to the later O.T. translator Aquila. In Isaiah’s day, God is saying that Israel would not listen to Him in obedience, even though He spoke in a tongue that was familiar to them. He will therefore speak to them in an unfamiliar tongue, that of their enemies, the Assyrians, but even then they would not hear. It is very important to notice that God is speaking to *Israel* in warning and judgment, not to Gentiles and *so it was in the Acts period*. The gift of tongues was primarily for *unbelievers among Israel*.

“Wherefore tongues are for a sign, *not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving*” (xiv. 22 R.V.).

To the Jew, who had the counter-sign, the O.T., tongues should have spoken as a *sign* and a warning to unbelief. It is clear that known languages, such as were used at Pentecost, would be the only forceful sign to hard-hearted Israelites. Ecstatic language admits of too many natural explanations, as we have seen, not the least being the historical fact that the pagans were acquainted with such speech in their temples. The divine reason for the gift of tongues is clearly given in the chapter we are studying, “wherefore tongues are for a sign, *not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving*” (22).

Tongue-speaking in the N.T. takes its place among the signs of Mark xvi. that confirmed the earthly kingdom purpose throughout the Acts. Modern Pentecostalism takes it out of its Divine setting and message to the *unbeliever*, and to a large extent, reverses the teaching of Scripture, making it an evidence of spirituality, and “entire

sanctification” *of the believer*. This is dangerous, indeed and will be avoided by all who seek to base their doctrine and practice on a rightly-divided Word alone. The gift of tongues, by itself, would have been highly inadequate, for even the striking exhibition of tongues on the day of Pentecost, was put down to drunkenness on the part of some (Acts ii. 12, 13).

As a warning to the unbelieving Jew and a means of the rapid spread of the gospel and the Kingdom message (Acts iii. 19-26), this gift had its place, but taken out of its Divine context, it can be dangerous. When Satan, at the end time of this age, produces his *deceiving miracles and signs* (II Thess. ii. 7-12) who can say that he will not use tongue-speaking to seek to deceive the very elect? He *has already used tongue speaking in the past in the worship of the pagan temples of old*. And if he does so in the future, what can the Pentecostals offer in the way of Scriptural refutation, and protection of those who are exposed to such terrible deception?

To sum up—not all the miraculous evidential gifts of the Acts period were of equal importance: Prophecy was greater than speaking in tongues (I Cor. xiv. 5). Some of them, like tongues, were to “cease” (xiii. 8); others were “to abide”, the three principal ones being “faith, hope and love”, with love as the crown of them all (xiii. 13).

This gift of love, said the Apostle Paul must be sought after with the eagerness of pursuit (xiv. 1). What a difference we might see today in the Christian world if this was put into practice! It is surely a question of getting our priorities right.

No.22. pp. 184 - 187

Having clearly taught that the gifts of prophecy and tongues were directed to the *unbelieving*, specially among Israel during the Acts (I Cor. xiv. 22), the Apostle Paul now gives explicit directions to the Corinthian church as to how these gifts were to be used when they assembled together.

They had to consider not only the effect on themselves, but also on any outsiders who might come in.

“If therefore the whole church be assembled together, and all speak with tongues, and there come in men unlearned or unbelieving, will they not say that ye are mad?”
(I Cor. xiv. 23 R.V.).

Those who were “unlearned or unbelieving”, probably refer to one group, namely “unbelieving outsiders”. That such found their way into the Christian assemblies, there is no doubt. If more than one believer spoke at once, there could be nothing but confusion, and such new fold would be disgusted and deem them to be insane. That this happened is evident from the context. We must not suppose that the church’s meetings always took place indoors. Some Jewish communities had no building to meet in.

Whether out-of-doors or inside a building, there was every likelihood that unbelievers might arrive or be brought in by other Christians. In these circumstances the gift of tongues, properly controlled, could be a help. If they were foreigners they would possibly hear a message delivered in their own language and the rest of the group would share in it when it was interpreted by someone with this Divine gift. But this could only happen with profit when these gifts were controlled by those who possessed them No one was forced to use them against their will (verse 32), so that anything that approached confusion because more than one was speaking at a time, was inexcusable.

If the gift of prophecy alone was being used when any stranger entered, then conviction would surely follow, with the result that such would own the fact that God was truly with them (24, 25).

Paul now sums up his instructions concerning the exercise of tongues and prophecy in the assembly:

“What is to be done, then, brothers? When you assemble, each one of you has a hymn, a piece of teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation. Let all these be exercised for the building up of the community” (xiv 26, C. K. Barrett).

As we have before seen, the exercise of these gifts was principally for the benefit of the church *as a whole*, not for the individual. Any shifting of this emphasis was dangerous and still is, and is not according to truth. It has been said that in verses 26, 27 we have a small glimpse of the simplicity of early church meetings.

It is noteworthy that there was no one in charge like the modern clergyman and when one considers the ornate modes of service and ritual that we see all around us in modern Christendom, we can judge how far this has gone astray from the Divine set-up at the beginning.

However, we must not fall into the error of assuming that this gives *in every detail* the example for assemblies today, for, despite Pentecostal claims, we have not the confirmatory gifts of the earthly Kingdom that were prominent during the Acts. When these lapsed after Israel’s failure at Acts xxviii., no doubt the order of service and worship was modified and God-given leaders, humble men drawn from the ranks, took their place in ministering the truth of the Word of God. We can be perfectly sure that all conformed to the administration of the Truth of the Mystery and that nothing was added or detracted from this climax truth and the gospel of God’s grace upon which it is based.

Coming back to the Apostle’s instructions to the Corinthian church, tongue speaking was limited to two or at the most three speakers on each occasion, and then only one at a time, to be followed by another member interpreting (verse 27). If no interpreter was present, the tongue speaker was commanded to keep quiet. Regarding prophets, they were also limited to two or three and then the important injunction is “let the others test what they say” (verse 29, C. K. Barrett). Here was God’s check against the deceiving work of Satan. In no case were the early Christians expected to swallow uncritically everything they heard (I Thess. v. 21; I John iv. 1). This Divine check is conspicuously

absent today, specially among those who profess to have these kingdom gifts. No wonder we read of excesses from time to time. Satan can have a “field-day” when Christian gatherings are not directly controlled by a rightly-divided Word, and the result is deception, confusion and division.

The Corinthian were further told that prophecy must be controlled as with tongues, and while it was possible that all *could* prophesy, if the Spirit willed, yet it did not mean that all *would* necessarily take part in this activity (verses 30 and 31). And then follows the important statement:

“The spirits by which prophets speak are under the control of the prophets, for God’s is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (I Cor. xiv. 32, 33, C. K. Barrett).

No one could plead that he was *compelled* to speak by the Holy Spirit. When one sometimes reads that a Pentecostal leader or speaker was dominated by the Holy Spirit and was not able to keep silent (e.g. Edward Irving, one of the founders of the modern Pentecostal movement), one can be assured that such experiences do not come from God but from the old deceiver of mankind.

Paul now reverts to the attitude of women in the assembly and we must be careful that we do not interpret the verses to conflict with what has already been said in chapter xi. 5. Apart from inspiration, one would not expect a logically-minded man as Paul to contradict himself. In the eleventh chapter it is not the *gift* that women are using which is the point at issue, but *how they are dressed* for the occasion. Acts xxi. 9 shows that women prophets existed, though possibly rarely.

What Paul is now going to say is that, apart from the teaching given in chapter xi., women should be silent in Christian gatherings, in just the same way as the male tongue speaker or prophet was enjoined to be silent, all being in the interests of peace and good order. If this was not so, then uncontrolled discussion and argument would take place which would become heated and give the enemy an opportunity of taking control and spoiling the witness. Such discussion should take place at home and not in the assembly.

Whether discussion should ever be allowed in a public meeting is indeed a difficult one to settle. We have seen meetings ruined by this. On the other hand if love and self-controlled prevails, then such discussion can prove helpful. No rigid rule today can be laid down on this point, but we may be assured of one thing, that no Christian woman who is versed in God’s truth will ever want to push herself into a position that is not according to his will. The relationship of the sexes in God’s sight has already been dealt with, and this should be the dominating factor in any problems that is related to a public assembly.

Paul now reminds the believers at Corinth that they should consider Christian practice generally. They had no monopoly of the gospel, Divine gifts, or truth as a whole.

“What? was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it unto you alone”
(xiv. 36 R.V.).

They should therefore consider how other assemblies were behaving and not suppose that they were right and every one else wrong. The Apostle, who had before stressed the need of testing and checking all they heard, now gives another important test:

“If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or a spiritual person, he should recognize that what I am writing to you comes from the Lord” or, as some MSS “is the Lord’s command” (xiv. 37, C. K. Barrett).

This does not mean that Paul is quoting from the words Christ uttered on earth, but that all was in accordance with the truth deposited with him by revelation from the risen Lord (cp. Gal. i. 11, 12). If this is not inspiration in the fullest sense, what is it? This verse and the statement in I Thess. ii. 13 makes it perfectly clear that there is no such thing as *Pauline* doctrine, that is, doctrine founded on Paul’s ideas. There are indeed *distinctive* truths given by God through Paul the channel, but in no sense are we dealing with Paul’s opinions or conceptions. *It is God’s truth*, and neither we nor the early churches follow a man pure and simple.

If Paul exhorts us to follow him, he immediately adds “even as I follow Christ”. We have *one Lord*, who only has the right to teach and control us and we cannot acknowledge anyone else as such. But no one at Corinth could claim to have reached this position who denied the Apostle Paul’s ministry and authority. There are those today who think they can by-pass Paul and as long as they adhere to the “teaching of Jesus” in the Gospels, they imagine they are receiving the Truth in all its fullness. Such deceive themselves and others whom they seek to influence.

The mark of spirituality which the Apostle gives in the context we are studying, is still true. The majority of Christendom today have little place for, still less an understanding of the truth given through the Apostle. Is it any wonder that we see it divided, powerless, with no divine answer to the enormous problems that face us?

Paul now closes this section by stating that while tongues should not be suppressed (the earthly kingdom was still a possibility—Acts iii. 19-26), yet prophecy, the greater gift, should be sought after (I Cor. xiv. 39). The overriding consideration was that all should be done in a decent and orderly manner (verse 40), for only in this way could the God of law and order be honoured and a witness given to the outsider that would be likely to impress and convict him of its truth.

The Apostle now turns to another vital subject concerning which they had possibly written him, that of resurrection. In the whole range of inspired revelation this is one of the most important subjects, for it underlies the whole purpose of God. No wonder then he devotes a long section to its consideration.

No.23. pp. 203 - 207

It is evident that the first epistle to the Corinthians came into being by reason of the problems of the church at Corinth, made known to Paul by the household of Chloe (i. 11) or by the questions they themselves had sent him (vii. 1). Chapter xv. 12 informs us that there were some at Corinth who disbelieved the resurrection from the dead, and as this great doctrine is fundamental to the whole purpose of God, the Apostle devotes a long section to its consideration. The fifteenth chapter is divided into three parts:

- (1) verses 1-11, the evidence and the importance of the resurrection of Christ in connection with the gospel.
- (2) verses 12-34, deal with the fact of the resurrection of Christ and of man.
- (3) verses 35-58, the manner of the resurrection.

Paul commences by drawing attention to the gospel he preached. In his first letter, Galatians, he had made it quite clear that he had received it directly by the Lord's revelation, and not through any human instrumentality (i. 11, 12). The resurrection of Christ was the fundamental basis of this good news:

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. xv. 3, 4 R.V.).

This good news he had handed on to them “first of all”. “First” here may indicate priority in importance, as well as time and this gospel was clearly made known in the O.T. Scriptures. Paul does not quote any particular passage, but redemption and atonement in the O.T. is clearly linked with death and could not be experienced apart from it. The Passover is directly mentioned in I Cor. v. 7 and the Apostle evidently felt there was no need to back his statement up with O.T. details, for it was so obvious.

It is interesting to note the stress on *burial*, for this confirmed the reality of both death and resurrection. Christ must have *really* died, if He was buried, and resurrection was the taking up again of the life He laid down voluntarily on our behalf (John x. 17, 18). As both sin and death are the great enemies of God, His age-long purpose, and His people, the death of Christ and His resurrection is obviously God's answer to these tremendous problems. Nor could they have been dealt with and abolished in any other way.

Paul now brings forward the testimony of eye-witnesses, many of whom would have been still alive at this time. To gainsay this, the Corinthian objectors would have to maintain that the whole of the number were either deceived or liars upon whom no reliance could be placed. First in the list of appearances of the Lord is that to Peter (Cephas). Peter was certainly known at Corinth as i. 12 and ix. 5 clearly indicate: Luke xxiv. 34 reveals that Christ did appear to him. It may be that Peter is put first, because of the prominent position he held in the affairs related in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, as the Apostle of the circumcision (Gal. ii. 7, 8).

After this the Lord appeared to the Twelve (I Cor. xv. 5). This is Paul's only reference to the Twelve and it makes quite clear that *he did not consider himself to be one of them*. Those who like to talk about "apostolic mistakes", may try and place Paul amongst the Twelve, but when they do this it is obvious that they have not gripped the place the Apostle and his ministry have in the Divine programme. Nor can the consummation of his ministry, expressed in his prison letters, ever be understood if Paul is linked with the Twelve and Israel, of whom they were representatives (cp. Rev. xxi. 10-14).

Next we have the witness of 500 brothers at once, the majority living at the time Paul was writing (verse 6), which was some twenty years later than the resurrection appearances. We can find no reference to this in the Gospels, nor should we expect it, for they are a concentrated account of the earthly life and witness of our Lord and make no pretence of being exhaustive. In exactly the same way the appearance to James is not mentioned in the Gospels and it seems that by the phrase "All the apostles", Paul is going wider than the Twelve, as it seems unlikely he would repeat what he has already said (5).

Last of all was the Apostle's own witness—the dramatic appearance of the Lord Jesus to him on the road to Damascus, "as one born out of due time" (literally, an abortion). This is a strange word to use. It sounds as though, from a natural standpoint, he was hurried into the world to take his important place in the outworking of God's mighty purpose.

It may be that the thought behind the word had already been used by his enemies, who not only ridiculed his ministry, but even his physical appearance (II Cor. x. 10). They dismissed him as a freak. But in spite of this, his apostleship was one of reality (cp. Gal. i.), although, whenever Paul thought about it, he marveled at the exceeding grace and love of the Lord that should choose and call him to such a service and witness.

"For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am"

(I Cor. xv. 9, 10 R.V.).

If we compare Eph. iii. 8 and I Tim. i. 15, the Apostle expresses similar thoughts. The contrast is of course between himself and the Lord, not himself and other apostles, for in this case, he was in no way inferior to the superlative apostles (II Cor. xi. 5; xii. 11). Concerning himself, Paul had no illusions, he was once "a blasphemer, and persecutor and injurious" (I Tim. i. 13), one who could have no claim on God. It was nothing less than God's rich grace that saved and called him and he never forgot it. No wonder then that he refers to grace more frequently than any other N.T. writer. He was indeed the apostle of grace and this was manifest in his faithful and unremitting labours for the Lord and His people after his conversion. This was indeed not "in vain". He could say truthfully that he laboured more abundantly than all the other apostles (10). II Cor. xi. 23-27 gives only an abbreviated summing up of all his faithful witness for the Lord and at what tremendous cost! Yet the Apostle did not want to take the credit:

"Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (xv. 10 R.V.).

This section is now summed up by saying that all the apostles, including himself, had had practical experience of the Lord's resurrection. All had truthfully testified to this and the Corinthians had accepted this and believed, except a minority that Paul is now going to deal with.

“Now if Christ is preached that He hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (xv. 12 R.V.).

If the resurrection was not an historical fact, then the inescapable conclusion was that Christ was still dead, and in that case the gospel proclamation was empty, their faith useless, and the apostles were deceivers in proclaiming such a message. “No one can give himself to a dead man; no one can expect anything or receive anything from a dead man” (Schlatter). In other words, the Christian faith was completely destroyed. This would not only affect living believers, but those who had died.

“Then they also which are fallen asleep in Chris have perished” (xv. 18 R.V.).

This is an unfortunate verse for the traditionalist who bases his hope for the future on the pagan conception of the immortality of the soul. Nothing could make the resurrection of the believer more basic or fundamental. Instead of considering dead believers as being consciously in the presence of the Lord and being safe for ever, this verse states the exact opposite. When will the Christian world really believe this and not give the resurrection of the saved just a nominal adherence? How often do we hear addresses emphasizing that without resurrection, a saved person is PERISHED, the same fact that is accorded to the unbeliever according to John iii. 16?

Cannot we see that the great doctrine of resurrection is absolutely fundamental to the whole redeeming purpose of God and without it, the plan collapses? Paul now continues the argument by saying that if Christian hope pertains to this only, then we are the most pitiable of all men (19).

The Apostle now leaves unreality for fact, with one of his magnificent “buts” (compare Eph. ii. 4 & 13 and note what has gone before).

“*But* now in fact Christ has been raised from the dead as the firstfruits of those who are asleep. Since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead; for as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be brought to life” (xv. 20,21, C. K. Barrett).

Christ and Adam are here regarded as heads of the *race*. Here we have resurrection and its *racial* aspect. Paul now goes beyond those who have been touched by the gospel, and deals with the connection which the Lord's resurrection has with the whole race in Adam, in relation to the matter of headship. “The head of every man is Christ”, even as the head of every woman is man which obviously goes further than those who are saved.

We must be very careful with the terms “in Adam” and “in Christ”. The latter phrase, as we have seen, stands for those in relation with Christ. Does every human being that has ever been born come with the scope of “in Adam”? But for the Scriptural doctrine of the two seeds, the answer would be “yes”. However one may dislike the thought of some

being designated as “tares” by the Lord, the fact remains that he used this term in the parable of the tares and Gen. iii. 15 clearly teaches that there is a seed of God and a seed of the Devil. The parable of the Tares and the Lord’s explanation of it should be carefully studied in Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-42. It should be noted that the tares are quite separate from the true wheat from their inception to their destruction at the end. *In no case are the ‘tare’ “wheat” that has gone wrong.* Their introduction is by Satan to counterfeit and seek to overthrow God’s purpose for the “wheat”. Those that are represented by “wheat” cannot become “tares”, neither can ‘tares’ be changed into “wheat”, if we carefully regard the plain teaching of this parable.

From the human standpoint their appearance was identical, and looking at them from this standpoint one could assume that they were all one and the same company; but their origin was from Satan (John viii. 42-44 and note *ek pratos tou diabolou* “of your father the devil”, *ek* being characteristic of John’s writing to denote *origin*, both in his Gospel and epistles).

They were not “of God”, *ek tou Theon* (John viii. 47), or of the Father (42) but were positively of “their father the devil” (44). If the ‘tares’ did not find their origin, being and end in God, we have no right to include them in the true “wheat”. In other words we should not include the seed of the devil among those truly “in Adam”.

We should also not that Paul does not deal with the subject of resurrection from *every* angle in I Cor. xv. Nothing is said of the special resurrection of Luke xx. 35 (note the personal “worthiness”, and the preposition *ek*, out from the dead). Neither is resurrection expounded as it applies to Israel in the future. Likewise it does not deal with the theme as it applies to unbelievers. This obviously did not come within the scope of the problem started at Corinth by some who denied resurrection. The Apostle is concerned to show the falsity of this and that resurrection was absolutely fundamental to the hope of believers who had died.

No.24. pp. 224 - 228

In dealing with the great truth of resurrection which underlies the whole redemptive purpose of God, we have reached the section where the Apostle Paul deals with it from a *racial* aspect:

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (I Cor. xv. 22 R.V.).

In our last study we considered the doctrine of the two seeds, one of God and the other of Satan, and its bearing upon the phrase “all in Adam”, which we believe must be limited to the true seed of God. Just how many this comprises, we have no means of knowing, but God knows and as *He* does the sorting out at the end, there will be no mistakes made (Matt. xiii. 30, 41, 42). “All in Adam” goes wider than the elective purpose now in operation, either for the earthly kingdom or the heavenly Body of Christ.

It must include millions who have died in heathen lands not ever having the opportunity of hearing the Word of God or the Christ of the Word. These are dealt with in resurrection along the lines of Rom. xii. 12-16.

It should be hardly necessary to say that this is *not* universalism. Adam and Christ are the respective 'heads' of this company and as all the true seed are "in Adam", even so they will all be made alive in Christ. *But not all at once*. There is no Scriptural basis for one general resurrection as is often held, for the next verse in the chapter we are studying says:

"Each one, however, will be brought to life *in his own rank*: Christ Himself as the firstfruits, then, at His coming, those who belong to Christ" (xv. 23, C. K. Barrett).

Let us not forget that I Corinthians was written during the Acts period when the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. The resurrection of the Lord having taken place, the next thing that believers eagerly awaited was His early return and the bringing to life of those believers who had already died. I Thess. iv. 13-18 makes this quite clear. The truth of the Mystery in Ephesians and Colossians had yet to be revealed and therefore finds no direct reference in I Cor. xv.

The Apostle continues:

"Then cometh the end, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have abolished all rule, and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet" (I Cor. xv. 24, 25 R.V.).

Verse 24 reads literally, "then the end" and if we stop reading here we might assume that directly after the second Advent of Christ the termination of all things take place. It is however important to note that *telos*, end, means *goal* as well as end in time, the completion or conclusion of a purpose or object. Matt. xxvi. 58 and James v. 11 are examples of this.

The goal the Apostle had in view is stated in verse 28 "that God may be all in all", but the intervening verses make it clear that this is not attained at once. "Then" of verse 24 is dependent upon the two occurrences of "when" which follow. There is the abolishing of all rule and the subjugation of all enemies and until this is secured, *Christ reigns* (verse 25) which must cover a period of time.

Allowance must therefore be made for this reign with the objects stated, namely to put "all things under His feet". There is no ground for the amillennial view that the winding up of all things takes place immediately at the Second Advent. The goal is not arrived at in an unbroken sequence. The Lord Jesus we repeat, reigns as King until all enemies are subdued. These are included in the words "all rule and authority and power". Col. ii. 15 teaches that the work on the cross is the basis for the destruction of "principalities and powers" who are hostile to God and His children. They are linked with death in the closing verses of Rom. viii., over which the believer is "more than conqueror". On the other hand Col. i. 16-20 shows that some principalities will be reconciled. When all enemies of God have been abolished and all the redeemed brought into line or

“subjected” to the great purpose of God, then the goal is reached and God is “all in all” (28). The word *hupotasso*, subdue, is linked with *tagma*, “order” or “rank” of verse 23. It is not a harsh word meaning despotic rule, but suggests the perfect alignment of all the redeemed in heaven and earth to the will and plan of the ages devised by the Lord.

This takes man back into the place intended for him in that great plan, for which sin and death had unfitted him. We can say that the whole of revelation is largely concerned with this object, namely the removal of all things that bar the accomplishment of the Divine purpose and this is what redemption and resurrection are all about and without them, such fruition would be impossible.

It is important to note that all enemies go under the *feet* of Christ (an Eastern figure of a conqueror), whereas the redeemed go under His *headship*, and the reign of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords will not cease until this is accomplished. When this state of things has been reached:

“. . . . When all things have been subjected unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected unto Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all” (xv. 28 R.V.).

Here we must take great care to note exactly what is said, for all sorts of wrong conceptions have sprung from a misreading of this verse. Many misread it as reading “. . . . then shall the Son also Himself be subjected unto Him that did subject all things unto Him, that *the Father* may be all in all”. This is the result of an erroneous conception of the Godhead in which the Father is God and the Son takes a lesser place in the Godhead. This is a confusing of *status* with *role* and *operation*. Oscar Cullman is right when he states “to speak of the Son has meaning only in reference to *God’s revelatory action*, not in reference to *God’s being*”.

The revelation of the Trinity was necessary to carry out the great plan of redemption and victory over Satan, sin and death. We have no means of knowing whether this relationship obtains right throughout eternity, for Scripture does not inform us and it is foolish to speculate. Some have made up their minds that such a relationship is eternal, hence their substituting, in their minds at least, the Father in place of God in verse 28.

When the great goal has been reached at the end of the ages, it is not the *Father*, *Son*, or *Holy Spirit* that is said to be “all in all”, but GOD, without any reference to any such relationship or need of mediation in the realized Kingdom of God and we should be content to leave it there.

The verse that follows is problematic and has led to all sorts of extraordinary ideas in interpretation:

“Else what shall they do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are they baptized for them? (xv. 29 R.V.).

Some, like the Mormons, think this teaches baptism for the dead by proxy. Others teach that Paul is referring to those who were baptized on the basis of the testimony of

some who had died. Yet another view postulates that such baptism refers to young converts who took the place of older brethren who had died. The difficulty lies in the preposition *huper*, “on behalf of”. With regard to the Mormon view, there is no evidence that a rite of this kind arose at any time in the first century. There is nothing like it till the second century and then only in connection with heretics like the Marcionites, and in any case, knowing the Apostle’s horror of false teaching, we should expect him to expose its falsity had it occurred at Corinth.

One thing is quite clear, namely that water baptism, symbolizing death, burial, and resurrection, would have no point if there was no resurrection. The rite would have been empty and meaningless. Dr. E. W. Bullinger suggests there is the figure *Ellipsis* here and by supplying the words “it is” as the translators have done in Rom. viii. 34, the verse then reads “What shall they do who are being baptized? It is on behalf of the dead if the dead rise not at all”. He points out that *nekros* ‘dead’, with the article as is the verse we are considering, usually means dead *bodies*, whereas without the article it refers to dead *people*.

We believe this to be the best solution of the difficulty that confronts us in verse 29. It fits perfectly with the context and is in harmony with the verse that follows, “why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour?” What point would there be in incurring continual dangers that accompanied his apostleship if death was the end of everything? “In death off” he wrote in his second letter to the Corinthian church (II Cor. xi. 23). We come to another problem in verse 32. What did he mean by fighting with beasts at Ephesus? He could not have been exposed literally to wild animals in the arena unless he had lost his Roman citizenship, of which there is no evidence whatsoever. It looks as though he was using it metaphorically of his enemies. “I die daily”, he declared, that is, he was daily exposed to the risk of death, and if “merely as a man” he faced this then there was no point in it without the Christian hope.

Heroditus, of Ephesus, had described his countrymen as “wild beasts” 400 years before. Likewise Epimenedes called the Cretans “beasts” (Titus i. 12), and Ignatius, later on, described himself as “fighting with wild beasts, being bound to ten leopards” by which he meant a detachment of soldiers who were guarding him. The whole point is that such experiences were valueless if there was not the hope of resurrection; why not seek to avoid all such difficulty and danger? Why not “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”? (32). This is a quotation from Isa. xxii. 13, but with a different context. Note Paul does not add the words “and be merry”, as many do who misquote it without the solid hope of eternal life. There is little to be merry about in a world that is dominated by sin, death and disappointment.

The First Epistle to the Corinthians.

No.25. pp. 9 - 14

In the context of I Cor. xv. which we are considering, the futility of life without resurrection is stressed. If there is no future life beyond the grave we might just as well 'eat and drink for tomorrow we die' (verse 32), and the Apostle Paul's constant exposure to danger and death in his faithful witness for Christ would likewise be useless. If death is the end, there is little left to do but to pluck the temporary pleasures of the moment. But such carelessness, however much it may appeal to unbelievers, is not for those who are redeemed and belong to Christ. Paul now interjects:

"Be not deceived: evil company doth corrupt good manners" (I Cor. xv. 33 R.V.),

or it could possibly mean 'good characters' and so would read 'bad company ruins good characters'. This quotation is not from the O.T., but from a lost comedy of Menander's called *Thais*, which had evidently become proverbial. The Apostle stresses that the witness of the Corinthian believers would be ruined if they identified themselves with the unbelieving around them who lived so carelessly. Not that he expected them to be isolated entirely from the world. To live in the world was one thing. To cultivate bad company was quite another.

We have a saying today that a 'person is known by the company he keeps' and it was evident that some of the Corinthians were associating themselves too closely with pagans, hence his exhortation:

"Awake up righteously, and sin not; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to move you to shame" (xv. 34 R.V.).

Professor Barrett's translation is to the point, "Wake up properly to a sober life and stop sinning. What some people have is ignorance of God. I say this to shame you".

A section now commences which amplifies the phrase of verse 23, 'every man in his own order', showing that a *general* resurrection is untrue.

"But some will say, how are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come?" (xv. 35 R.V.).

Some questions do not arise from faith nor are they edifying. God has nowhere revealed *how* the dead are raised and to speculate therefore is profitless. He has however revealed that resurrection will be a *fact* and so calls for our faith and hope. To the merely curious Paul writes:

"Thou foolish one, that which thou thyself sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind; but God giveth it a body even as it pleased Him, and to each seed a body of its own" (xv. 36-38 R.V.).

The Apostle turns now to the analogy of the sown seed. Life can only come from seed if it dies. The Lord Jesus had already spoken the same truth “. . . . except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John xii. 24). One does not sow the mature crop, but just the bare grain at the beginning and from this God gives it a ‘body’ as He has chosen. So with the believer, death is not the end. At the time God wills an unending life with a resurrection body is provided by Him, but this does not mean that these bodies are identical.

Paul now changes his word from *body* to *flesh* in order to emphasize this:

“All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead” (xv. 39-42 R.V.).

In nature God has provided variety; in the future life enjoyed in resurrection this is also true. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, each having their particular ‘glory’. These do not refer to stars, but to the resurrection bodies of believers. It is God’s purpose that some shall occupy a position in the heavenlies, ‘far above all’, while others will be blessed on the new earth. These differing spheres of glory will demand bodies that are suited to the sphere.

Paul now does turn to astronomy and comments on the variation in brightness of each star. Like this, he declares, is the resurrection of the dead. The contrast is now made with the entry into this life where sin and death dominate, and the entry into the next where these great enemies are abolished for ever. The ‘sowing’ must not be made to refer to *burial*, but *birth*, for seed must be alive when it is sown, or nothing will come from it. The sowing is in *corruption*; the raising in *incorruption*. The sowing likewise takes place in *dishonour* and *weakness*; the raising up in *power* and *glory*.

The present body is ‘natural’; the future body is ‘spiritual’. The word ‘natural’ is *psuchikos*, allied to *psuche* ‘soul’. It is the ‘flesh and blood’ body that is dominated by the five senses and as such, cannot inherit the kingdom of God (see verse 50). It could not exist in the future spheres of glory, being totally inadequate and imperfect for such conditions. But the resurrection body, animated by the Spirit of God, will give complete equipment and be all-sufficient. Thus resurrection is not just the re-animation of corpses. It is however completely dependent on Christ’s resurrection but even so each retains its own individuality and receives a spiritual body suited to the sphere of glory that God has willed each to have in His redemptive purpose. This partly answers the query of verse 35.

The Apostle now goes back to the creation of man:

“So also it is written, the first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second Man is of heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the

heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (xv. 45-49 R.V.).

It is hardly necessary for us to state that Gen. ii. 7 does not teach that man was given an immortal soul which was distinct from the animal world. Adam BECAME a soul; he was not given one together with other faculties in his make-up. Genesis clearly shows that the Creator gave *nephesh* ‘soul’ to the animal world as well, for Gen. i. 20, “the moving creature that hath *life*”, and in verses 21 and 24 the word ‘creature’, and verse 30 *life* (see margin) is *nephesh* also. It should be plain that Adam was not *spiritual* but *soulish*, quite apart from sin. It is the second Man, the last Adam, Who is truly spiritual, and it is to His image that the redeemed will ultimately be conformed (Rom. viii. 29), for nothing less than this is adequate for God’s great redemptive purpose.

“For we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself” (Phil. iii. 21 R.V.).

Adam and Christ are the heads of the old and new humanity respectively.

The Apostle now begins to sum up his arguments:

“Behold, I tell you a mystery (secret): we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (xv. 51-53 R.V.).

Paul now reveals, under the Spirit’s guidance, a secret which deals with the living believers at the Second Advent, as well as the dead ones and dates it ‘at the last trumpet’. The phrase ‘the last trumpet’ must refer to the last of a series and the only series of trumpets in the N.T. are those of the book of Revelation. It is pathetic to see the efforts of some expositors to try and dissociate ‘the last trumpet’ from the Revelation, for they can see that this would take these believers into the Great Tribulation. The problem is of their own making in that they insert the future church related to the Secret of Eph. iii. either at Pentecost or Acts xiii. and so bring it into the earlier position of the Pentecostal assembly being dealt with in I Corinthians.

Nor can we get out of the difficulty by saying that at this point we are at the end or the ‘last day’, so that this is the final trumpet of all time. The earthly kingdom has yet to run its course, and the whole creation be brought under the control of Christ as verses 24-28 testify. However, one thing is certain. In resurrection immortality and incorruption are *put on*. It may be that immortality refers to living believers at this time and incorruption those who are asleep in Christ.

If human beings possess immortality *now* then it cannot be ‘put on’ at the resurrection. Those who believe the pagan doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul, should carefully ponder Gen. iii. 22, 23:

“And the Lord God said and now, LEST he (Adam) put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and EAT AND LIVE FOR EVER: THEREFORE the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden”

One thing is abundantly clear from this, if there is one thing that God will not tolerate, it is an *immortal sinner*. God alone has immortality (I Tim. vi. 15, 16) and He gives it to His redeemed children when He awakes them from the dead and gives them a spiritual body fashioned like the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus.

At the sounding of the seventh and last trumpet in Rev. xi., “the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ” and immediately follows reference to the ‘great power’, ‘the reign’ and the ‘*time of the dead*’ (Rev. xi. 15-18). This is all connected with the *parousia* of Christ. His visible coming back to the earth in power and great glory, which He Himself dates *after* the Great Tribulation (Matt. xxiv. 21, 29). Let us rightly apportion the Word of Truth and not confuse this with the hope of Col. iii. 1-4.

No.26. pp. 32 - 37

We are coming to the conclusion of the setting forth of the great basic doctrine of resurrection in I Cor. xv. After looking forward to the resurrection of the believer as the culmination of his redemption (see also Rom. viii. 23), a time when immortality, previously absent, will be ‘put on’, Paul now designates it as *victory* over the last enemy:

“. . . . then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor. xv. 54-56 R.V.).

The Apostle is alluding to Isa. xxv. 8, “He will swallow up death in victory”; and Hosea xiii. 14, “O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction”. Death is the result of sin (Rom. v. 12), but for the believer the sting has been drawn, for the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary covers ‘all trespasses’ (Col. ii. 13), and because He has died for sinners death itself shall finally be destroyed. Wonderful though this vision is, Paul ends on a practical note:

“In consequence of this, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, abounding always in the Lord’s work, since you know that your labour is not vain in the Lord” (xv. 58, C. K. Barrett).

The subject now changes and Paul returns to further questions concerning which the Corinthian believers had asked his guidance (see vii. 1; viii. 1; xii. 1). It was most probable that they had heard of the collection of money the Apostle was organizing for the poor saints at Jerusalem and now Paul gives them instructions in this matter:

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come” (xvi. 1, 2 R.V.).

At Jerusalem the Apostle had undertaken to “remember the poor” (Gal. ii. 10). For his activities in this direction the reader should consult Acts xi. 29, 30; xxiv. 17; Romans xv. 25-28; II Cor. viii. & ix. He emphasizes the freedom of this voluntary action in making a money gift to the mother church. There was no compulsion about it, but Paul evidently felt that his Gentile converts would need no great persuasion to help the brethren in need at Jerusalem. He instructs them to do as he had advised the Galatian churches. We have no record of these instructions and they are not referred to in his epistle to the Galatians, but the following verses in I Corinthians make clear what these were. They had possibly been passed on orally during the journey described in Acts xviii. 23.

They were as follows. Each believer should set aside for himself and save up whatever profit he made so that time might not be spent in taking collections when Paul visited them. No specific sum was mentioned; it was all according to how they ‘prospered’. Doubtless they knew of God’s claim on the Jew of the tithe, a tenth part of their income and they would hardly give less than this. The total gift could then be taken to Jerusalem by any whom the Corinthian church approved. The Apostle is not sure of his future plans, but states ‘if it be meet for me to go also, they shall go with me’ (xvi. 4 R.V.). The reader should study II Cor. viii. and ix. for further details of this collection.

Paul now deals with a future visit to Corinth:

“I shall come to you when I pass through Macedonia; for my intention is to pass through Macedonia, but with you I will perhaps stay, or even winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I am traveling. For I do not wish to see you now in passing, because I hope to stay with you for some time if the Lord permit. But I shall stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a great and effective door is opened to me, and there are many who resist” (I Cor. xvi. 5-9, C. K. Barrett).

At the time of writing, the Apostle was at Ephesus (verse 8) and from there he would eventually travel northward by land and sea to Macedonia and then move west and south to Athens or Corinth where he would probably winter (6). He explains his plans so that there should be no misunderstanding at Corinth about a delayed visit to them. He did not intend moving from Ephesus at once. “But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost” (the feast that fell seven weeks after Passover), the reason being, ‘for a great and effectual door is opened to me and there are many adversaries’ (9). There was, therefore, at this moment, a great opportunity for presenting the Truth, but at the same time Satan was resisting, as he always does, stirring up opposition from possibly Jewish Christians who opposed him wherever he went.

Paul loved to describe the Lord’s leading as ‘doors’ which He opened or shut. In Rev. iii. 7 the Lord declares Himself as:

“He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth.”

The Lord is sovereign in this and it is the most effective way of Divine guidance, much better than peculiar feelings and impressions that so many believers rely on to know the Lord's will. We can look to Him to open those doors which are definitely in His appointing and to close those which are not. Always our wills must be subordinate to His, lest we force open the door ourselves and thus make our own pathway which can so easily lead astray.

“Now if Timothy come, see that he be with you without fear; for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do: let no man therefore despise him. But set him forward on his journey in peace, that he may come unto me: for I expect him with the brethren” (xvi. 10, 11 R.V.).

Before Paul's visit to Corinth, they could expect one from Timothy. According to iv. 17, Timothy had already been sent, but the reference here expresses doubt, “*if* Timothy comes”. This could be because of the perils which beset all travelers (see II Cor. xi. 23), or it could have been for a reason that has not been expressed, and which therefore we do not know. Nor can we be certain what the Apostle means by saying that Timothy's stay with them should be ‘without fear’, unless he was trying to shield his assistant from unpleasant and threatening attitudes that some in the Corinthian church could take. This opposition is made clear in the second epistle and constitutes one of the chief problems Paul had with this church. Evidently there was some reason, fancied or otherwise, that might have led the Corinthians to *despise* him, but Paul reminds them that Timothy was as much the Lord's servant as he was himself and therefore they must recognize this and finally send him on his way ‘in peace’. Christian assistance to traveling brethren was an important and practical manifestation of Christian love and at a time when there was much journeying to spread the Gospel far and wide, this was a real necessity without which the work would have been much hindered.

In verse 11 it is not clear whether ‘the brothers’ referred to were coming with Timothy, or waiting for him with Paul, in which case they could have been Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (verse 17). The Apostle now refers to Apollos and tells the Corinthians that although he had begged him earnestly to go to them, Apollos could not do so at the moment, but would take the opportunity when it occurred (12).

The last words and greetings in this epistle are now given:

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all that ye do be done in love” (xvi. 13, 14 R.V.).

The first four exhortations use military words. They are present imperatives expressing actions that are to be continuous. “To watch”, meant not only ordinary vigilance, but the attitude that looked for the early coming of the Lord, a possibility in the Acts period (iii. 19-26, and see Mark xiii. 35-37). They were to ‘stand fast’ and not yield (compare ‘unmoveable’ xv. 58), to ‘play the man’ and ‘be strong’. All must be done ‘in love’ which had been so vividly described in chapter xiii.:

“Now I beseech you, brethren (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have set themselves to minister unto the saints), that ye also be in

subjection unto such, and to every one that helpeth in the work and laboureth” (xvi. 15, 16 R.V.).

The household of Stephanas (i. 16) were the first converts in Achaia, and now they had “set themselves” or “appointed themselves” for service to the saints. This was a self-imposed duty, which they evidently gladly assumed for other believers in the church. It is important to note that they had not been ordained or appointed by Paul or the assembly. Nor does Paul reprimand them for not getting such ordination. This opportunity for a practical expression of their beliefs had occurred and they took it gladly. We are not told of what this service consisted. Doubtless it included the proclamation of the Word as well as other practical matters and in this willingness to serve we have the beginnings of Christian ministry quite apart from any man-made ordinations.

The believers at Corinth are exhorted to recognize the leadership of Stephanas. It would seem that this was not easy for some who had the tendency to push themselves forward. Stephanas, together with Fortunatus and Achaicus were probably the bearers of the Corinthian letter to Paul (vii. 1). They had refreshed Paul’s spirit and supplied his need (18). Final greetings now come from the churches of Asia and Aquila and Priscilla, those outstanding believers who had risked their lives for the Apostle (Rom. xvi. 3). They had a ‘church in their house’. This is where the church began, not in special buildings which did not exist at this time. The believers’ home was the meeting place for the church, and we believe that this is how it will be at the end of the age when apostasy is rampant. Let no one therefore despise ‘house churches’. They are Scriptural and have the full blessing of the Lord. To what higher purpose could a home be dedicated?

Paul now takes the pen from his amanuensis and writes:

“The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema Maranatha. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen” (xvi. 21-24 R.V.).

“Anathema” means ‘under a curse’ which separates a person from God. This is strong language, but it is evident that there were those at Corinth who needed this warning. Practical love for the Lord Jesus Christ is the very centre of Christian response. “Maranatha” is the Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word and means: “Our Lord is come” or “Our Lord cometh” and in view of the context of the whole epistle with its expectation of the Second Advent the latter is evidently meant, being very much like Rev. xxii. 20 “Come, Lord Jesus”. The epistle ends with Paul’s characteristic reference to grace (peculiar to him and his epistles) and last of all he sends his love, reminding them, as it were, that his rebukes sprang from love and extended to all, for he always had at heart their spiritual well-being, progress in the Truth and the practical response in their lives.