

Lecture 11 The Gifts of the Spirit.

Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12 - 14.

"Another Comforter"

Thirteen Lectures on the Operations of the Holy Ghost.

by W. T. P. Wolston, M.D.,

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It is important to note the marked distinction which appears in Scripture, between the *gift* of the Spirit, which we have been considering on previous evenings, and the *gifts* of the Spirit, which, with the Lord's help, we will look at a little this evening. The gift of the Spirit is universal to every child of God, in his normal state now. That is, every one who, through grace, has been born of God, and been led to believe in the Son of God, who knows what redemption is through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins, every such one has received the promise of the Father — the gift of the Holy Ghost. Indeed, he is not a Christian, in the full sense of the term, if he has not the Holy Ghost. The gift of the Spirit therefore is that which, when received, sets the soul in the true Christian place. Now it does not follow that every one who has received the gift of the Spirit is, necessarily therefore, a participator in these gifts of the Holy Ghost, some only of which are enumerated in the part of Ephesians 4 which I have read this evening. I am careful to say some only are enumerated, because you do not find anywhere, in the New Testament, a complete list of these spiritual gifts, which the Head of the Church has been pleased, by the Holy Spirit, to bestow on certain members of His body here upon earth. We hear about these gifts in Romans 12, in 1 Corinthians 12, and again in the chapter which I read this evening. The reason, I think, is very simple. If they were all in one list the veriest child, so to speak, could sum them up; but God has put them in many parts of His Word, hence the inquiring soul must search that Word to learn, and thus know His mind. You will find, furthermore, according to the place and position in Scripture, in which these spiritual gifts are spoken of, and unfolded, there exists a distinct difference in the aspect in which they are presented, as well as in the source from which they spring. In Romans 12 all flow from God; in 1st Corinthians 12 all flow from the Holy Ghost; and, in the fourth of Ephesians all flow from the ascended Head of the body, the exalted Man at God's right hand, the Lord Jesus. Such a difference is, of course, of importance, and is instructive.

But first of all tonight we will look at the verses I have read (Eph. 4: 7-16), which beautifully unfold, and present to us the grace of the Lord Jesus to His people here upon earth. In the epistle to the Ephesians the Church is presented in the fullest way, as being the body of Christ, united by the Holy Ghost to Him, where He now is in glory. It is therefore as to its origin, nature, and destiny, a heavenly body. The Head is in heaven, and the body is upon earth, and consequently needing all the varied sustenance for growth and blessing, which the Head alone

can supply. The body is one, as the apostle tells us in verse 4, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." All which that body needs, as it passes through this scene, is supplied from Him, who is its Head in glory — the One who loves, with a deep and inextinguishable love, His assembly, His body here upon earth.

In order to nourish and cherish that assembly, He gives what is here presented. Now, the fact that the gift of the Spirit must not be confounded with the gifts of the Spirit, is very manifest in the seventh verse, where the sovereign, and absolute choice of Christ, in disposing of the gift, is stated plainly, even when the universality of the grace given, is seen, for, "unto *every one* of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." The Lord, in His sovereignty, is pleased to deposit these spiritual gifts where He will. He chooses, and fits certain vessels, for certain work, according to His own will. It is not a question of the will of man, or of the choice of man, but of the sovereign grace of Christ, and, consequently, it is evidence of the utmost folly to quarrel with what is, or is not, in a certain vessel. You are quarrelling with the Head of the body. You ask, Why has not that man so and so? It is a question of the sovereignty of Christ. He makes one an evangelist, another a teacher, another a pastor, and rarely combines all in one man, as Christendom would fain universally have, in its ministerial appointments. He gives spiritual qualifications, and usually physical suitability for the special service; giving "to every man according to his several ability," as we read in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25).

Now see whence these gifts flow, because it is a matter of deep importance to be quite clear thereupon. That ministry, which is the exercise of a spiritual gift, has its source *only in Christ*. You cannot manufacture ministers. If already gifted of Christ, such need not man's help or instruction to make them ministers. He has made them such in sovereign grace, in view of the need of His body. If they be not gifted by Christ, human learning, and even human ability to speak, will never make them true spiritual helps. Ministry is the exercise of a *spiritual gift*, which has come from the Lord Jesus, and certain members of His body, are made ministers, through the exercise of His own sovereign grace and choice.

Now, I repeat, where does this ministry flow from? Nothing can be more beautiful than the next verse. "Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." You have here three things said about the Lord as Man. He is the ascended, glorified Man; secondly, as Man, He ascended after He had led captivity captive, when He had overthrown the power of Satan; and thirdly, when ascended, as Man, He received and gave gifts unto men. As you know, this verse is a quotation from the 68th Psalm, and I will read it, because the way in which He is presented in the Psalm is a little different. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Acts 68: 18). That He is Man gone up, the second of Acts shows. Let us turn to it. At the thirty-second verse we read, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." As the ascended, victorious, triumphant Man, He received gifts in person. First of all He received the Holy Ghost, in this new way as Man in glory for us, but He received Him for a special and twofold purpose, not alone to give that Spirit to all His own on earth, as the indwelling Comforter, but likewise to make some of them the depositories of spiritual power by that Spirit, to be exercised in bearing testimony to His glory. He makes those vessels which have

been hitherto the slaves of sin and Satan, henceforth the vessels of His own grace to others round about. "Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Truly it is beautiful to see the place whence ministry flows, namely, the Lord Jesus, as the ascended Head of the Church, in glory.

Christ has been down here, has seen the misery of man, and the malignity of Satan, has defeated the one, and delivered the other, and then gone on high to carry on His work of grace. That is what the next verse of our chapter brings out. "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (vers. 9, 10). He has been in this scene, as Man, and met man's victor and captor, Satan. Morally He overcame him in the wilderness, where as you know, when tempted to the uttermost for forty days, He completely defeated the enemy, by dependence, and obedience, so that he left Him. He then came out, and, having bound the strong man, He rifled his palace, the world, spoiling his goods, — in other words, delivering his captives, and setting them free. Still there remained work to be done. The question of sin before God had to be taken up, and Satan's title over man, as a sinner, had to be met. Further, He Himself must pass back into glory, and on the ground of the work He was to accomplish, He would have those who are His, with Him. When therefore He descended into the lower parts of the earth, I apprehend that the descent there spoken of, is not His coming from heaven to earth, when He assumed manhood, but the cross and its consequences.

The Lord Jesus goes down to death, as the judgment of God upon man, and, in death, which is the power that Satan can use over man, He annuls him, and becomes the complete victor. In death He conquers. If I may say so, in the very centre of Satan's kingdom, the domain of death, which has overcome every other man, He is victorious, for He rises out of it, and then goes on high, and fills all things in the love, and power, and glory of the redemption He has wrought. He goes to heaven! What for? Not to demonstrate His victory over Satan, as the humble, dependent, obedient, self-emptied man, but He goes up that He may take up with Him those whom He has delivered by His grace. "When he ascended up on high he led captivity captive." When the Lord came to earth what did He find? He found the devil the master of the situation, and man a poor willing slave, bound to the wheels of Satan's victorious chariot. But oh! what a difference Christ has made. All is changed. It is not now Satan the victor, and man the captive. It is Man, in Christ, that is the victor, and Satan who is the captive, completely annulled as to his power, for faith, by the obedience and death of Jesus.

The very first thing the Lord does, as He passes into glory and receives the Holy Ghost, is to send Him down. What to do? To use those who had been Satan's captives, but whom He has delivered and saved, to spread the tidings that would set countless myriads of poor captives free, and this is the only present proof of the bringing to nought of Satan's power. Ah! it is a wonderful thing to be the recipient of any gift from Christ, gift not to be used for our own glorification, but for the spread of the testimony to the Son of God, in a way that carries blessing with it to others round about us. That is the way ministry is presented in this fourth of Ephesians.

In the eleventh verse, where some of the gifts are enumerated, we read, "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers." I apprehend this to mean, not that the Lord gave special spiritual capacity, or spiritual power to certain

persons, but, rather, that having already endued these persons with spiritual power, and made them the possessors of a special gift, He gave them in this characteristic way to His Body, the assembly. Pastors and teachers are what you may call a conjoint gift. They appear to be coupled in the same person, as I shall show you presently. One is of very little value without the other, and as a matter of practical interest we find they are generally united in the same individual. The man who is only a teacher, without being a pastor, rarely sees very much good of his labour; and the man who is only a pastor, without being a teacher, has not the same sphere of usefulness that he would otherwise have, if he had also the power to teach. The Lord puts them together here.

Let us now look at these gifts for a moment — gifts given through the love of Christ to His assembly on earth. First observe the object. "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (ver. 12). It is beautiful to see the way in which the Spirit presents the Lord's objects in giving these gifts. First of all, we have their ultimate aim, "the perfecting of the saints," that is, that the saints individually should really be brought into the appreciation and enjoyment of what belongs to them in Christ. Truth is always for the individual first. If we are not right individually, how can we be right collectively? If we are not happy individually, how can we be happy collectively? If we are not rejoicing in the Lord individually, how can we do so collectively? Therefore, here, as always, the individual state is first brought before you. Then comes, as the intermediate means by which this object is carried out, "for the work of the ministry." The gifts go out into the work of the ministry, in various aspects and directions. This, as I have already said, is the fruit of Christ's gift, and is not due to human intelligence, or human knowledge. A man might be a brilliant speaker, but, in the midst of the assembly, unless he have spiritual power, he has not the ability to minister to real profit. You may find men able to talk to any extent, but unless they possess gift from Christ there is never any grace, unction, or power about it. One is reminded by such of the proverb, "Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain" (Prov. 25: 14). You wait in vain for refreshment. On the other hand, you might have a man who has no eloquence, and yet whose ministry — fruit of Christ's gift — may be most precious, valuable, and useful to the saints. The apostle Paul, speaking of himself, says, others judged "his bodily presence weak, and his speech contemptible." Yet no man would say his ministry was contemptible, not even his enemies could say that.

There was also for this object of perfecting the saints, "the edifying of the body of Christ" — the building up, the growth of the body of Christ. This gives us the distinct object of the Lord in giving these gifts. He continues to give them, and we learn what the use to be made of them, what His wonderful thought in bestowing them, is, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (ver. 13); so that which the saints need here will be continually supplied by the Head of the Church, so long as the body remains on earth. There will not be a moment of the Church's passage through the world, when you will not find these gifts existing; whether they are fulfilling their functions, in due order, is entirely another matter, that should exercise the possessors thereof. Whatever gifts, however, are necessary for the blessing of souls, for the growth of the saints, and for the edifying of the assembly, will continue to be given by the Lord, so long as the assembly is in this scene, i.e. until He comes to take His bride home, to dwell with Him in glory, where these functions are no longer necessary.

Let us look for a moment at the different character of gifts spoken of here. "He gave some apostles; and some prophets." These come together in the New Testament, and are frequently in the same person. Paul, notably, was a prophet, as well as an apostle (see Acts 13: 1). What the special functions of these were, we find in the second chapter of Ephesians, "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (ver. 20). You have not here the *prophets* of the Old Testament referred to, as some would be inclined to think, and the *apostles* of the New Testament. If that were so the order would be reversed. Scripture puts it thus, "apostles and prophets"; and of the New Testament undoubtedly, because the prophets of the Old Testament did not know a bit about the Church. They were neither of it, nor in it. They might, and did prophesy of the sufferings of Christ, and of the coming glories of the kingdom, and as one part has been fulfilled, so the rest of their prophecies will come true, but the apostles and prophets here spoken of were those who were to bring out the mystery, the distinctive truth as to God's assembly, the body of Christ, founded on redemption, the death, resurrection, and ascension to glory of the Lord Jesus.

The Church of God is based upon the truth of the death of Christ, who, as Man, has gone into death, and come up out of it, and from whom, as ascended, the Holy Ghost has come down. Again, these apostles were not the twelve. I do not think the twelve, sent out by the Lord, are so much as alluded to in this scripture, for none of them reveal the Church, as the body of Christ, in their written ministry. I judge it alludes to the apostle Paul, and to the others who were with him, in bearing this testimony. Barnabas, his fellow-worker for long, is called an apostle, and I have no doubt there were others. In Ephesians 3: 1-9, and Colossians 1: 24-27, we are distinctly told, that the revelation of the mystery was first of all given to Paul, and, as unfolded by him, it was doubtless carried and preached by others also. It is, therefore, to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament that this scripture refers undoubtedly. The apostles and prophets in their ministry, oral and written, lay, and are the foundation upon which the Church of Christ is built.

Have we then still abiding such gifts as apostles and prophets? Clearly, we have them in their writings, and in the truth as unfolded by them, but we should know perfectly well, that their special functions having been exercised, there is now no longer any necessity for their repetition, and for this reason. They laid the foundation, and you know when the foundations of a house are laid, all you have to do is to go on building. Consequently, every man who professes now to have the apostles' office is in a very awkward position. Apostolic succession is claimed, but I venture to say to those who claim it, Look at what the Holy Ghost says of those who shall come as successors of the apostles. In the twentieth of Acts you read, "After my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (ver. 20). And what He said has turned out perfectly true. Again, in the second chapter of the Revelation, we read, — "Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (ver. 2). So that any man who now assumes to occupy the serious ground of apostolic succession, is committing a grievous mistake, and placing himself in very reprehensible company. You say, That is very serious. It is very serious for the man, because it is so plain in the Word of God. When God speaks, His word should surely be heeded.

The apostles and prophets, then, of the New Testament unfold the truth, bring out the mind of God, and lay the foundations, and the faith of the saints is built upon that which God has revealed by their testimony in early days. There is a passage in the last of Romans which will

make this quite clear to every subject mind. There we read — "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the *revelation of the mystery*, which was *kept secret* since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets [prophetic writings], according to the commandment of the everlasting God, *made known* to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16: 25, 26). Clearly you have here the prophetic writings of the New Testament referred to, which, thank God, we hold in our hands.

Then, in the next place, you find, He gave "some evangelists." I need not say much about them, although the gift of the evangelist is a most precious one. I know perfectly well it is thought to be simple, and is sometimes looked down upon for that reason. Still it is remarkable that here, where it is a question of the Lord giving that which is for the blessing and good of the assembly, evangelists are spoken of, because if you had no evangelists the assembly would not grow. The evangelist is full of the Gospel, and what is the Gospel? It is the revelation of the heart of God, and what can be higher than that? It is the unfolding of the testimony about His Son, and the object of the evangelist is to bring souls to Him, and thus, as a consequence, into the assembly. The evangelist is a man who busies himself with souls. He has a burning love for them, and an unquenchable thirst for their salvation. His object is by all means to win the soul for Christ, yet, mark you, he is, if labouring rightly, working out from the bosom of the assembly. He is of the assembly. His work, therefore, though in no ways *in*, yet goes out from the assembly, and the soul that is laid hold of, and led to Jesus, becomes a member of His body, and, when all was in its normal order, would be found amongst the gathered ones; and nothing else is still His order. The evangelist should be like a pair of compasses, one leg is fixed, and the other is to sweep all round as far as it can reach. If his work is to be successful not only in conversion, but really in edifying the body, he must have a fixed leg, i.e. he remembers he is of the assembly, and works out from, and returns to it. In a certain sense it is his Gilgal. Too many evangelists look upon their work as a sort of guerilla warfare. They are spiritual sharpshooters, free lances, delighting in being "unattached." In all such, will is working. They are like a man who brings out a lot of stones from a quarry, and having got them into the road, has no place to build them into — no building to fit them in. You would surely say of all such that they are loose, careless workmen. I ought to have a definite object before me in preaching the Gospel; first, to bring the soul to Christ, and, secondly, to put it into its right niche in God's assembly on earth. It is not that the evangelist may always be used in this. Others have to be satisfied as to the reality of the fruit of his labour.

The wise evangelist will not in any way press the apparent fruit of his labour into the assembly; and I am speaking now of those gathered in the principles of it. He would be very lacking in wisdom if he did so, in my judgment, because the evangelist, from the very nature of his gift, is a warm-hearted, sanguine man, led much by his own fervency of spirit. Look at Philip, who is the first, and only man in the Bible, as far as I know, who is called "the evangelist." In Acts 8 what is he doing? Preaching Christ, getting numbers converted, turning the city upside down, and longing for the apostles to come down. He was admitting many outwardly to the house of God on earth, by baptism; had baptized Simon the sorcerer, on a confession of faith, and would doubtless have let him into fellowship with the saints had it not been for Peter. I have no doubt Philip thought he had caught a great fish when he heard that "Simon himself believed also." But as the result showed he had not got him. It needed the calm discernment of Peter to

show the real position of Simon, and very sad it was. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (ver. 21). The Lord's care for His assembly, and for His evangelist, is very touching in this scene. What a cheer is it to know that He is still the same; so one can joyfully say, The Lord help all the dear evangelists, cheer them, and encourage them, and increase their number a thousand-fold. If you are wise, and really walking "in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost," you will help them by every means in your power.

Now, what should the evangelist do when he gets the soul converted? He should introduce him to the assembly, not necessarily bring him into it. Others should do that. It is well to let others judge of the reality and soundness of God's work in the soul. They are responsible to do so. Perhaps you say, he should now teach him. No; the teacher should teach him. I quite admit that, owing to the ruin of the Church, the evangelist often has to seek to do it, but it is not his work. Owing to the ruin and failure of the Church, practically speaking, many of the gifted servants of God do not do the part for which they are fitted. The reason is this. Many of those who really possess gifts, and are themselves gifts of Christ to the Church, are buried. Yes, I believe untold numbers of them — to use a figure — are buried under the ruins of Christendom. Hampered, hindered, and restrained by ecclesiastical systems, that necessarily prevent the exercise and development of gift, they are not exercising the gift the Lord has given them. They have been dislocated from their true functions by the purely human organisations with which, alas! Christendom abounds, and in which the free activity of the Holy Ghost, in the gifted members of Christ's body, is hindered by that which man calls "the ministry," but which God cannot so account, as, in principle, it is opposed to the direct and plain directions, nay, the commandment of His Word.

The place of the Holy Ghost has been usurped in Christendom by man, which has this serious effect, that numbers of those, who are really gifted servants of Christ, are silent, and are not exercising their gifts, because, from the very constitution of the ecclesiastical associations in which they find themselves, there is not liberty for the exercise of their gift. Many again are, in their timidity, which one cannot but admire, afraid lest they trench upon the office, and work of those whom they may regard as specially called to minister in the things of God — a ministry, be it observed, to which these silent ones have also been called, but to which they are not, from what is called "order" — man's order — responding.

How beautiful is the divine order in God's assembly! First, the evangelist reaches the soul, and brings him to the gateway of the assembly, and leaves those who are therein to test him, and, if confident of him, to receive him, for it cannot be too strongly asserted, that it is the assembly, as a whole, that receives. Each and all composing it are responsible — not only the labourers, or those who may commend souls that seek admission. When the young convert, judged to be born of God, and indwelt of the Spirit, is admitted, he is to be instructed. Let us beware of keeping souls out of the assembly until they have as much intelligence as those within. Such a thought is very common, and some saints have the idea that all such should be kept outside, until they have got a certain amount of intelligence. That shows how little intelligence they possess who would act on such lines, and how little they really know the mind of the Lord, because, you see, when a child is born, it needs a great deal of nursing, attention, and care. Now the assembly, if walking rightly, is just the place to find all this, and is the spot to which the new-born soul is rightly led

by the evangelist, in the expectation that there, if anywhere, will be found plenty of nurses, glad to foster, and help the infant life given of God. Would that we saw more of this.

Then come the "pastors and teachers." Now a pastor is not less important than a teacher. The pastor occupies himself with the state and growth of the soul. The teacher is more occupied with the Word of God, seeking to unfold that which God has therein given. The two foundation gifts, of apostles and prophets, abide permanently in the Scriptures, but the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers exercise their gifts, as given by the Lord, in their living ministry until there be no more saints on earth to be perfected. The apostles and prophets give us the truth. The evangelist carries out to the world its special portion thereof — the Gospel — and brings in the young souls. Thereon the pastor begins the exercise of his gift, looks after them, and sees how they are going on. His work is most beautiful, if by no means prominent, because the pastor is more of a shepherd, and it is not a question of preaching with him. His voice may never be heard in the assembly at all. He goes in and out, and looks after the need of souls. I believe his is very much house-to-house work, and happy work it is. The teacher is he whom God specially prepares to unfold His Word, already given and recorded in Scripture. He is busy with the book — digs out its treasures, and feeds the saints thereby. His work, for the most part, is in the assembly. Of necessity God is careful of them as to temporal things, for in another epistle it says, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6: 6). These teachers might be men who have no means of livelihood, and the Lord is careful for all such — even as the evangelist is not forgotten, for we read, "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9: 14). It is noteworthy however, that while Paul lays down this principle, he immediately declines its application to himself (ver. 15). The true shepherd thinks only of the sheep, not of his own support. He thinks of their spiritual need. They should think of his temporal necessity, but all must be a matter of grace, not law. When ministry is reduced to a "bread trade," than which nothing could be more dreadful, it savours sadly of Balaam and his ways (see 2 Peter 2: 15; Jude 11); nevertheless it should be the joy, as it is the duty, of the taught one, to communicate with him that teacheth, in all good things.

We get, then, in this chapter the heavenly aspect of the source of ministry in the assembly, flowing from the Lord Jesus on high, and it is perfectly plain that these qualifications for ministry can never be communicated by man, nor can they even be fostered by man. They only grow by exercise, like the blacksmith's biceps. Therefore you cannot make a minister of Christ. It is Christ alone that can make him, and if he be made, by Christ, it is the privilege and responsibility of the saints to receive, not to remake him. All that the servant of Christ has to do is to find out the nature of his gift, and then steadily and unhinderedly to go on, in the exercise thereof, in his right niche, in the body of Christ — the One body — of which he is a member.

Let us turn back now to Romans 12, not that I shall dwell on it, but that you may see there how the gifts are referred to, as belonging to the whole body. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are *one body* in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching" (vers. 4-7). We have very simple and distinct instructions to those who have any gift from the Lord for special work; they are to

use it "according to the proportion of faith," or "according as God," who is the source of the gifts, and all else in Romans, "hath dealt to every man the (or a) measure of faith" (ver. 3).

We will pass now to the first epistle to the Corinthians. The epistles to the Corinthians are remarkable, in this respect, that the receivers are the only company, or assembly, in the New Testament, that is *addressed* as "the Church of God." Both first and second epistles are addressed "Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth." The subject is all that pertains to the order of the Church on earth, and you are brought in this first epistle very distinctly upon Church ground, and therein receive an immense amount of instruction as to the assembly, and the manner of its conduct. It is, in fact, the object of the epistle. What you have in 1st Corinthians is the assembly in function here upon earth, and you find that it is endowed by the Lord with all that it needs. People are fond, sometimes, of talking about Church endowment. I believe the real endowment of the Church you have recorded in the 1st Corinthians.

The assembly is endowed by Christ with all that she needs in her pathway on earth. In 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14, we get profound and detailed instructions as to spiritual gifts, and also as to the assembly. I think you will find that the three chapters must be taken together to learn their true import. They have been dislocated very often, by taking out 1 Corinthians 13, which is so full of love. In another part of Scripture we are told that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1: 7). Now I believe that these three characteristics, power, love, and a sound mind, are just what the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth chapters of 1st Corinthians bring out. In the twelfth chapter it is the spirit of power, the Holy Ghost as power, in the assembly, "dividing to every man severally as he will." In the thirteenth chapter it is the spirit of love, and in the fourteenth it is the spirit of a sound mind. Everything there must be for profit.

The twelfth chapter gives in much detail the varied operations and manifestations of the Holy Ghost in different members of the body. We learn further that, no matter what the magnitude of the spiritual gift may be, of which you read in 1 Corinthians 12, it is of no real value, in 1 Corinthians 14, where the assembly is before us, in function, for worship, unless it be baptized into, permeated, and regulated by the spirit that governs the thirteenth chapter. And what is that? Love! And what does love do? It never thinks of itself. Love always thinks of others, and the apostle taught these Corinthians this lesson. They were proud of their gifts. They were like children with so many new toys, which they wished to show off. They spoke in different tongues, and did so, though nobody knew what they said. And the apostle corrects them. "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Cor. 14: 26). They were all anxious, and seemingly determined, to get the gift displayed which they thought they possessed, and the apostle in the plainest way corrects them.

Time fails to deal at length with chapter 12, but this may be said, it is a description of the varied spiritual manifestations which are to be found in the assembly. They all flow from the Spirit, as down here in testimony for Christ as their source. Verse 4 says, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." That is the key-note of the

three chapters, "to profit withal." In passing, let me say that this verse has been most mischievously misinterpreted. Based on its supposed meaning, has actually gone forth the idea that every man, Jew, Turk, infidel, believer, and unbeliever promiscuously, has the Spirit. I shall not wound the feelings of any one in mentioning that the Society of Friends holds that every man has the Holy Ghost in him. They call it by various names, "inward light," "divine light," or "a ray of eternal wisdom," but it is supposed to be the Spirit, and they think they find support for the theory in this verse, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." But manifestly it is not a question of man, as man, here. It is in the assembly, where you have the saints of God, all of whom possess the gift of the Spirit, and some of whom have different gifts for ministry by the Spirit. And for whose benefit are these spiritual manifestations? Not for any one's own private use, but for the *benefit* of others. That is the point, and when you come to chapter 14 you have instruction as to what would be profitable for the assembly.

You find, in the plainest language, that edification is the key-note of all these chapters, whilst the Spirit of God was the source of these varied gifts. "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit," and so on. "But all these worketh that one, and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12: 8-11). It is the Holy Ghost who acts for God, and He it is, who is the source and spring, in the assembly, of these varied manifestations. At the close of the chapter the apostle says, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles; secondarily prophets; thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." And why does he put them in their normal order? The reason is this? The Corinthians were so inflated with the power they possessed of being able to speak in unknown tongues; they were so inflated by possessing these gifts, which would pass away, that the apostle brings out what their relative value is, and where does he put this gift of tongues? Last. They put them first. He puts them last. "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease" (1 Cor. 13: 8). The only value of the tongues was to be a sign to those without - not within the assembly, as he says in the fourteenth chapter, "tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (1 Cor. 14: 22).

The gift of tongues was, as I have said before, God ringing the bell to the inhabitants of earth, so to speak, that they might hear about His Son Jesus. It was a valuable sign, the gift of tongues, and it was not inappropriate if those were present, who, knowing the language, could interpret; that failing, the tongue was useless, and the possessor was to be quiet. But, notwithstanding, they were to covet earnestly the best gifts; "and yet show I unto you a more excellent way." What is that? Love certainly. It always seeks the good of others. "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." Prophesying was not only the unveiling of future events, but it brought the conscience into the light of God's presence, and was for "*edification*, for exhortation, and for *comfort*." How different this from merely speaking what no one could profit by. In the fourteenth chapter Paul says, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." You see the truth was working

practically in his own heart. The only thing he thought of in the assembly, was the profit of others.

This subject of profit is equally true in the matter of prayer and singing. "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else, when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at the giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? for thou verily giveth thanks well, but the other is not edified" (1 Cor. 14: 15-17). If I sing, if I pray, if I speak, what is the good of doing so unless the rest are edified? I once said to a friend of mine, "I never say 'Amen' to your prayers." He looked surprised and asked, "Why?" "Because," I replied, "I never hear what you say. You mumble so much in your prayers, that I am unable to hear what you say, and I am not going to say 'Amen' to a promiscuous number of words, which I do not hear." Everything should be done for the profit of others, and to this singing is no exception. Everybody thinks it is a very easy, and most simple thing to give out a hymn. But I must "sing with the spirit," and, as Paul concludes, "with the understanding also." Thus it is that a hymn, when given out, in the assembly, ought to be the expression of that which is at the moment felt by the assembly. It is therefore a very serious thing to give out a hymn there. A person may say, "But I had that hymn laid on my heart." That is no indication for giving a hymn out, because a woman might have a hymn on her heart, yet she is bidden to be quiet and not give it out. One never should give out a hymn, or do aught else in the assembly, unless with the distinct sense — I have the leading of the Lord in doing this, and, I know that I shall express His will in doing it.

In the close of chapter 14, the apostle speaks of the very important point, of direct subjection to the Lord, by the Spirit of God, and of how God's assembly should behave when gathered together in the Lord's name. We read in 1 Cor. 14: 23 — "If therefore *the whole church* be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (vers. 23-25). There is an immense difference between the value of the gift of tongues, and of the prophetic gift, if used in the Spirit of God. Then he adds — "How is it, brethren, when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation?" that is, every one when he came to the assembly had something on his mind, and gave it forth. No man who has the sense of what it is to be before the Lord, and believes in the presence, and guiding of the Spirit, would so act. What may or may not take place must be unknown till we are there, and then "Let all things be done unto edifying" is the injunction.

But notice, Paul does not correct disorder by prearrangement, and putting all into one man's hands: nor, to those who had the power of speaking in different tongues, does he say, You must not speak. No, he says, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret." Very simple are these instructions, and much better than saying, No man should speak with an unknown tongue. That would be to quench the Spirit. You see, to prevent the Holy Ghost acting, by any allowed member of the assembly, is to fall into the snare that we are warned against in the fifth chapter of 1st

Thessalonians, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings" (vers. 19, 20). How do we quench the Spirit? you ask. The individual may grieve the Holy Spirit, but in the assembly, and only in the assembly, can you quench the Spirit. In the assembly there is to be every scope for all possible activity of the Holy Ghost by every member whom God permits to speak. This can refer only to men, as "Let your women keep silence in the assemblies, for it is not permitted unto them to speak," is the injunction regarding these latter. If this liberty be not allowed, He is quenched, a solemn charge I am bound to bring against every congregation, that does not give Him the fullest scope to use any and all. The Spirit of God is not to be quenched, and it would have been quenched, had the apostle sought to rectify disorder by silencing the tongues. So far from that, he says in verse 39, "Wherefore, brethren, *covet* to prophesy, and *forbid not* to SPEAK WITH TONGUES." But he also adds, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course (separately); and let one interpret." There must be an interpreter. "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge."

This is God's distinct instruction, and revealed mind and will, for His assembly, when together. Nothing could be plainer, and, with sorrow be it said, nothing has been more unheeded by the Church. The rule in almost all ecclesiastical bodies has been to place all, beforehand, in the hands of one man. Thus is the Spirit quenched, and as a consequence all suffer. But why, in the midst of the assembly, do you think, has the Holy Ghost said two or three prophets, and two or three only, may speak? Why not four, five, or six? I think it is a practical proof of the unerring wisdom, and tender care of our God. If, when gathered in assembly, we have listened to two or three addresses from our brethren, we have received about as much as we can well take away, and if we had more, it is very likely there would be little profit therein, as bodily weakness would in some, if not all cases, assert itself God knew very well what our life here would be, and consequently He knew there would be claims, and calls at home, that in due course must be obeyed, and, therefore, He would not have the meeting of His assembly so indefinitely protracted, that some would be under the necessity of running away from the assembly, ere the meeting was concluded. Everything was to be of such a nature that all would be done "decently and in order," therefore he says, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace." I do not say that the first must finish speaking ere the other rose. There were not to be two or three speaking at once, as was sometimes the case, so determined were they to be heard. If the Spirit of God made a sign that He wanted to use a certain vessel, then "let the first hold his peace." He was to be subject to the Spirit. "If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, *let the first hold his peace*. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Even the wisest prophet may learn from his brother.

Today we have this curious state in Christendom, that the whole capacity and function of the assembly, both in worship and ministry, is supposed to be wrapped up in one man, who is to go to God for the people, and to the people for God. This is not after the pattern of 1st Corinthians 14. You meet a Christian man on Lord's Day morning, and ask him where he is going? He says, I am going up to worship. On further inquiry, you will usually find he is going to hear some one, more or less gifted, preach. Is that the conception you would draw from the fourteenth of Corinthians? No. The thought in your friend's mind is not so much worship, which is what flows from the gathered saints to God, as that of ministry, connected with some

individual who will address, and possibly help, and comfort him. No doubt there is warrant in Scripture for teaching, but we ought to call things by their right names, and not label ministry, which is a precious privilege, with a name — worship — that carries a totally different idea, at least in Scripture. You have come to hear me speak tonight, but this is not the assembly, and hence not a meeting for worship. This is a mere gathering, of those whom I take for granted are the children of God, to hear what an individual servant of Christ, in the exercise of any little gift he may possess, has to say. How different a matter is it to be gathered before the Lord in the assembly. There I read, "Ye may *all* prophesy one by one, that *all* may learn, and *all* may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

At this point, and because he had just said, "Ye may all prophesy," there comes in a qualification, "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." This verse might as well be taken out of Scripture altogether, for of what avail is it to bid women be silent, when the almost absolute rule in modern Christendom is that all the men, save one, shall be. Ah! here is where the Church has grievously failed. She has not had faith in the Holy Ghost. That there is something seriously wrong is plain, for this scripture is absolute in its statement, as to what the Lord would have in His assembly, and if I am not walking with the saints according to the principles of, and in absolute subjection to the commands, and instructions, of the fourteenth of Corinthians, I am really throwing away my mercies, and going directly in the face of my Lord's command.

Paul knew very well that what he was saying would not be acceptable to all in the assembly at Corinth, and, therefore, he says, "What! came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?" What does he mean by that? As I have said, he knew very well that what he was bringing out was not acceptable to many minds, therefore he says as it were, Are you the source of the word of God, or is it God that gives the word through me, to you, to instruct you? Are you going to be teachers or taught in this question? "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, *let him acknowledge* that the things that I write are *the commandments of the Lord.*" Every Christ-loving heart will now have to ask itself this question, Am I keeping His commandments in respect of 1 Corinthians 14? Am I gathered to His name where the Holy Ghost is allowed His own way in the assembly.

Then follows a very striking verse, "But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." I do not think there is much comfort in being ignorant, and there is no credit in so remaining, with such plain teaching before our eyes, as to what the Lord would have. If I shut my eyes to the plain, distinct teaching of the Word of God, then I shall not know the truth. "If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant," is a caustic that I would fain not have applied to me. It applies to the one who *will* not see what God enjoins. "Wherefore, brethren, *covet* to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues," is the conclusion of the whole matter, and is pregnant with grace. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (ver. 40), is the inscription graven over the door of God's assembly, and I should ever see it there as I enter; and it is well also to remember that it is written, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (1 Cor. 3: 19), for, if I may say so, when I go

to the assembly of God, this verse would seem just to say, This is God's house; if you come in here you will be found out, therefore, "Let everything be done decently and in order."