

# Dangers that Threaten

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### 1. Deception.

The church of God has an unsleeping foe. In the very earliest moments of its history his attacks began, first by persecution from without, then, and more successfully, by seduction and corruption from within. At the beginning his attacks were in measure repulsed. Apostolic vigilance discovered his movements, apostolic energy under the Spirit's direction largely countered his devices. We may be very thankful that God permitted Satan's power to be so early manifested in this direction, for as a consequence we have unfolded in the epistles of the New Testament the divinely-given antidote to his devices, and the divine method of dealing with them.

It is a remarkable fact that both the Apostles Paul and John were taken up by the Spirit of God as vehicles of His testimony to seven assemblies. John writes to the seven assemblies of Asia in Rev. 2 and Rev. 3; Paul addresses letters to the Romans, Corinthians, the assemblies of Galatia, the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Thessalonians. It is an even more remarkable fact that in each case five out of the seven assemblies had to be dealt with in correction. The epistles to Smyrna and Philadelphia alone, in Rev. 2 and 3, are not marked by reproof and correction. The epistles of Paul to the Romans and Ephesians alone are occupied with exposition of the truth followed by exhortations based upon it. The other epistles addressed to five churches clearly had correction in view though much truth is unfolded in them.

Of these Pauline epistles, the two to the Thessalonians are the last in the order of Scripture. If we allude to them first it is because they were written within a short time of the conversion of the Thessalonians, meeting a danger which threatened them when still but babes in Christ. In reading them, therefore, we are warned against snares that may beset us at the beginning of our Christian careers.

The devil particularly attacks the spiritual babe by false and even anti-Christian teaching. This is made plain to us in 1 John 2: 18-27, and what John lays down in this passage is illustrated by the case of the Thessalonian saints. They were in danger of being deceived.

When Paul wrote his first letter they were suffering from self-deception through ignorance. When he wrote the second time they were being deceived by mischief-makers from elsewhere. In both cases *deception* was the trouble.

If a comprehensive view of the 4th and 5th chapters of the first epistle be taken it will be seen that a state of distress and restlessness prevailed amongst them. They needed to be quiet and to do their own business, for some were inclined to be unruly or disorderly (see 1 Thess. 4: 11; 1 Thess. 5: 14). Disquietude is the product of distress, and for that comfort is needed (see 1 Thess. 4: 18; 1 Thess. 5: 11, 14). They were in trouble about some of their number who had died, evidently imagining that this would in some way penalise them in regard to Christ's coming and kingdom. Their sorrow, however, was based upon an illusion. They were ignorant of truth which once known would remove all their difficulties and set the whole position and prospects of "them which are asleep" in their true light. The apostle proceeds to reveal to them what will come to pass at the coming of Christ for His saints, particularly as regards the sleeping saints. For certain details concerning the living we have to turn to 1 Cor. 15.

The tender love of the apostle for these young children of his in the faith, the solicitude for their welfare, the care for their souls, which breathe in every part of this epistle, are very beautiful. There was, of course, much excuse for their ignorant condition. But recently converted they could not be expected to know everything. The ignorance that so often marks the children of God to-day is less excusable, for the written revelation of God is complete. If we, who are not new converts but older Christians, with the New Testament, containing the full unfolding of the counsels of God, in our hands, are compelled by honesty to sing such lines as: —

"I am not skilled to understand

What God hath willed, what God hath planned" —

then we ought to be ashamed of ourselves.

What is wrong with us? Is it indifference - that we have no real interest in the things of God? Or, is it indolence - that though we have an interest, we allow the things of God to be crowded out instead of diligently pursuing them? Or what? If in difficulty by reason of cherishing delusions and deceptions, we certainly have the remedy to our hand in the written Word of God. Let it be studied in dependence upon the Spirit of God and a cure will be found.

When Paul wrote his second epistle further difficulties had been created. They were "shaken in mind" and troubled (2 Thess. 2: 2) by some who insisted that the "persecutions and tribulations" they were enduring meant that the day of Christ was "at hand" or "present." It was apparently claimed that their tribulations were a part of the great tribulation of prophecy. This deception evidently came from the devil, for the apostle writes of their being troubled "by spirit."

He writes, in fact, of the methods of deceit.

1. "By spirit." The Thessalonians received what purported to be a revelation given by the Spirit of God but which really came from a spirit of darkness, and they had not been able to "try the spirits," according to 1 Cor. 12: 1-3; 1 John 4: 1-6.

2. "By word." The same erroneous idea had also reached them by word of mouth through one or more men who were deceivers.

3. "By letter as from us." Those who were deceiving them even went to the length of writing what professed to be an epistle from Paul confirming their error. By this spurious document they hoped the more effectually to gain the ear of the Thessalonians.

If any be tempted to wonder what particular harm would be done to the Thessalonians by entertaining such ideas, they may find some enlightenment in 2 Thess. 3: 5 and 6.

To interpret the persecution and tribulation which they were enduring for Christ's sake as the throes of the great tribulation which has the character of wrath from the hand of God, would divert their hearts *out* of instead of *into* the love of God. It would then be a case of God counting them worthy of governmental wrath instead of His counting them "worthy of the kingdom" for which they were suffering (2 Thess. 1: 5). It would leave them also the prey to impatient longing instead of their hearts being directed into "the patience of Christ." Lastly it produced disorder which expressed itself in not working at all but acting as busybodies.

In the light of what has happened in our own day we need not be surprised at the infant assembly being troubled and deceived in this fashion. How many of the deceits of the twentieth century centre around the fact of the second advent and prophecy generally? Men are naturally curious as to what may be expected in the future, and credulous too. Hence, from the days of the Thessalonians until our own, matters concerning the coming of the Lord have provided a kind of hunting ground for those of speculative mind; and of these Satan is not slow to take advantage.

The Thessalonians were not free of blame in the matter themselves. Neither are we, if we too get deceived. The apostle had already instructed them that the day of Christ must be preceded by evil coming to a head in the form of a *movement* - a "falling away" or an "apostasy," which should be headed up in a *man* - the "man of sin," the "son of perdition"; and as neither of these had materialised the day of Christ could not be present. He could appeal to them and say, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" Careful attention to instructions already given to them would have preserved them from being deceived.

But there was more than this. Since he had been with them he had written to them his first epistle, in which he had revealed to them the truth concerning the coming of the Lord for His saints and the way in which they would be "caught up together" to meet Him. To this he alludes in 2 Thess. 2: 1 speaking of it as "our gathering together unto Him." How could their tribulations be those connected with the day of Christ when it had been plainly revealed that the saints should be raptured to heaven? That rapture being in fulfilment of the word, "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5: 9). By this fact so firmly established in his first epistle he beseeches them not to be betrayed into theories at variance with it. A young assembly has more truth to learn, but to be truth it must be consistent with the truth with which they started.

In 2 Thess. 2: 15 Paul alludes to these two ways in which the truth had reached them. They were to hold fast the "traditions" or doctrinal "instruction" which they had been taught, "whether by *word*" when he had been present with them, "or our *epistle*" when absent from them. They did not as yet know all the truth, but it was foolish of them to let what they did know be disturbed by what they did not know. Their safety lay in the Word of God received either orally through apostolic lips, or in writing through apostolic pens.

We have no apostolic lips to speak to us today, but the apostolic writings - the New Testament - we have, thank God! Here is our resource and our safeguard. The deceits of the present hour are legion, but there is no need that we fall under their power. If we do, it simply means that we are either ignorant of the Word of God, or that knowing it our eye is not single, our spiritual state is not according to God. If on the other hand "the word of God abideth" in us (1 John 2: 9) - which means that we not only *know* it but that by the Spirit of God it is *operative* and *formative* within us - we shall be preserved from the snares set by anti-christian teachings and indeed from all the deceptions which spring directly or indirectly from our great adversary, the devil.

## 2. Defection. Galatians

The assemblies of Galatia had not been converted for very long when Paul had to write to them in the severe tone that marks his epistle. They were not, however, mere novices like the Thessalonians, and hence their case was a far graver one. To be deceived is indeed serious, but to start on the slippery incline of departure, which has as its end thorough-going defection, from the truth of the gospel, is far worse. And this was their plight, though evidently they were not conscious of it.

The trouble entered amongst them in a very insidious way. Men who posed as teachers appeared in their midst and sought to make them, though Gentiles, conform to Jewish usages, and in particular adopt the practice of circumcision. It is quite possible that they did not advocate it as being absolutely necessary to salvation, as had previously been done (see Acts 15: 1), but they evidently advocated law-keeping - of which circumcision was the symbol - as necessary to holiness of life, and also claimed the authority of the Jerusalem apostles as behind them. It is very instructive to see how Paul, inspired of God, treated the apparently trivial matter of these Gentile believers submitting to circumcision.

At the close of the epistle, the apostle plainly declares that, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision" (Gal. 6: 15; see also Gal. 5: 6). The thing had lost all its force and significance for those in Christ Jesus, and hence, in a place where as yet circumcision had not been made a test question by Judaizing teachers, he had circumcised Timothy so that thereby he might have full access to Jews in his service, which would otherwise have been impossible since his father was a Greek and they knew it (see Acts 16: 1-3). When, however, he had previously gone up to Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15, about this very matter of circumcision - since the Judaizing teachers had made it a test question both at Jerusalem and Antioch - he took with him Titus, who was not, like Timothy, partly of Jewish blood, but wholly of Gentile blood, and stoutly refused to circumcise him under any consideration. This he relates fully to the Galatians in Gal. 2: 1-10.

Circumcision was thus being advocated as a sign of subjection to the law of Moses; if not as determining their standing before God as justified, at least as determining their place before Him in holiness. Consequently if one of these Gentile believers submitted to the rite, he thereby signified his adherence to the law and he became "a debtor to do the whole law" (Gal. 5: 3). James has informed us that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in *one* point, he is guilty of *all*" (James 2: 10). Paul here enforces a corresponding fact, viz., that whosoever puts himself under the law as to *one* detail is considered by God to be under it in *all* its details. We cannot pick and choose out those of the law's commandments which we happen to like. We must be either under it all or not under it at all. Snap one link in a chain and the chain is broken. Attach a boat to but one link in a chain and to the whole chain it is made fast. The Galatians, therefore, in adopting circumcision, were being entangled in the "yoke of bondage" and Christ would profit them nothing; and if indeed Christ was "become of no effect" unto them they were "fallen from grace" (Gal. 5: 1-4).

To "fall from grace" has become in some quarters a rather hackneyed expression, and it has acquired a significance very different from that which it has in Scripture. The Galatians had not lapsed into the world, nor gone back as a washed sow to her wallowing in the mire, and so fallen out of the position in which God's grace had set them. On the contrary, they were adopting a rigid legalism and pursuing justification and holiness — not licence — by going over to law-keeping; and in so doing they were forsaking, *in their own consciousness and experience*, grace for law. In their own thoughts they no longer stood before God on the grace platform, but the law platform; they no longer viewed themselves as sons with the Spirit of God's Son in their hearts, but as servants under the regulations that prevail in the servants' hall (see Gal. 4: 1-7). The difference between these two platforms is so great

that to step down from the one to the other amounts to a fall. Thus in their own *state* and *experience* they had fallen from grace. As to their *standing* before God in grace, of which Romans 5: 2 speaks, this standing was theirs unalterably in Christ, if indeed they were really the Lord's and so justified by faith.

In the light of this we may more fully appreciate the indignant outburst of the apostle in Galatians 1. They had been brought into the enjoyment of the grace of Christ by God Himself who had called them into it. They had now listened to "another gospel" which based itself upon circumcision, the symbol of law-keeping. To exchange Christ for the law of Moses, to embrace the demands of the law instead of the grace of Christ, and thus depart from the One who had called them out of the one and into the other, was such incredible folly that the apostle marvelled. They were like people "bewitched," and in Galatians 3: 1, he plainly calls them "foolish" or "senseless." Later on he has to say, "I stand in doubt of you" (Gal. 4: 20).

How would the Apostle Paul view Christendom to-day? How does modern Christianity stand in the light of this portion of the Word of God? At the doors of how many of us can similar folly be laid? Are any of us marked by defector from the truth of the gospel by reverting to the law as in any way determining our status before God?

These are searching questions, and we do well to ponder them. The matter of circumcision is hardly a live issue to-day: that of the Jewish sabbath is a very live issue, however, at least in some directions where subjection to it is much pressed. Inasmuch as the sabbath was given to Israel as "a sign" between Jehovah and them (see Ezek. 20: 12), it is equally with circumcision a symbol of law and law-keeping, and the inspired reasonings of the apostle as to the one would apply to the other; and other things there are of a yet more subtle nature. It is not very difficult to "fall from grace," in the Scriptural sense of the term, if we remember that the essential principle of law is that our standing before God is determined and regulated by what *we are* and *do*: whereas the essential principle of grace is that what *God is* and *has done* determines and regulates our standing as believers in His presence.

How did the apostle meet the state of defection that had developed amongst the Galatians? By bringing before them the truth, both as to the cross of Christ and as to the Spirit of God. In both cases the truth is set forth experimentally and not doctrinally. The truth of the cross is set before us doctrinally in Romans 6, but experimentally in Galatians 2: 19-21 and Galatians 6: 14, and consequently Paul writes there in a personal way, leaving the plural for the first person singular, for experience is of course an individual matter. The truth as to the Spirit of God is unfolded doctrinally in Romans 8, but experimentally and practically in Galatians 5: 16-26 and Galatians 6: 8.

1. THE CROSS OF CHRIST struck at the very roots of the ideas and practices which had started the Galatian defection, inasmuch as at the cross Christ died for us under the curse of the law which we had broken (Gal. 3: 13), and consequently we believers died representatively in Him beneath its sentence.

This the apostle takes up and applies to himself in an experimental way, saying, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ." For him, therefore, the condemning grasp of the law had been relaxed and that by the law's own act. He was legally dead to legality, in order that he might live unto God.

Let those words, "THAT I MIGHT LIVE UNTO GOD," be greatly stressed. Paul did not reckon himself to be dead to the law in order that he might live to himself and his own will, which would have been pure lawlessness, but that he might live with God Himself as the End and Object of his life. Formerly the law had controlled, or rather failed to control, him. Now God really did control him. While as yet God was only partially revealed as at Sinai, the law — holy, just and good — was set up

as schoolmaster. Now that He is fully revealed in His Son we pass from under the control of law to the control of the One who gave it — which is infinitely higher and exerted upon the opposite principle of grace.

This life which is "unto God" can only be lived, says Paul, "by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," for God is now known to us in His Son, and "faith's vision keen" alone makes Him to us "a living bright reality" and His love the moving and constraining force in our lives. We live unto God in the bright light of the Son of God and in the warmth of His love.

But all this, *not apart from the cross*. "I," says Paul, identifying himself with the Adamic life and nature of which he participated in common with the rest of us, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I" — the "I" here being just Paul himself, the person, the "ego," as we speak — "I live; yet not I" — here again Paul as the man who expressed the Adamic life and nature because participating in it — "but Christ liveth in me." Paul was living now in the life and nature of the Risen One who was the Object of his faith. *The Cross severed him from the old life of Adam that he might live, even while here upon earth, in the life of Christ.*

The law with all its demands, its ceremonies and its symbols, whether circumcision or sabbaths, addressed itself to the life of Adam. The cross of Christ has severed the believer from both the life of Adam and the law which applied to it. To go back to law in the principle of it, though apparently only taking up one of its symbols, is to do violence to the cross of Christ - then, "Christ is dead in vain."

2. THE SPIRIT OF GOD is possessed by the believer as the directing power of his new life. Of old all our thoughts and actions were dominated by the flesh within us. We were sowing to the flesh and of the flesh reaping corruption. What is the remedy for this? Is it to sow to the law, and of the law reap bondage and condemnation? No.

It is to sow to the Spirit and "of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6: 8). If the cross puts the sentence of death upon the flesh, the energy of the old life, the Spirit indwells us as the energy of the new life. If we walk in the Spirit we do not fulfil the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5: 16). If we are led of the Spirit we are not under the law (Gal. 5: 18).

The expression "led of the Spirit" carries us back to the earlier passage, Galatians 3: 2 — Galatians 4: 7. Formerly the law took our hand and led us about as a schoolmaster or tutor. Now, redemption being accomplished, we are sons of full age, and the Spirit of God's Son is sent forth into our hearts saying, Abba, Father. The indwelling Spirit now fulfils the office formerly undertaken by the external law — only He does so with much greater fulness. We cannot be under the leadership of both at the same time.

We *live* in the Spirit (Gal. 5: 25). We are *led* of the Spirit. Now let us *walk* in the Spirit. Walking is the most normal and universal and healthy of all man's activities. It consequently signifies *activity*. All our activities are to be in the Spirit.

The truth thus presented in this inspired epistle completely met the Galatian defection. Let all that is implied by the cross of Christ and the gift of the Spirit be grasped, and defection from the truth of the gospel in all its forms will be met. The cross of Christ shuts out fallen man, his wisdom, his reasonings, his world. The Spirit brings God in, His purpose, His grace, His Christ, His Word.

Established in these things, Christ is formed in us (Gal. 4: 19) and we stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free (Gal. 5: 1). Consequently we do not remove from Him that called us into the grace of Christ.

### 3. Division. 1 Corinthians.

At this late hour in the church's history the state of division into which it has fallen is all too manifest. So manifest is it and so complete, that it might be thought that this particular evil could hardly go further than it has gone, and that to deal with the subject is a waste of time — a kind of shutting of the stable door after the horses are fled. We are assured, on the other hand, that however widespread may be the trouble it is one that never ceases to threaten the people of God, and that, therefore, the Scriptural sayings on the subject are always timely and to the point.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians the divisions that existed among them were of an incipient nature and not as yet open and avowed breaches. Twice does the apostle speak of "divisions" (1 Cor. 1: 10; 1 Cor. 3: 3; 1 Cor. 11: 18). Once he uses the word "heresies" (1 Cor. 1: 19), and once he speaks of "contentions" (1 Cor. 1: 11). They were forming parties or schools of opinion — which is what the word "heresies" means — and those, of course, gave rise to contentions and divisions. Yet the divisions were found amongst them when they came together "in the church" or "in assembly" (1 Cor. 11: 18), so that they evidently maintained outward unity, though these sad cleavages or rents were present.

It is worthy of note that the divided state of the Corinthians was brought under Paul's notice by a report which reached him, and that in taxing them with it he plainly stated who his informants were, and also was quite specific in the charge he brought against them. How often have reports concerning the low estate or wrongdoing of some of the saints of God been brought by their fellow-believers, who having poured forth their tale have at once tried to bind down the one who has listened to their complaint to absolute silence as to their names! They are wishing to bring the charge, but not willing to put their name to it, so that should it be unfounded or only partly correct their responsibility may not be brought home to them. It was not thus with these believers "of the house of Chloe."

Nor did the apostle permit the point of his charge to be lost in vague generalities of a sort that are fairly easy to establish and very difficult to deny. He made his charge quite clear. "*Now this I say,*" or "*But I speak of this,*" — that each of you say, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." They were turning into party leaders men whom they esteemed to be great.

It was not that they were actually ranging themselves under the banners of Paul or Apollos or Peter, as 1 Cor. 4: 6 shows. With Christian delicacy the apostle avoided mentioning the real names of the men who were making themselves into, or being made by the Corinthians, into party leaders. He spoke "in a figure," and transferred the matter to himself and to Apollos, desiring that in that way they might learn the lesson not to be puffed up for one man against another. The men they were really puffed up for, were either men of note in their own local assembly, or possibly some of the false and Judaizing workers who got amongst them, as 2 Cor. 11 shows.

In their unconverted days the Corinthian believers had been familiar with the philosophies of the Grecian world and accustomed to range themselves under their leaders of thought into philosophic schools. They had boasted in all this human wisdom — "the wisdom of this world" and of "the princes of this world," for without a doubt many of the leaders of Greek thought were princes in the realm of intellect, as the Romans were princes in the arts of government. They committed the folly of importing these worldly ways into the midst of the church of God, and assuming that leading Christians were to be esteemed as princes in things religious — were to be followed and magnified into leaders of schools of religion.

Why did they think after this fashion? The apostle's diagnosis of their case is very simple, and

stated with great plainness of speech: "Ye are yet *carnal*," he said. "Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not *carnal*, and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3: 3). Spiritually they were still but babes, in an infantile condition, and they were fleshly and not of spiritual mind.

Before the eyes of the carnal believer *man* always looms as an imposing object. If he does not exactly see men as trees walking, he certainly sees them as of mountainous proportions, and hence in these early chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul proceeds to put man, together with his works and his wisdom, into his proper place of nothingness, by exalting Christ and His cross. When first he arrived at Corinth he was led of God to know nothing among them "save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2: 2). That they needed at the outset, and that they needed still.

In the first nine verses of the Epistle he reminds them that Christ is all.

Upon what Name did they call? "Upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1: 2).

How had the grace of God reached them? It had been, he says, "given you by Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1: 4).

What was the character of the apostolic witness which had reached them? It was "the testimony of Christ" (1 Cor. 1: 6). What was their hope? "The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1: 7). And, what the character of the time for which they waited? It was "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What was their position on earth while waiting? They were "called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1: 9).

How high and holy the dignity and, privilege connected with a calling such as this! We have but to awake to it to become instantly conscious of what a poor and paltry thing it is to be of Paul or Apollos or Cephas. To say, "and I of Christ," in such circumstances — that is, to treat the Lord Himself as though He were to be ranked with His servants, as though He were but worthy to be a party leader in the church instead of being Head of the church — is even worse. It is to commit in principle Peter's mistake on the mount of transfiguration and to suggest erecting a tabernacle for Christ alongside tabernacles for Paul, Apollos and Peter.

Having set forth the paltriness of their divisions in the light of the incomparable glory of Christ, the apostle expounds the cross as the power and wisdom of God, which has "made foolish the wisdom of this world." Why had the Corinthian believers become enthusiastic partisans of one or another of the clever or gifted men who had been or still were amongst them? Because they intensely admired them. They were enamoured of the brilliant intellect of this one, or the flowing eloquence of that one, or the pushful energy of a third; instead of perceiving in them simply "ministers" or "servants" possessed it is true of differing qualities as also of differing gifts, but even these, "as the Lord gave to every man" (1 Cor. 3: 5). Hence, instead of glorifying the Lord who had gifted and enabled them, they glorified the servants who were but instruments or vessels, and it may be that they glorified clever men who could hardly be ranked as true servants of God at all. It was as though one should attribute all the virtue and glory to the jawbone of the ass instead of to the power of God that moved the mighty muscles of Samson's arm.

How often we are like these first century believers at Corinth! How little have we learned the grace and meaning of the cross of Christ from this standpoint, even though we rejoice in it as that which has wrought expiation for our sins. The very thought of "the cross" is that of a death under judgment, a death of shame; and we believe that almost invariably the passages in the Epistles that speak of the death of Christ as "the cross," contemplate it as that which *puts under judgment and under the brand of shame*.

Let us all make sure that by the help of God we understand this point. The Lord Jesus humbled Himself to death — "even the death of the cross." Stretched forth upon a Roman gibbet, lifted up from the earth, He was *put publicly under MAN'S judgment and openly branded with shame*. The thing was not done by the fools and degenerates of this world. It was "the princes of this world" — princes in authority and intellect and religion — that "crucified the Lord of Glory."

The central cross, then, lifted on high as an object of scorn, the LORD OF GLORY, who suffered Himself to be thus eclipsed — as we may speak — for a brief moment in the history of eternity. To all outward appearance He was judged and put to shame in man's rebellious and foolish little world. He was not *really* put to shame, but rather He was glorified, and God was glorified in Him, as never before. His own words in John 13: 31, anticipate this.

The cross then, as God saw it, as the holy angels saw it, as believers today see it, and as presently the whole universe shall see it, was not the putting to shame of Jesus under the judgment of the superior wisdom and power of the princes of this world, but the glorifying of the Son of man and *the solemn putting of the princes, and their fancied wisdom and power, under a sentence of shame and judgment from GOD*.

The cross was judgment indeed. But it was the judgment of this world. It was shame, indeed. But it was the wisdom of this world that was "made foolish" there. It was death — death dropping like a curtain and closing the story. But though the princes aimed to "destroy Jesus" (Matt. 27: 20), it was not Jesus who was destroyed. It was rather the fulfilment of that which had been written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor. 1: 19).

We solemnly urge upon all our readers the question — Have you so learned the cross of Christ? If you have you will know well what "the offence of the cross" (Gal. 5: 11) means, and why there are to be found "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3: 18), and why preaching the gospel "with wisdom of words" must help towards making the cross of Christ "of none effect" (1 Cor. 1: 17), since it would be tantamount to proclaiming with a flourish of worldly cleverness that which sets aside all worldly-cleverness. A truly stultifying procedure, since people always lay more stress on our practice than on the mere affirmation of principles.

The truth of the cross clearly shuts out man and his self-importance. Be it even Paul, or Apollos or Peter, all are swept away, and the divisions that would centre in them are excluded.

But if the cross shuts man out, the Spirit brings God in; and 1 Cor. 2 is the chapter of the Spirit of God.

The Corinthians might have thought that since Paul had come amongst them with nothing "save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," there was nothing further for them in the things of God. This was not so. These are "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" — the things which are to be ours as the fruit of the cross and according to the counsels of God. In these things are told out "the wisdom of God . . . the hidden wisdom," and hence they lie outside man's range altogether. Of them it is written, "Eye hath not seen" — so we cannot discover them by *observation*; "nor ear heard" — so we shall not find them in *tradition*; "neither have entered into the heart of man" — so there is no hope of arriving at them by a process of *intuition*. If we are to know them at all we are shut up to God.

Now God *has* acted. He has revealed them by His Spirit to the apostles and prophets (verse 10), and then empowered them to communicate what was revealed to them in words taught by the Holy Ghost (verse 13). Hence we have inspired communications. Thirdly, by the Spirit of God these things can be received or appropriated by the believer (verses 14, 15). Man in his unconverted condition —

"the natural man" — cannot receive them at all.

All that we know, therefore, of the things of God we know not by observation, nor tradition, nor intuition which are purely human, but by *revelations* and *inspiration*, and *appropriation*, which are all by the Holy Spirit of God.

Let us only lay hold of the truth that centres in "the cross" and "the Spirit," and our souls are at once lifted from mere religion upon a human plane, which may have its great leaders. of thought and its schools of opinion and parties, into an order of things which is divine. We then begin to forsake the carnal for the spiritual and to get away from the spirit of division.

Division is nowhere in Scripture presented as an evidence of spirituality but always of carnality. "Ye are yet carnal," was the Apostle's indictment. How did he prove his charge? By simply saying, "whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Cor. 3: 3). Similarly in Galatians 5: 20, "heresies" or "schools of opinion" are cited as amongst "the works of the *flesh*." If carnality prevails, divisions are sure to raise their ugly head. Hence, when the report of the divisions at Corinth reached Paul it did not take him by surprise. "I partly believe it," he writes, "for there must be also heresies [schools of opinion] among you" (1 Cor. 11: 18, 19). Emphasize that "you." There was no such "must" in the case of the faithful saints at Ephesus, or Colosse or Philippi. But amongst "you" — the carnal believers at Corinth — there are sure to be these "heresies" as the inevitable fruit of your carnal state. That God knows how to overrule even heresies and make them serve towards the making manifest of those who are approved of Himself — those not infected with the spirit of division — is no, excuse for the heresies or divisions.

#### **4. Disintegration. 2 Corinthians.**

The first Epistle which Paul wrote to the Corinthians evidently produced a very powerful effect upon them. The second Epistle makes this manifest. The evil-doer who had been in their midst had been excluded in a spirit of zealous repentance (2 Cor. 2: 6; 2 Cor. 7: 9-12)

Moreover they had been largely lifted out of the sectarian spirit that had threatened to engulf them. He writes of their being established in CHRIST (2 Cor. 1: 21), and "manifestly declared to be the Epistle of CHRIST" (2 Cor. 3: 3). Not Paul nor Apollos nor Peter was written on the fleshy tables of their heart, but Christ.

And, further, their intellectual doubts on the subject of the resurrection had been dispelled, for he says, "*We know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God . . ." (2 Cor. 5: 1), referring to the resurrection body which awaits the saints.

Thus far all was well, and the Apostle rejoiced and told them about his gladness of heart in a strikingly beautiful passage (see 2 Cor. 7: 4-16); yet there were still things in their midst which caused him grave anxiety. With great warmth and tactfulness he acknowledges in the early part of the Epistle all that grace had wrought in their midst, and it is not until he reaches his farewell words that he plainly expresses his fears concerning them, and thereby indicates evils that were still at work among them.

He says, "I fear . . . lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed" (12: 20 21). In his first Epistle he had laid certain definite charges at their door upon the evidence of reliable witnesses. In his second Epistle he writes with greater freedom of spirit, which he expresses in 2 Cor. 6: 11, and consequently he is bold to tell them

what he *feared* concerning them.

The Apostle well knew the devices of Satan, as he tells us in the early part of the Epistle, and the subtle workings of the flesh. In reference to the shocking immorality exposed in the first Epistle, he had reminded them that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Hence he deduced that the leaven of immorality had worked and that others besides the man who had been put away from their midst had been guilty, and he feared lest, their cases not having been specifically brought to light, repentance had not really been wrought in their hearts — repentance to salvation from the evils that had overcome them.

Further, he knew that "false apostles, deceitful workers" had gained access into their midst, and he described the moral features of these men in 2 Cor. 11: 1 to 4, and 2 Cor. 11: 12 to 20. They appeared in the midst of the primitive assemblies as the very apostles of Christ, yet the effect of their teachings was to turn aside from the truth of the gospel (verse 4), and to corrupt from simplicity as to Christ (verse 3). Instead of condemning the flesh as a judged thing they gloried in it (verse 18) and they exercised, as might be expected, a highly fleshly "ministry" — exalting themselves, brow-beating the saints, devouring them by extracting money and possessions from them, and bringing them into spiritual bondage to their false teachings. All this verse 20 shows.

Inspired by the Spirit of God, Paul well knew what would be the effect of the mischievous activities of these men. Glorifying in the flesh themselves, they would promote the activities of the flesh in all who fell under their influence, and thus fill the assembly with strife and confusion. No less than eight words are used in 2 Cor. 12: 20 to describe the conditions which the Apostle feared must prevail in their midst — words all of which portray the out-workings of the evil spirit of jealousy and envy.

*Let us faithfully apply this warning portion of the Word of God to ourselves.* It is true that men have always cultivated the flesh, but in our days the thing has been reduced to a fine art. Modern theories of education insist that the great thing is to instruct the rising generation in "self-expression," so that every ability and impulse may be developed and not restrained. This may mean the development of latent powers in the fields of art and science and invention. It certainly must mean a development of flesh in its most self-assertive and pugnacious form. Let the infection of these ideas spread in the church of God, and debates, envyings, wrath, strifes, back-bitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults, will be more than ever manifest; and the unedifying spectacle will be seen of even true believers filled with envyings of each other, puffed up in their mind, resulting in angry arguments, the whispering of stories to each other's discredit behind the backs and positive disorders.

When these things come to pass, a process of disintegration has set in, which, if not checked by the grace and power of God, must ultimately lead to dissolution.

Can we discern, in the case of the Corinthians, anything which predisposed them to fall victims to this particular danger? Is something of a fundamental nature disclosed to us which lay at the root of all these troubles? We believe that the passage, 2 Cor. 6: 11-18, supplies the answer. They were, alas! maintaining alliances with the world. They had not accepted as yet that clear-cut separation which took them out of the zone of the world's infection — if we may so speak. Maintaining alliance with the world-system, religious teachers who sprang from the world-system (for "religion" forms a well-recognized department of world order) found an easy means of slipping into their midst, and their teachings and influence promoted the very evils which are before us.

In this great passage the Spirit of God contrasts Christianity proper with the world. Both are set forth in their essential characters. The one is characteristically righteousness, light, Christ, a believer, the temple of God. The other, unrighteousness, darkness, Belial, an unbeliever, idols. No modifying

circumstances are allowed to obscure the issue. It is true, alas I that Christianity is not always displayed according to its essential character. It is equally true that the world wears many dresses fair to behold and by no means always displays itself in its true guise. Still that is what the world-system is, and from it the believer is to be free.

It is *unrighteousness*, for it is wholly out of right relations with God, and consequently right relations as between man and man are absent too.

It is *darkness*, for the **light** of the knowledge of God is lost and unknown, and no mere light of science lit by man's devising — even if it be true science and not that "science, falsely so-called," which consists of speculations and guesses — can make up for the absence of the true sun from the firmament of man's mind.

*Belial* is the god or prince of this world, dominating, though secretly, its councils and its plans.

Unbelievers are the units that go to the making up of the world-system. The system itself had its rise in the minds of the unbelieving, and it now utterly dominates the mind of mankind wherein it had its birth. Unbelievers are the subjects of the kingdom dominated by Belial.

*Idols* are the many things, often trifling in themselves, which men pursue as objects of desire and which consequently usurp in their souls that place of supremacy which properly belongs to God alone. By means of idols Belial maintains his sway over the minds of unbelievers, blinding them to the "light of the glorious gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 4: 4), keeping them in darkness and in unrighteousness as regards their relations with God.

With such a condition of things there can be no compromise without grave damage to the Christian. What fellowship, what communion, what concord, what part, what agreement can there be? None whatever, and if any be ever attempted it can only result in the introduction of infection from without into the assembly of God. It will also result in terrible loss of power to the assembly, since alliance with the world is like a breakdown of insulation in an electric plant. We have no need to wonder at the many ills that afflict the church of God to-day nor at the small measure of the energy of the Spirit available to counteract them.

**The introduction of the world and its principles**, by unholy alliance with it, works disintegration in the church of God. What will act as an antidote to this state of things? The affirmation of truth, even heavenly truth as in 2 Cor. 3: 6 to 2 Cor. 5: 9; or of the searching truth of the judgment seat as in 2 Cor. 5: 10 and onwards, is not of itself enough. **THERE MUST BE THE SEVERANCE OF THESE WORLD LINKS.**

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." We come into contact with all sorts of men in our daily business or employment. Had we to be separate in that sense, then we "needs go out of the world" (1 Cor. 5: 10). We are not, however, to be unequally yoked with them. It is the "yoke" we have to beware of, for it is well-nigh impossible to be *equally* yoked with an unbeliever.

Are there any "yokes" today? Why, they simply abound. They are multiplying at a great rate. Societies, unions, federations, guilds, orders, sodalities, exist in appalling profusion, and — we write it with sorrow — the Christian who is not enmeshed by them is a rarity indeed. Here, lying right before our very eyes, is the thing that largely accounts for the sad disintegration and lack of power which are so manifest and so much deplored amongst Christians.

What are we going to do about it? There is only one thing to do — OBEY. "Come out . . . and

*touch* not the unclean thing, SAITH THE LORD," and we must *obey*. No light as to the truth of God, no correct church position exempts us from the obligation of obedience.

Obedience, however, it will be urged, is certain to entail suffering and loss. Precisely: and hence those gracious words also covered by the "saith the Lord" — "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." These words are not the declaration of relationship as are the words in John 20: 17, but rather the One who is our Father saying that if men refuse us He will receive us, if they would antagonise us, He will fulfil to us the Father's part. He will "father" us indeed. In the light of such promises we need not fear. We should rather be encouraged to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7: 1); seeing to it that we are not content with an outward separation, however necessary, but supplementing it with that cleansing of spirit which perfects holiness in the fear of God.

Shall we not, one and all, seek from God an enlargement, by obedience to this commandment from the mouth of the Lord? It would check disintegration. It would promote an integration that would be according to God.

## 5. Diversion. Colossians.

The believers at Colosse were not babes in Christ like those at Thessalonica, nor were they in a carnal state like the Corinthians. On the contrary, the Apostle Paul could address them as "saints and *faithful* brethren in Christ," for "the word of the truth of the gospel" had come to them and brought forth fruit in them. They were marked by "faith in Christ Jesus" and "love . . . to all the saints." All this the apostle acknowledges in his opening words, and in Colossians 2 he supplements it by crediting them with "steadfastness" as to their faith in Christ and also with "order."

Among the Thessalonians there were those who walked in disorderly fashion as regards their personal lives and behaviour (see 2 Thess. 3: 6). Among the Corinthians there was much disorder in their assembly life and gatherings together, so that a long passage (1 Cor. 11: 17-14: 40) is taken up with instructions of a corrective nature, and even then the apostle has to say, "The rest will I set in order when I come" (1 Cor. 11: 34). The Colossians were in happy contrast to all this. They had received the instructions that relate to Christian life and activity, whether of a personal or assembly nature, and they were governed by them. Under the leadership of various able and gifted men Christians may have adopted in turn a dozen differing forms, all of which may appear very orderly, but which, nevertheless, would be every one of them but *disorder* because *astray from the divine ordering*. The Colossians, however, could be truly credited with "order" since they were *obedient to the divine ordering*.

All this was very good, and the Colossian believers as a result were a cause of much thanksgiving and joy to the apostle even though, having been converted through the instrumentality of others, they had not seen his face in the flesh. Their condition was a spiritual one, and we might almost speak of them as advanced Christians. Yet Paul's loving heart discerned a threatening danger even for them, and in Colossians 2: 8 to 23 he exposes it.

The danger was that of being *diverted* from Christ who is the all-supplying, all-sufficient Head of His body, the church. The subtle adversary aimed at bringing in that which would prevent them "holding the Head" — maintaining, that is, an intimate contact and communion with Him, so that He should be the Source and Governor of all our thoughts and ways. The Head securely "holds" us, the members of His body, but do we "hold" Him? The adversary knows well that if this diversion of the

saints from Christ can be effected innumerable mischiefs, innumerable spiritual diseases, will arise.

And what was it that threatened to accomplish this serious diversion for the Colossians? The answer may be thought surprising, but this is it nevertheless — *human intellect*. The danger was consequently one that would especially threaten intelligent and advanced Christians, such as they were.

"Beware," said the apostle, "lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." The force of the word "spoil" is not to *mar* but to *capture*, i.e., to take as a spoil or prey. Nothing does more easily capture intellectual people than the philosophy of the world-teachers, because it is so very abstruse and involved. It represents the highest flights of the reflective and imaginative powers of the human intellect. Here, however, it is coupled with "vain" or "empty" deceit, which affords us a sure insight into what it really is according to the divine view.

Having surveyed very imperfectly some part of the material universe and observed or deduced what they believe to be the laws governing it, men love to speculate upon the mysteries of its origin and its character. They attempt the solution of a problem only knowing, and that imperfectly, some tiny fraction of the factors involved in it. Is it likely then that their philosophies will stand? Moreover, could they become possessed of ALL the facts governing the case their minds would break down under the weight of them, for only a mind equal to the mind of God would be capable of comprehending the inter-relation of all the facts and so drawing correct conclusions. What hope is there, then, in philosophy? It is only "after the tradition [or, teaching] of men, after the rudiments [or, elements] of the world," and we Christians should know something of what men and the world are. It is not "after Christ," and hence has the effect of diverting from Him.

The human intellect, however, works very busily in another sphere altogether. There is also the unseen universe — what we may call the sphere of *religion* — and subtle forces were at work here to divert the Colossians from Christ. There were those who would have ensnared them by a reversion to Judaism, judging them "in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." The substance, being available there must be great loss in turning back from it to that which is merely the shadow of it, and this loss is enhanced when the substance is "of Christ" — that which proceeds from and is identified with Him. Judaism, even a tinge of it brought into Christianity, diverts from Christ. This the adversary knew full well.

To many minds, however, it would appear a rather feeble and reactionary thing to hark back to Judaism. "What!" they would exclaim, "are we not capable of thinking for ourselves in things religious? Let us not be bound hand and foot by the past, but let us make our own independent advance. "They have done so with sad results, which call forth another apostolic warning, commencing with the words, "Let no man beguile you of your reward" (verse 18).

The passage extending from this verse to the end of the chapter is not an easy one. It is difficult even as to its translation, as may be seen if the New Translation by J. N. Darby (large edition with full footnotes) be consulted. Still it is quite clear that in it we are warned, firstly, against *angel-olatry* — including, of course, the worship of "saints" who after death are credited with angel-like existence and powers. Secondly, we are warned against *ordinances* connected with things that perish in their use, which may be imposed upon us after the commandments and doctrines of men. Thirdly, against *asceticism*, which, though it may appear a proceeding of much humility and denial of self, is really one which ministers to the satisfaction of the flesh in those who practise it. Indeed, this feature, *the satisfaction of the FLESH*, is what marks the whole movement, for the worship of angels, though

apparently a very humble kind of thing, is really connected with being "puffed up" as to the "fleshly mind."

We have no hesitation in identifying the danger that is unmasked for us in Colossians 2: 18 to 23 as *Ritualism*; just as we have *Judaism* in Colossians 2: 16, and *Rationalism* in Colossians 2: 8. The Ritualistic error diverts from Christ as much as the other two, for those who are ensnared by it are "not holding the Head," who is Christ.

Thus far we have listened to the warnings of the apostle. We now turn to the great realities which he brought before them as being in the nature of an antidote.

These may be summarized under three heads: (1) The knowledge of Christ Himself personally. (2) The knowledge of "the mystery." (3) The understanding of the bearing and force of His death and resurrection. If we possess ourselves, through grace, of these three, we shall, indeed, "be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1: 9).

On the one hand, the truth of the gospel is so divinely simple that the mind of a little child, illumined by the Holy Ghost, can sweetly take it in. On the other, the deep things of God, made known to us in Christianity, are of such scope and profundity as to overshadow the greatest human mind ever opened by the Spirit to receive them. Let us make no mistake about this. The truth revealed to us in Scripture will more than fill and satisfy the intellect of widest range and greatest powers, *if that intellect is possessed by one who is self judged and under the control and teaching of the Holy Ghost*. Taught by the Spirit — whatever be the range of our intellects — we have to cry with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" For the truth is beyond us in its depth; yet we may lay hold of it with "spiritual understanding" as opposed to mere natural intelligence, and "in all wisdom" since it will be knowledge not merely theoretic but applied.

In Colossians 1: 13 to 22 CHRIST personally is presented with wonderful fulness. He is "the Son of God's love," "the image of the invisible God," "the Firstborn of every creature" because the Creator. He is the Former of all things, the One by whom they hang together. He is "the Head of the body the church," "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead," so that He holds the pre-eminent place in every sphere. On earth He accomplished redemption, and the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him to that end. Moreover, that which He was on earth He is to-day, for "In Him *dwelleth* all the fulness of the Godhead bodily " (Col. 2: 9), and consequently, we are "complete" or "filled full" in Him.

Our completeness in Christ is emphasized in connection with the danger of Rationalism. The fitness of this is evident. In order to be a rationalist you must enthrone the human intellect as supreme, and this must necessarily involve the dethronement of the mind of God as revealed in Christ. The rationalist is of necessity the enemy of *Revelation*, and the revelation of God in Christ is the total destruction of rationalism. Rationalism may admit a human "Jesus" as a great seer or prophet or thinker, but that is all. The knowledge of Christ as the One in whom the Godhead-fulness came into perfect display and revelation dispels the mists of rationalism for ever.

And for ourselves, Christians of the twentieth century, is there any danger from this direction? Most assuredly, — very much so. The so-called "modernism" is just religious rationalism, and it is spreading as a plague. It can, however, only infect those who have no active, vital faith in the Godhead-glory of Christ. The full knowledge of Christ as presented here lifts the soul entirely out of the range of the miasma of modernism.

Then, also, Paul sets before these Colossians "the mystery of God" — that particular part of truth

which had been hidden from previous ages and generations, but which was now revealed as the crowning point of God's purposes and the completing of His word. In it (for so Colossians 2: 3 must be read) "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," since it was only when it came to light that the whole circle of God's thoughts and purposes came clearly into view.

A story has been told of the artist Turner standing with an art critic in his studio. The critic inspected one of his pictures, and confessed himself somewhat baffled, when Turner stepped forward and placed with his brush a single dot or splash of crimson on the canvas. The effect was extraordinary. It seemed to set everything in right perspective and make all intelligible and harmonious. So it was when the "mystery" or "secret" of God was revealed through Paul. Its effect at once was to make the whole scheme of God's will and counsel intelligible. His ways and dealings which had before seemed dark and mysterious were made plain. It became the key to unlock the knowledge of His will.

Apart from this, however, the mystery is of great excellence in itself. The apostle writes of "the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1: 27). It has its own peculiar "glory" and in that glory rich treasures are enfolded. One aspect only of the mystery is alluded to here and that the *subjective*. In Ephesians we have the mystery considered from an *objective* standpoint — the Gentiles, "fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Col. 3: 6). An election of grace from amongst the Gentile nations brought jointly with an elect remnant from amongst Israel into heirship as regards the inheritance and into the same body, which is Christ's body, and into all that is promised in Christ. The character of both the inheritance and the body are developed in Ephesians 1 and 2.

The subjective counterpart to this is that Christ is in these elect Gentiles; the hope because the pledge of the day of glory when Christ will fill not merely Gentile believers but "all things" (see Eph. 4: 10). We are "in Christ," and that carries with it our fellow-heirship, our being of the same body, our joint-participation in His promise. Being of His body, Christ, the Head, is in us, and the more truly we hold the Head the more effectively will His life and character be seen in us. Christ in us, Gentiles, is a little sample and pledge of the coming day of glory when all things shall be headed up in Him, and He will fill all things over which He is Head. If we have the full assurance of understanding in the full knowledge of this, the stark-naked poverty of rationalism, whether as Modernism or in any other form, will be perfectly apparent to us. Neither shall we be enticed by ritualism. Who desires to traffic with angels or ordinances or ascetic practices when we are put into such intimate relations with the Head? Members of the Privy Council who have access to His Majesty's person and councils never betray any desire to interview and accept orders from the chauffeur who drives the royal motor-car or the footman who opens the door into the audience chamber. Why should they? It would be a strangely inverted procedure to do so. Not more inverted, however, than the procedure of the ritualist, who, overlooking the fact that as Man Christ is his Head, desires to place angels or ordinances between.

Thirdly, there is the bearing of the death and resurrection of Christ upon these matters. We believers are circumcised in His circumcision, that is, we have died with Christ. Thereby the flesh has been disowned (for Colossians 2: 11 should read "the putting off of the body of the flesh"). Thereby also "the handwriting of ordinances" has been abolished and principalities and powers have been spoiled. We have also been raised with Him, and this involves being quickened together with Him.

We *are* dead with Christ, and this being so, how can we be subject to the ritualistic ordinances, all of which recognize the flesh which the cross has disowned? We *are* risen with Christ, and this being so, how can we set our minds on things on the earth rather than on things above? How can we then be entrapped in a ritualistic system of religion which cultivates the flesh and occupies its votaries with

earthly things?

If, then, we are to be preserved from the danger of being diverted from Him we must just have Himself abidingly before us. — CHRIST in the fulness of His personal and official glory; CHRIST as the One to be expressed in connection with the mystery of God; CHRIST once dead but now risen, our position in relation to all things being simply determined by His.

## **6. Dissension. Philippians.**

Of all the early churches, of which we have any notice in the Scriptures, not one appears to have been in a more healthy condition than that at Philippi. In the epistle that Paul wrote to them we do not find anything 'hat would lead us to infer that they excelled in intelligence and understanding, nor is there any unfolding of the counsel of God. The personal note is prominent right through the epistle, for what specially marked them was their wholehearted love for, and identification with, the apostle who at so great a risk to himself brought the gospel to them, as Acts 16 records.

Paul could thank God upon every remembrance of them. They had him in their hearts — as the marginal reading of Philippians 1: 7 puts it — and consequently from the first day until the time of writing their fellowship with Paul in the gospel had been marked. Their large-hearted liberality was Remarkable and exceptional as witnessed by Philippians 4: 10 to 18, and 2 Cor. 8: 1-5. This latter Scripture — where the apostle was writing about them to others — shows that they were then marked by four things: —

1. A great trial of affliction.
2. Abundance of spiritual joy.
3. Deep poverty.
4. Riches of liberality.

They gave to their power and even beyond their power, exceeding Paul's expectations. Moreover, they began with that which is greatest, giving their own selves to the Lord. It is easy to give of our substance without giving ourselves, whereas if we give ourselves to the Lord, our substance is necessarily surrendered also, to be used henceforth as He directs. This the Philippians did.

It is evident, therefore, that love of a divine sort was very active among the Philippians, both towards the apostle and towards all saints. That love was to "abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. 1: 9), for there is always room for enlargement in the divine nature; still, if love is the real measure of our spiritual stature, as 1 Cor. 13 indicates, then the Philippians were to be reckoned amongst the spiritually great. Paul himself called them his "joy and crown" (Phil. 4: 1).

Yet there was "a fly in the ointment" even with these devoted Christians. Dissension had sprung up between two sisters in their midst, and this threatened their peace and their joy, for it is a highly infectious complaint. Nothing is easier under these circumstances than for others to have their sympathies or prejudices awakened, so that they fly to arms and side with the contending parties; and so the whole assembly may be convulsed over something that in its beginning was a very trivial matter. For the moment it may be but a disagreement between Euodias and Syntyche, but who shall say whereto it may extend if not checked, so that they be "of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4: 1-3).

Paul evidently felt how important it was that these excellent Christian women should be lifted out of their dispute, and he entreats one whom he calls a "true yoke-fellow" (probably Epaphroditus) to

help them seeing that they were saints of no mean worth who had laboured with him, or shared his conflicts, in the gospel.

It looks, therefore, as if the dispute between them was not over some worldly matter, not a case of a quarrel based upon idle and foolish talkings, such as are at all times so common, but rather a disagreement over something connected with the Lord's interests and service. Now Paul himself had once been involved in a matter of this sort, as Acts 15: 37-40 tells us, and the contention between himself and Barnabas had been of so sharp a character as to divide them asunder as far as their future service was concerned. With this in mind we can understand how acutely he felt the situation at Philippi, and how urgently he desired that they might be of one mind in the Lord.

As a consequence of this the Epistle to the Philippians is pre-eminently the epistle of the *mind*. The very word itself occurs a number of times.

The first chapter might well be called the chapter of the *devoted* mind. In it Paul is led to speak of his own trying circumstances as a prisoner in Rome with his life hanging in the balance. He is, however, in no state of feverish anxiety to escape. He knew well, for he had already been caught up into the third heaven (see 2 Cor. 12: 1-7), that to depart and to be with Christ is very much better than the life of service here, yet he was well content to stay and toil on if thereby the Lord's interests in His saints should be served. He had before him one thing, and one thing only, that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. Such was his mind, a devoted mind indeed, and he exhorted the Philippians to the same when he urged them to "stand fast in one spirit with one mind [one soul] striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1: 27).

The second chapter is clearly the chapter of the *lowly* mind. A great deal of the difficulty which comes in amongst Christians lies just here.

The apostle had just experienced most sweetly the "consolation in Christ," the "comfort of love," the "fellowship of the Spirit," the "bowels and mercies" found in the saints of God, in connection with the visit of Epaphroditus, bearing the gifts of the Philippian assembly. All this was a joy to him, but he tactfully intimates to them that one thing remained if they wished to fill the cup of his joy up to the brim. They must be "likeminded, having the same love." They must be "of one accord, of one mind" — or, more literally — "joined in soul, the one thing minding." Here we have that which lies behind the "one thing I do" of Phil. 3: 13, for the secret of doing one thing is minding or thinking one thing.

We all feel at once how desirable a thing this is. If we have any knowledge of ourselves and of the state of affairs generally among the people of God, we know that it is to all appearance an impossible thing. Yet there is a way by which it may be achieved, and verses 3 and 4 show us that way. Nothing is to be done in the spirit of contention or vainglory, but everything in that lowliness of mind which leads one to esteem others above themselves, and consider the things of others and not only the things of self.

The "one mind" of verse 2 is certainly to be achieved if the lowly mind of verse 3 is produced in us all. A difficulty, however, would still be felt if the lowly mind were to us only an abstract conception. We want it to be a living reality before our eyes, and we have it thus in Christ Jesus.

If there is to be only *one* mind, *whose* mind is that one mind to be? — "Let *this* mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

At first sight it would seem strange that to the carnal Corinthians the apostle should write "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2: 16), whereas he exhorts the devoted Philippians to have in them the mind that was in Christ Jesus. The two Scriptures are, however, perfectly consistent, as the words used

for "mind" differ. To the Corinthians he says, "we have *the thinking faculty* of Christ" — inasmuch as "we have received . . . the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." To the Philippians he says, "Let this *way of thinking* be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

And what was His way of thinking? The succeeding verses 6-8 present it to us — a passage wonderful beyond all words. The first man, Adam, conceived the idea of exalting himself in the scale of creation, to become even as gods: and he fell. The whole Adamic race inherits by nature *that way of thinking*. And here is Christ, who before incarnation was "in the form of God." It was to Him no unlawful thing to be equal with God for He was God, and therefore it was impossible for Him to be higher than He was. Before Him were only the two alternatives, of staying exactly where and as He was, or of coming in incarnation upon a downward path that would not stop short of the death of the cross. *His way of thinking was to come down and humble Himself.*

Adam's way of thinking has filled the earth with sin and strife, and there remains with us each the tendency to think as Adam, inasmuch as the flesh is still within us. Christ's way of thinking is life and peace, and having His nature, His Spirit, we have the capacity to think as He thinks. We infinitely prefer Christ to Adam. The contemplation of His mind fills us with adoration and worship. Let us then think as He thinks. With our present imperfections of understanding we might even then not see exactly eye to eye about everything but the element of *dissension* would be eliminated from our differences.

The third chapter is the chapter of *the heavenly mind*. The Christ, who in His downward path of humiliation is so excellent an Example to us, is glorified on high as an excellent Object before us, and the knowledge of Himself as in that glory is the thing to impart a heavenly direction and character to our lives and energy and decision on our way. Paul's first sight of the heavenly Christ on the road to Damascus led him to discard all his natural advantages as worthless (verse 7), and now writing long years after, with an enlarged experience of "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" his Lord, coupled with suffering and loss for His sake, he more than ratifies his early decision (verse 8). He had but one desire — to reach Him in His resurrection glory even if it meant martyrdom to do so (verses 10, 11). He calls upon us all to follow him in this (verses 15, 16). If we are "thus minded" with him we, as well as Euodias and Syntyche, will find it more possible to be "of the same mind in the Lord."

The fourth chapter is the chapter of *the contented mind*. Paul himself in a Roman prison is no more disposed to grumble than when he first made the acquaintance of the Philippians and sang praises in their local jail. He had learned in whatsoever state he was to be content; but then he practised what he presses on the Philippians.

In verse 6 of this chapter he bids them to unburden their minds of care by freely making known their requests to God, with thanksgiving. This would keep or garrison their minds with peace. Then having unloaded their minds of care he bids them fill their minds up to the brim with all that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report, of virtue and of praise. "*Think,*" he says, "on these things." One thing further remains, "Those things . . . *do*" (verse 9). Let all those lovely things that fill our minds work out into action and practice, and "the God of peace shall be with you" - and with us. Dissension dies in the presence of *the God of peace*.

The choicest believers and the choicest assemblies have all too often been overcome by dissension. Let us therefore pay diligent heed to the remedy.