

1 Corinthians

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Introduction

WE NOW ENTER upon the epistle which above all others deals with matters concerning the local assembly, and the order which by Divine appointment should be observed in it. The church, or assembly, of God in Corinth was a large one, as we gather from Acts 18: 10. It had within it some very unsatisfactory elements, as is not unusual in such a case, and these elements were introducing ways and habits and even doctrines, of a sort which were common enough in the Corinthian world, but which were absolutely foreign to the nature and spirit of the assembly of God. Partly perhaps it was due to the ignorance of the Corinthian saints, for they had written a letter of enquiry to the Apostle Paul, who had brought the Gospel to them, as to certain matters, as is indicated in 1 Cor. 7: 1. Still Paul not only answered their questions but also brings home to them in most vigorous language their grievous errors both in behaviour and doctrine. This he did not in annoyance or anger or sarcasm, but, "out of much affliction and anguish of heart . . . with many tears" (2 Cor. 2: 4). Hence the powerful effect which his letter produced, as evidenced in 2 Corinthians 7: 8-11.

1 Corinthians 1

HAVING TO WRITE in this corrective strain Paul very naturally emphasizes at the outset the apostolic place of authority which he held from God; and further, he associates with himself one of themselves. Sosthenes came from Corinth (see Acts 18: 17), and apparently was converted after the beating he got from the Greeks as chief ruler of the synagogue, having supplanted Crispus, who was

converted somewhat earlier.

Two important facts confront us in the second verse. First, that only those who were sanctified in Christ, who were saints by the call of God, and who called upon Jesus as Lord, composed the church of God at Corinth. Second, that though the epistle was written primarily to the assembly at Corinth, yet secondarily ALL who called upon Christ as Lord were in view, no matter where they might be located. The same Lord was "both theirs and ours," and hence all saints were under a common Authority.

We do well to note with care the first fact, for the word, *church*, is used with a variety of meanings today. We may get an idea of its true meaning according to Scripture from this verse. None but true believers are saints, sanctified in Christ. It is on the other hand a fact that some may professedly call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord without being true believers, and this accounts for passages in this epistle where Paul takes them up on the ground of their profession and says things which implies that some among them *might* NOT be real. Still, speaking generally, if a man professes faith he must be accepted as real, until proved to be otherwise.

We do well also to observe and digest the second fact, with its significance, and the consequences that flow from it. It quite definitely shows that though each assembly has its own local conditions, and state, and responsibilities, yet it cannot be dissociated from the whole — from the church of God in its universal aspect. The order which this epistle enjoins upon the Corinthians is equally enjoined upon all saints everywhere. The discipline which was to be effected at Corinth, while affecting Corinth *immediately*, had its bearing *ultimately* upon the whole church. The recognition of this fact will preserve us from the mistake of treating each assembly as though it were an independent and autonomous unit — from laying such stress upon the local assemblies as to overshadow the fact of the unity of the whole church of God.

Paul's desire for the Corinthians was that grace and peace might be ministered to them. There was evidently a good deal of discord in their midst, which would have been eliminated had a larger measure of grace been amongst them. Yet the grace of God had been ministered to them in Christ, as verse 4 states, and that moved him to thanksgiving. Moreover, from the grace of God had sprung all the gifts that they possessed, while waiting for the coming of the Lord. The God who had called them to the fellowship of His Son is faithful as well as gracious, and consequently he was confident that they would be confirmed without blame to the end.

Notice how repeatedly the Lord Jesus Christ is named in the first nine verses, and how everything is attributed to, and referred to, Him. It is His Name, His grace, His testimony, His coming, His day, His fellowship. All this reinforces, and is intended to reinforce, the strong remonstrance of the Apostle which opens in verse 10. There were divisions, or parties, among them, leading to contention and strife. These parties struck a blow at the fact that they had been called to the fellowship of the One who is God's Son and our Lord.

When David was at Adullam, in the time of his rejection, men flocked to his standard and he became captain over them. They entered his fellowship for he was the central figure. Had he been smitten the fellowship would have ceased to be. We are called into the fellowship of One who also is in rejection, yet is infinitely greater than David. The One who is Captain over us is God's Son. The fellowship to which we belong is dominated by Him, without a rival.

In the light of this, how great is the evil of party-making or party spirit, even though honoured names be attached to the parties, or even the very name of Christ be adopted as a party label. From 1 Cor. 4: 6, we gather that the Corinthians were actually forming their parties round gifted and able men in their own assembly, and that the Apostle avoided the mention of their names by inserting his own

with Apollos and Peter. Thus he maintained the delicate courtesy which is characteristic of Christianity, and at the same time heightened the effect of his argument. Paul was their spiritual father, but even to say, "I am of Paul" is not admissible

Divisions — i.e., schisms or parties — always lead to contentions. God's desire is that we should be united in one mind and judgment. Though at a distance, tidings of the sad state of the Corinthians had reached Paul's ears, and he dealt faithfully with them. At the same time he plainly stated whence his information came. The house of Chloe could not lay information against them and yet remain anonymous, saying, "Don't let anyone know that we told you!" So also Paul himself avoided all vague and indefinite charges. He was quite explicit and definite in his statement, as indicated by the words, "Now this I say . . ." If such safeguards were always observed when charges must be brought, it would be well.

The questions of verse 13 are very much to the point. Christ is one. He only has been crucified for us. To His name alone have we been baptized. Paul was thankful that though so long at Corinth he had not baptized any of them, save two or three. In the commission given to the twelve (Matt. 28 and Mark 16) baptism had a prominent place. In his commission from Christ all the stress had been laid upon the preaching of the Gospel, and not upon baptism. It is possible of course that baptism was playing a part in these divisions and contentions at Corinth. Be that as it may, verse 17 makes it very clear that not baptism but the Gospel of the cross of Christ is the thing of all importance. And moreover, the cross must be preached in a way that does not nullify its meaning and power.

This brings us to verses 18 to 24, a great passage wherein the real force and bearing of the cross of Christ is revealed to us: the cross, that is, as passing the sentence of condemnation upon man, and of destruction upon his wisdom; while at the same time it brings in the power and wisdom of God for the salvation of those who believe. The cross of Christ is the point at which in supreme measure the world took upon itself to join issue with God. It put the Son of God to death, a death of extremes" contempt and shame. God accepted the challenge, and in result the cross also became the supreme proof of the folly of human wisdom, of the disqualification and repudiation by God of even the greatest and wisest of men. Because of this, Paul was sent to preach the Gospel in a way that gave no quarter to human wisdom.

Because of this, also, the cross stands as "the great divide" amongst men whenever it is faithfully preached. On the one side of it stand "them that perish," on the other "us which are saved." To which class any individual belongs may be discerned by observing that individual's attitude toward the preaching of the cross. To the one it is but foolishness, for they adhere to the world and its wisdom. To the other it is the power of God, and that unto salvation. God saves by the foolishness of the preaching. The point of this remark in verse 21 is not that preaching appears a foolish *method* — as compared with working, for instance — but that the actual message preached — *the word of the cross* — is foolishness according to human notions, but is wisdom and power according to God.

The world has its wisdom. When the Son of God arrived within its reach and scrutiny the world tested Him according to the accepted standards of its wisdom, denounced Him as acting by the power of the prince of the demons, and crucified Him. The wisdom of the world did not enable men to recognize God when they saw Him; the rather, they mistook Him for the devil. If that is the ripest fruit of the wisdom of the world then it is utterly worthless in the things of God, and condemned of God. And this is the case whether we look at Jew or Gentile.

Both Jew and Greek had their idiosyncracies. The one required signs, as the fruit of God's frequent miraculous interventions in their past history: only the sign had to be of a certain order to

satisfy them. The other almost worshipped the human intellect, and wanted nothing that did not agree with current philosophic notions. To both Christ crucified was an offence. The Jew awaited the Christ, only He must be a splendid Being, and sensational according to their anticipations. The Greek would have welcomed a new philosopher to carry their speculations to a triumphant climax. Both were outraged by Christ crucified. Such a Christ was a hopeless stumbling-block to the Jew, and He appeared ridiculous beyond words to the Greek. *But there is no other Christ than the Christ who was crucified.*

And, through grace, no *other Christ is desired by us*. But then, we are amongst the "us which are saved." We are called of God, whether once we were Jews or Gentiles, and we can see that Christ really is both the power and the wisdom of God. He will bring to nothing all the mighty schemes of men in consummate wisdom and most decisive power and also establish all that God has purposed. At the same time His wisdom and power have wrought for our salvation. From the human standpoint the cross may be the foolishness and the weakness of God, but it is at the same time both wiser and stronger than men.

Now let us review these twenty-five verses that we may not miss the drift of the Apostle's argument in all this. The Corinthians were magnifying men — Christian men doubtless, and possibly very good ones at that — into leaders of parties in the assembly of God. This in effect struck a blow at the supreme and pre-eminent position of Christ; and it indicated that man, his powers, his wisdom, his gifts, had far too large a place in their thoughts. This in its turn indicated that they had but feebly realized the significance of the cross of Christ, which puts God's sentence of condemnation on man and his wisdom. Hence the Apostle's preaching of the cross, and hence his repudiation of mere human wisdom in the way he preached it.

The need for the preaching of the cross, in Pauline fashion, is not less in this twentieth century than it was in the first. Probably it is greater, inasmuch as never more than today was stress being laid upon the greatness and glory and wisdom of man. Never have men, even professing Christians sometimes, felt so pleased with their powers. Yet never has their lack of true wisdom been more manifest. The cross puts all into its real place. It makes everything of the Christ who suffered there. It makes nothing of man who put Him thereon. And that is right.

Have we learned and inwardly digested the meaning of the cross? Many millions in Christendom have turned it into an elegant symbol to be placed upon buildings devoted to religion, or even to be worn on the bosom, made in gold and studded with precious stones. Be it ours to have it engraved in "fleshly tables of the heart," in such fashion that we see through and eschew the tinsel glory of man, and seek ever and only the glory of Christ: that we are delivered from making much of any man, even the best of men, and above all from making much of ourselves. For us let it be Christ first, Christ last, Christ all the way through — Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Having unfolded the significance of the cross of Christ, the Apostle proceeds to show that its meaning had been corroborated by the effects it had produced. He appealed to the Corinthians to consider their own calling, for by *the preaching of the cross* they had been called. But few among them had been reckoned amongst the wise or mighty or noble of this world. The very opposite, for these were all too prone to stumble at such a message. The rather God had chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, and even things which are not.

In each case the Apostle speaks of them doubtless according to that which they were according to human reckoning, and it was astounding that God should choose and use such as these for the confounding and bringing to nought of much that looked to them so wise and honourable. At the same

time these words could no doubt be applied to that which the Corinthians really were in their unconverted days, and then the wonder is that they should have become what they now were, as the fruit of the Divine choice and workmanship. But whichever way we look at it the significance is the same. The practical effects of God's choice, and of His call by the preaching of the cross, were such as put no honour upon man. No flesh could glory in His presence. All glorying must be in the Lord.

The abundant reasons why we as believers may glory in the Lord are given us in verse 30. We are "in Christ Jesus," partakers of His life and sharing in His place and acceptance. And we are *that* "of God," and not in any way of man. God Himself is the source of all this grace which has reached us. It is true of course that we *are* "of God," as is clearly stated in 1 John 4: 4, and it is as "in Christ Jesus" that we are of God. But that is, we believe, hardly the point in the verse before us, but rather that all is of God and not of man whether we consider what we *are* in Christ, or what we *have* in Christ.

The second "of" in the verse is more literally "from." The Christ who was crucified is made unto us these things from God. Wisdom naturally comes first, inasmuch as it is the point under discussion. We need it, for sin has plunged us into ignorance and folly. But then sin has equally plunged us into guilt and condemnation; hence we need righteousness. And into contamination and corruption; whence our need of sanctification. And into bondage and slavery; so that we need redemption. Redemption comes last, inasmuch as it is a term which includes the final thing, the redemption of our bodies at the coming of the Lord.

Thus the cross excludes *in principle* all glorying in man. God's work in connection with the preaching of the cross also excludes it *in practice*. We have only the Lord in whom to glory, if we glory at all.

1 Corinthians 2

WHEN PAUL WAS commissioned to preach the Gospel he was instructed to do so in a way that would endorse the message he preached. This he stated in 1 Cor. 1: 17. Had he as a matter of fact done as he was told? He had. And in the opening verses of chapter 2 he reminds the Corinthians of the spirit that had marked him in his approach to them, and the character of his preaching. Verse 1 gives us the style of his preaching. Verse 2 the Subject of his message. Verse 3 the spirit that characterized him. Verse 4 reverts to the style of his preaching, but adding where his positive power lay. Verse 5 shows us the end he had in view.

As to style, he was no orator well versed in the arts of moving men by excellent or enticing speech. All that he eschewed, relying only upon the Spirit of God and His power.

For theme he had Christ and His cross only. Emphasize in your mind the two words, "among you." He knew the tendencies of the Corinthians, with their great ideas as to philosophy and the human intellect. He would not meet them on their ground and be enticed into philosophic discussions of their choosing. He determined that among them he would know nothing but Christ crucified. Paul started his career with Christ glorified, yet he knew well that except they believed on, and laid hold of, Christ crucified, nothing of a divine sort, would be done. The truth of a crucified Christ was that which laid in the dust all their pride and glory; and until man comes down into the dust he cannot begin with God.

And Paul's own spirit was in keeping with this. He did not arrive in their midst with a great flourish of trumpets, announcing himself as "Palestine's most powerful Preacher," or something of that sort, as is customary in this twentieth century. The very reverse. Weakness, fear, trembling, are the things he alludes to. He was acutely conscious that the flesh was still in him, that he might easily be

seduced from single-eyed fidelity to his Master, and betrayed into something which was not of God. He knew the mighty power of the devil, entrenched in Corinthian hearts. Hence his fear and trembling. And hence again the room for the demonstrated power of the Spirit of God, and the casting down of the devil's strongholds in human hearts. Would to God that there was more room made for the working of that power today!

Then we might see more of converts who really have their faith standing not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Up to the end of this fifth verse the Apostle has mentioned human wisdom eight times, in every case to utterly discredit it. From this some might imagine that wisdom of every kind is to be discounted. Others again might suppose that the Christian faith only appeals to the feelings and emotions, and hence has in it nothing worthy of the attention of a thinking man.

So, in verse 6, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the faith abounds in wisdom, only it is the wisdom of God, and not of the great ones of the earth. Moreover it is wisdom of a character that only appeals to "the perfect," to those who have graduated, or are full-grown. We may be believers, but as long as we are in any uncertainty as to how we stand before God, as long as we are in the throes of self-occupation over questions of deliverance from the power of sin, we have neither heart nor leisure to learn the wisdom of God as expressed in His counsels and purposes, which were once a secret but now are made known.

The word, *world*, in verse 6 is really, *age*. In another scripture Satan is spoken of as "the god of this age." The god of this age uses the princes of this age to propound the wisdom of this age, while blinding their minds so that they have no knowledge of God's wisdom which was ordained before all the ages. When the Lord of glory was here he so blinded their minds that they crucified Him.

This really is a tremendous indictment! The supreme Lord of glory was condemned to a death of supreme degradation and shame, and that not so much by the ignorant rabble as by the princes of this age. The very superscription on His cross was written in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew. The Greeks were incontestably the intellectual princes of the age. The Romans were the princes in matters of military prowess and the arts of government. The Hebrews were princes without a rival in matters of religion. Yet all were involved in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. All thereby revealed their complete ignorance of God and all brought themselves beneath His judgment.

The princes of this age "come to nought." Very humiliating this! Not only is "the understanding of the prudent" coming to "nothing," (1 Cor. 1: 19.) but the princes of this age themselves come to nothing. The final result, the sum total, of all the clever doings is *NOTHING*. The clever men themselves come to *NOTHING*. In contrast with this we are told by the Apostle John that "he that doeth the will of God *abideth* for ever" and again we have the Lord's words to His disciples that, "your fruit should *remain*." The believer, and the believer *only*, has power to engage in that which will abide to eternity. Let us consider this very attentively, and may our lives be governed by our meditations!

It is a marvellous thought that the wisdom of God, once hidden, but now made known, was "*ordained*" before the ages unto our glory. Not only were we ourselves chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, but God's wisdom had our glory in view before the ages began, and all was then ordained. And what God ordains never fails of consummation when God's hour is reached. Our glory then is certain, and is connected with, and subsidiary to, Christ's glory. Christ's glory is the supreme thing, but our glory is as certain as His, and equally ordained of God.

That which has been ordained, according to verse 7, has also been "*prepared*" (verse 9), and the

things prepared are altogether beyond man's reach, either by eye, ear or heart. We apprehend many things by using our eyes — that is, by *observation*. Many others we apprehend by using our ears, listening to what is handed down to us — that is, by *tradition*. Other things we apprehend by the heart instinctively — that is, by *intuition*. We apprehend the things of God in none of these ways; but by *revelation*, as verse 10 shows.

The things prepared have been *revealed* by the Spirit. The "us" of that verse is primarily the apostles and prophets to whom the truth was first made known. The truth has reached the general body of saints through them, as we shall see in a moment. But in verse 11 we are made to think of the competency of the Spirit to reveal, since He is the Spirit of God. Only the human spirit can really know human things. Just so, only the Spirit of God knows the things of God and is competent to make them known.

But believers have received the Spirit of God as verse 12 states. Thus it is that we have competency to apprehend the things of God. No research, no experiment, no learning, no intellectual powers, can give us that competency; only the Spirit of God.

Let us take this very much to heart, for we live in an age marked by research and experiment and intellectual activity and it is commonly supposed that the human mind is capable of dealing with the things of God just as it deals with the things of man. IT IS NOT. Hence the fearful spiritual blunders perpetrated by otherwise learned men. Highly qualified are they in human things: yet pitifully blind and ignorant of the Divine.

Are we all keen to know the things of God? We certainly should be. We have a personal interest in them. The things "ordained," "prepared," and "revealed" have been "*given* to us of God." Are we possessing ourselves, in spiritual understanding and enjoyment, of our possessions?

We may be, since the things revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets have been *communicated* to us in divinely ordered words. This verse 13 tells us. The words "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," may be rendered "communicating spiritual [things] by spiritual [means]" (N. Tr.). Here the apostle definitely claims inspiration, and *verbal* inspiration at that, for his spoken utterances. Even more so then, if that were possible, for his written utterances. The inspiration claimed definitely relates to "words." If we have not got in the Scriptures (as originally written) *God's thoughts* clothed in *God-chosen words*, we have no inspiration of any real value at all.

The last link in this wonderful chain is "discerned." If we today do not discern God's things through God's word it will not avail us much that they have been ordained, prepared, revealed, given and communicated. They may be ours: *are* ours, if indeed we are Christians; but for practical blessing today, we must discern them. And the discerning on our part is by the same Spirit, by whom they were revealed and communicated.

For discerning, we need the right spiritual condition. The "natural man," i.e., man in his natural or unconverted condition, does not discern them at all. The "spiritual," i.e., the converted man, not only indwelt but also governed and characterized by the Spirit of God, alone can take them in. Possessing the Spirit we have the mind of Christ. Governed by the Spirit the eyes of our hearts are opened to understand.

The word "judgeth," occurring twice in verse 15, is just the word "discerneth," as the margin of a reference bible shows. Read *discerneth* and the sense is clearer. It is only the spiritual believer who has spiritual eyesight to see all things clearly.

Long ago someone was complaining: "I can't see it. I want more light!" It was said in reply, "It is

not more light you want; it is windows!" That was doubtless true. If we allowed the Spirit of God to clean up the windows of our souls we should soon see clearly.

1 Corinthians 3

IN THE OPENING verses of chapter 3, the Apostle brings the Corinthians face to face with their true condition in very plain words. Enriched as they were "in all utterance, and in all knowledge," they may have imagined themselves to be worthy of high commendation. In point of fact they came under definite censure. They were not spiritual but carnal.

They were not *natural*, for "the natural man" is man in his unconverted condition. Nor were they *spiritual*, for the spiritual man is man enlightened and controlled by the Spirit of God. They were *carnal*, for the carnal man, as spoken of in this passage, is man, who though possessing the Spirit, is controlled not by the Spirit but by the flesh. Being carnal, Paul had hitherto fed them with milk not meat; that is, he had only instructed them in the elementary things of the faith, and had not said much to them of that hidden wisdom of God, to which he alluded in chapter 2.

The Corinthians however might resent Paul's charge against them and wish to rebut it. So Paul proves his point by again referring to their divisions under party leaders, which generated envyings and strifes. In all this they were walking according to man and not according to the Spirit of God.

If the Apostle Paul wrote to us today, what would he say? What *could* he say, but the same thing with greatly added emphasis? The division of true saints into, or among, the many parties or sects could hardly go further than it has gone. We too might wish to rebut the charge. We might say — But are we not earnest? Have we not much light? Do we not expound Scripture correctly? The reply would come to us — While some say, I am of A — , and a few, I am of B — , while many say, I am of X — , and a multitude say, I am of Z — , *are ye not carnal?*

In so saying we are not unmindful of the fact that there are to be found some who are spiritually minded. There were some amongst the Corinthians, as a later chapter reveals. But this we do say, that they who *really* are spiritual will be the last people on earth who desire to stand out as exceptions, prominent and distinguished. They know that this would be the very way to help on the evil here denounced, for they would promptly find themselves made into leaders of parties! NO. Their spirituality will rather express itself in humility of mind, and that confession which makes the sin of all the people of God their own. They will pray in the spirit of Ezra 9. Ezra said, "OUR iniquities are increased over our head, and OUR trespass is grown up into the heavens," though personally he had had very little share in all the wickedness, but rather was marked by a very exceptional piety.

The same humble spirit marks Paul here. He promptly disclaims for himself any place of importance, and for Apollos also. Evidently he had full confidence in Apollos, that in this matter he was wholly like-minded with himself, and therefore he could freely use his name. Whilst his omission here of the name of Cephas (Peter), is a witness to his own delicacy of feeling; since there had once been a serious issue between himself and Peter, as Galatians 2 bears witness.

Neither Paul nor Apollos were anything more than servants by whom God had been pleased to work. God was the great Workman. In this passage (verses 5 to 11) the Corinthians are viewed in a twofold way, as God's husbandry, and as God's building. Paul and Apollos were but "God's fellow-workmen." That is the force of the first clause of verse 9. They were not *competing* workmen, much less were they *antagonistic* workmen. They were fellow-workmen, and both belonged to God.

Each however had his own distinctive work. In the husbandry, Paul planted and Apollos followed

to water the young plants: in the building, Paul was the wise architect who laid the foundation, and Apollos built upon it. Their labours were diverse, but their object was one. This is emphasized in verses 7 and 8. Paul and Apollos in themselves were nothing, yet they worked each in his appointed sphere. And both were *one* as to their object and aim, though each should finally be rewarded according to their own labour. Thus among His servants does God maintain both unity and diversity, and there is to be no pitting of one against another.

So much for Paul and Apollos. But they were not the only labourers who had taken part in the work at Corinth. So at the end of verse 10 the application of the figure is widened out to embrace "every man," that is, every man who had put his hand to the work at Corinth. It applies of course equally to any man who puts his hand to any work of God, anywhere, and at any time. It applies therefore to us today.

The foundation had been well and irrevocably laid by Paul when he first visited Corinth and stayed for a year and a half. It had been the right foundation — Jesus Christ. The question now was as to his successors. Not so much *how* they built as *what* they built in. Was it substance precious in nature, and capable of standing the fire? Or was it common in substance, and easily consumed? The day is coming when the fire test will be applied. Everything will be made manifest. The true character of all our work will be revealed. Not merely how much we have done, but "of what sort" it is. How searching is the thought that, "THE DAY shall declare it."

When *that* day sheds its light upon us and applies its test, it may leave our work standing. If so, we shall receive reward. God grant it may be so for each of us!

On the other hand, our work may be consumed and fall in ruins, yet we ourselves be saved, "so as through fire." When the three Hebrews passed through the fire, as recorded in Daniel 3, they and their clothes were wholly untouched: only their bonds were consumed. What loss for us if we come through the fire naked, stripped of all that with which we had clothed ourselves as the fruit of our labours here.

But further, there was evidently a doubt in the Apostle's mind whether all those who had wrought at Corinth were truly converted men. Hence the solemn warning of verses 16 and 17. Work may be done which is positively destructive in its effect upon the building. This raises a further important question. What is the *nature* of this building, which is God's?

The Apostle asks the Corinthians if they did not know that as God's building they had the character of His temple? In them as His temple God dwelt by His Spirit. This gave to them collectively a very sacred character. To do work which would "defile," or "corrupt," or "destroy," God's temple was terribly serious. If in the coming day any man's work is found to be of that destructive character, God will destroy him.

Apparently some who were going about in those days and doing, as Paul feared, this destructive work, were men who had a good deal of the wisdom of this world, and posed therefore amongst the saints, as very superior persons. This would account for the pungent words that fill verses 18 to 20. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. So let no man deceive himself on this point. And if the destructive workers still go about, deceived themselves, and deceiving others, let us not be deceived by them.

What woe and destruction must await the destructive critics, the semi-infidel modernistic teachers, of Christendom! Inflated by the wisdom of this world, they take it upon themselves to deny and contradict the wisdom of God. They may imagine that they only have to expect the opposition of unlearned and old-fashioned Christians. They forget the day that shall declare God's judgment — THE

DAY!

Let us not glory in men. Some of those in whom the Corinthians had been glorying may have been men of quite undesirable type. But let us not glory in the best of men. On the one hand, no man is worth it, as 1 Cor. 1 showed us. On the other hand, as emphasized here, grace has given us a place which should put us far above glorying in a mere man. "All things" are ours. All things? That is rather a staggering statement. Is it really *all things*? Well, look at the wide sweep of verse 22. The best of saints on the one hand, and the world on the other. Life on the one hand and death on the other. Things present on the one hand and things to come on the other. All are ours.

How are they ours? Verse 23 answers that. They are ours because we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. All things are God's. No one can dispute that, and there we begin. But then God has His Christ, who is the Heir of all things. And, most wonderful to say, the Christ proposes to practically possess Himself of His mighty possessions by putting His saints into possession. Even in Daniel 7 this is hinted at. The "Ancient of Days" takes the supreme throne. When He does, "One like the Son of Man" appears, and to Him there was given "dominion and glory and a kingdom." But that is not the end of the story, for we further read, "the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom." Read that chapter before proceeding further.

So all things *are* ours, and we must never forget it. The remembrance of it will lift us above the world with its false attractions, above the wisdom of this world, above glorying in man, in even the best of saints.

1 Corinthians 4

THE MEN OF THIS WORLD, and — sad to say — especially modernistic preachers, are often remarkably like "Muckrake" of Bunyan's great allegory. They have no eye for the things of heaven. They boast a purely earthly religion, which aims at producing a little more order amongst the sticks and stones and refuse of the floor. But Paul and Apollos? Who and what are they? May we not glory in them? They are but servants and stewards. And the fourth chapter opens with a reminder of this, and with the statement that the essential virtue of a steward is faithfulness. This again raises the thought of THE DAY, which is to declare all things, as the 13th verse of the previous chapter told us.

In verse 3 the words, "man's judgment," should read "man's day," and thus the connection and contrast is made plain. In the light of "*the day*," Paul was not overmuch troubled or concerned about the judgment of "*man's day*," or even of the Corinthians themselves. Had they been in a spiritual condition he would doubtless have listened patiently to any criticism of himself which they wished to proffer. But they were carnal and consequently their judgment was of but little worth. Paul lets them know this.

Moreover Paul had a good conscience. The opening of verse 4 has been translated, "For I am conscious of nothing in myself; but I am not justified by this." How good it would be if we could each speak thus: if we were each so true to what we have learned of the mind of God that we are not conscious of anything amiss. Yet even a Paul had to admit that this did not justify him, for he is to be judged not by *what he knew*, but by the Lord and *what He knows*. So have we all; and there is a vast difference between the standard erected by our consciousness and that erected by the omniscience of the Lord.

What does the Lord know? Let verse 5 tell us — one of the most searching verses in the Bible. When the Lord comes He will usher in the day, and the beams of its light will have X-ray properties. This verse is written, not in view of the enormous evils of the world without, but of the actions that take

place within the Christian circle.

Oh! what painful episodes — in their uncountable thousands — have taken place amongst the saints of God. Many of them more or less private in nature; some of them public and ecclesiastical. We may form our judgments and even become violent partizans, and all the while there may be dark corners hidden from our eyes in which *hidden things* are secreted. There may be secret motives in hearts, altogether veiled from us. All is coming out in the light of the day. The final court of appeal lies in the presence of the Lord. His verdict may irrevocably upset all the verdicts of the courts below. So, if we feel ourselves wronged, let us have patience. If inclined to take some drastic action, let us take great care. Search well the dark corners lest there be some hidden things which should see the light. Search your own heart lest a wrong motive lurk there. Think twice and thrice before launching the thunderbolt, especially if it be an ecclesiastical one which may affect many.

The last clause of verse 5 is rather, "then shall each have praise from God." That is to say, the point is not that every man is going to be praised, but that each who *is* praised will have his praise from *GOD*, and not from some few of his fellow-creatures. The Corinthians had their party leaders. They praised this one extravagantly, and these they condemned; and *vice versa*. It was all worthless. God give us grace to avoid this kind of thing. The only praise worth having is praise from God.

Verse 6 shows us that the real party leaders at Corinth were other than Paul or Apollos, probably gifted local leaders, or even visiting brethren of Judaising tendencies, to whom he alludes more plainly in his second epistle. Paul avoided the use of their names, but he wanted all to learn the lesson, not to be puffed up for one as against another. No one has any ground for boasting, however shining their gift, for all that they have they have received from God.

Now this glorying in man is of the spirit of the world. And if the world creeps in at one point, it will soon creep in at another. So it had at Corinth. They were full and rich, and reigning like kings, having a real "good time," while their Lord was still rejected, and the apostles of the Lord were sharing His rejection. There is a tinge of holy sarcasm in that word, "I would to God ye did reign, that we also [Paul and his companions] might reign with you." The saints will reign when Christ reigns, and the apostles will not be missing from their thrones.

What a picture of the apostles, as they were then, do verses 9 to 13 present! Comment is not needed. We only need to let the picture be engraved on our minds. Paul painted the picture not to shame us but to warn us. But without a doubt we shall be both warned and shamed. He was a spiritual father to the Corinthians and not merely an instructor, for he had been used to their conversion. We, too, as Gentiles, have been converted through him, though indirectly, and he is our instructor through his inspired writings. So let us also take him as our model, and imitate his faith and devotedness.

The closing verses of our chapter show that some amongst the Corinthians were not only running after party leaders, and worldly in life, but they were conceited and puffed up. To such the Apostle writes very plain words. For the moment Timothy had come to remind them of what was right and becoming, but he anticipated coming shortly himself. When he came in the power of God's kingdom, of God's authority, these conceited brethren might measure themselves against it, if they so desired.

Did they desire it? How effectively it would puncture their inflated pretensions! Would it not be better to humble themselves before God, and enable Paul to visit them in a far happier spirit?

And will it not be well for us all to be searched and humbled as we close this chapter?

1 Corinthians 5

AS WE READ the opening verses of chapter 5, we see that the Corinthians quite deserved the rod of which Paul spoke, as he closed chapter 4. There was a very grave case of immorality in their midst. Corinth was a licentious city, and the standard of morality amongst the Gentiles was deplorably low, yet even they avoided the particular sin which had been perpetrated by this professing Christian. The thing had not been done in secret. It was known on all hands.

But though it was a matter of common report the assembly at Corinth had taken no action. That was bad enough, but they aggravated their indifference by their conceit. Possibly they might have pleaded that as yet they had no instructions what to do in such a case. But this, if true, was no real excuse, for a very small measure of spiritual sensibility would have led them to mourn for the dishonour done to the Lord's name, and also to pray that God would interfere by removing the evil-doer from their midst. Instead of this they were "puffed up" with a foolish and baseless pride.

In verses 3 to 5 we see the holy vigour and decision which marked Paul in contrast to the supine indecision of the Corinthians. They should have been gathered together in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and acted in the putting away of the wicked person from among themselves, as indicated in the last verse of the chapter. They had not done so. Paul steps into the breach, judges and acts with Apostolic authority, though associating the Corinthians with his judgment and act. Such an one as this he would deliver unto Satan, for even Satan may be used for the disciplining of a guilty saint.

Apparently the utmost limit to which Satan can go is the destruction of the flesh. In the case of Job he was not allowed to go to that limit, though he grievously tormented his flesh. But if the flesh be even destroyed and death supervene, it is in order that the spirit may be saved in the coming day. This, you see, supposes that the one coming under this extremest form of discipline is after all a real believer.

But there was another fact overlooked by the Corinthians, which showed the wrong and folly of their boastful spirit. They were like a lump of dough in which a little leaven had been placed. Now leaven has well-known properties. It ferments, until the whole lump is permeated by it. Thus they could not rightly look upon this sin of one of their number as being a thing in which they were not involved. The very opposite. It was indeed the "old leaven," the very thing that had been rampant amongst them in their unconverted days, and would be very certain to spread amongst them again if unjudged. Hence they were to purge it out, by putting the wicked person away.

The effect of so doing would be to render them practically "a new lump, as ye are unleavened." They really were a new and unleavened lump, as regards their place and condition before God; and they were so to act that they might be in practice what God had made them to be in Christ. Let us all seize the underlying principle of this, for it is the principle on which God always acts in grace. The law did indeed demand that we should be what we were *not*. Grace makes us to be what is according to God, and then calls upon us to act in accordance with *what we are*. You may apply this in a multitude of ways. You are always so to act, "that ye may be . . . as ye are."

The Apostle uses a figure, of course, in speaking thus of leaven. But it is a most appropriate figure. Israel's passover feast had to be eaten without leaven, and was followed by the feast of unleavened bread. Now the passover pointed forward to the death of Christ as its fulfilment, and the church during the whole time of its sojourn here is to fulfil the type of the feast of unleavened bread by eschewing all evil, and walking in sincerity and truth.

Just as Israel had to sweep all leaven out of their houses, so are you and I to sweep all evil out of our lives. And beside this there are certain cases in which assembly action is demanded by the Word of

God. Such cases in the matter of moral evil are those mentioned in verse 11. The transgressor may be a "man that is called a brother." Just because he has professed conversion he has been found inside the assembly and not without it; and because he is within he comes under its judgment and has to be put away. This putting away is not just a formal and technical excommunication. It is an action of such reality that all the saints were no longer to "keep company" in any way with the offender. When dealing with the men of the world on a business basis we cannot discriminate in this way as to their moral characters: but if a professed Christian is guilty of the sins mentioned in verse 11 we are to have done with him, and not own him as a Christian at all for the time being. Time future will reveal what he really is.

This chapter shows very clearly that while an evil-doer might be dealt with, while the apostles were alive, on the basis of apostolic authority and energy, the normal way is by the action of the assembly gathered together in the name of the Lord. Its jurisdiction only extends over those who are within it. Those who are without must be left to the judgment of God which will reach them in due season.

1 Corinthians 6

THERE WAS ANOTHER very grievous scandal amongst these Corinthians, to which Paul alludes in chapter 6. It was less grave perhaps than the foregoing, but apparently it was more widespread. Some amongst them were quarrelsome, and dragging their disputes into the public law courts. Thus they launched their accusations and aired their wrongs, whether real or imaginary, before the unbelievers.

Here again spiritual instinct ought to have delivered them from such an error. It was virtually confessing that they had not one wise man in their midst with the ability to discriminate and judge in such matters. Thus they were noising abroad their own shame.

And further than this, they were proclaiming their own ignorance. Verse 2 commences with, "Do ye not know?" and five times before the chapter is finished do we find the question, "Know ye not?" Like many other carnal believers the Corinthians did not know nearly as much as they thought they did. If truth *governs US*, we *really* know it. Mere intellectual knowledge does not count.

They ought to have *really* known that "the saints shall judge the world." This fact had been stated in the Old Testament. "The Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (Dan. 7: 22). Had they really known it they would not have dragged one another into heathen law courts. If we really knew it, we perhaps should avoid certain things that we do. A still more astonishing fact confronts us in verse 3: though here the change from, "the saints," to, "we," may indicate that the judging of angels is confined to the apostles.

Be that as it may, these verses open up before us a vista of extraordinary authority and responsibility, in the light of which things pertaining to this life can only be spoken of as "the smallest matters." In keeping with this estimate, is the instruction that if such questions are brought before the saints for judgment, those least esteemed in the church are to hear the case. We notice that it does not say that *all* the saints are going to judge in the coming age. Perhaps all are not, and so those least likely to be judges then are to be judges now. Such is the estimate which Scripture gives of the relative importance of the things of the coming age as compared with the things of this age.

It is quite evident, then, that if one Christian has an accusation of unrighteousness to lay against

another, he must lay his case before the saints and not before the world. There is however something better than *that*, as indicated in verse 7. Better than *all* is it to meekly suffer the wrong, leaving the Lord to deal with it, and work repentance in the wrong-doer. Worst of all is it to do the wrong and defraud even the brethren.

If one called a Christian acts fraudulently, serious questions are raised in view of the fact that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The first question we ask is — Is he a true Christian after all? God alone knows. We stand in doubt of him. A true believer may fall into any of the terrible evils enumerated in verses 9 and 10, but he is not *characterized* by any of them, and through repentance he is eventually restored. Those characterized by these things have no part in the kingdom of God, either here or hereafter. They are consequently clean outside the fellowship of the assembly of God.

Some of the Corinthians had been sinners of this type, but their conversion had involved three things — washing, sanctification, justification. Washing signifies that deep and fundamental work of moral renovation which is accomplished by the new birth. Sanctification is a setting apart for God, now to be for His use and pleasure. Justification is a clearance from every count that otherwise would lie against us; a judicial setting right, so that we stand in righteousness before God. All three are ours in the Name of the Lord Jesus — that is, in virtue of His sacrificial work; and by the Spirit of our God — that is, by His effective work in our hearts. We might have been inclined to connect the washing with the work of the Spirit exclusively, and the justification exclusively with the work of Christ. But it is not so stated here. The objective and the subjective go hand in hand.

We might also have been inclined to have put justification in the first place. But washing comes first here, since the point of the passage is, that the believer manifests an altogether new character. The old filthy characteristics are washed away in the new birth. And if they are manifestly not washed away, then no matter what a man may profess he cannot be accepted as a true believer, or in God's kingdom.

Verse 12 commences a fresh paragraph, and introduces another line of thought. Meats are mentioned in the next verse, and we shall have more concerning that matter in chapter viii. It was a burning question amongst the early Christians. In such matters as that Paul was not under law. Yet even so what is quite lawful may be by no means "expedient," or "profitable" (see margin). Moreover even a lawful thing may have a tendency to enslave, and we are not to allow ourselves to be brought under the power of anything, but rather hold ourselves free to be the bondslaves of our Lord and Saviour. How often one hears it said concerning a debated point — "But it is not forbidden. What is the harm of it?" And the reply has to be in the form of another question — Is it profitable? We want things which have not only the negative virtue of having no harm in them but also the positive virtue of having profit in them.

This last paragraph of the chapter contains very important teaching as to the body of the believer. As yet our bodies are not redeemed, and consequently are the seat of various lusts, and they must be held as dead. Still we must not fall into the error of treating them lightly. Three great facts concerning them are stated in this passage.

First, they are "members of Christ." (ver. 15). Though not yet redeemed, they are going to be redeemed, and the Lord claims them as His. So really are they His that it is possible for the life of Jesus to be made manifest in our bodies. (See 2 Cor. 4: 10). They are members in which is to be displayed the life of Him who is our Head.

Second, the body of each believer is "the temple of the Holy Ghost." (ver. 19). Our old life has

been judged. Sin in the flesh, which formerly dominated us, has been condemned; and now the Spirit indwells us as the energy of that new life which we have in Christ. Every believer should regard his body as a shrine wherein dwells the Holy Spirit, which he has of God. God has taken possession of his body in this way: a fact of tremendous import.

Third, we have been bought with a price, (ver. 20) body as well as soul. The price that has been paid is beyond all our computation, as we know right well. The point we might overlook is that it covers the purchase of our bodies.

Now note the implications of these facts. How can we make the members of Christ the members of an harlot? Again, how can I treat my body as if it were exclusively my own? We are not our own. We are Another's, spirit and soul and body. Hence, "glorify God in your body," is the word for us. The whole idea of the unconverted is to gratify and glorify themselves in and through their bodies. Be it ours to gratify and glorify God.

What a lofty standard is set before us in these things! We may feel that it is indeed high and that we do not attain unto it. Still we would not have it altered. A great present blessing lies here, and also a great pledge of future glory. If already our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, how sure it must be that the redemption of our bodies is coming. Then the *Holy Spirit* will have a temple perfect in *holiness*. Meanwhile He promotes holiness in us, and that is for our highest blessing.

Finally, glance at verse 17. This verse flatly denies the idea that our union with Christ lies in the Incarnation, which idea lies at the root of much ritualistic error. The union lies not in flesh but in spirit. This is one of the cases where it is a question whether to begin the word spirit with a capital or not. The Spirit, who indwells us, is the Spirit of Christ; and by Him we are one spirit with the Lord. What a marvellous fact! Ponder it well.

1 Corinthians 7

FROM THE FIRST verse of chapter 7 we infer that Paul sat down to write this epistle in reply to a letter of enquiry, previously received from the Corinthians. Only, when he did so there were graver and more urgent matters to be first disposed of, and these fill up chapters i. to vi. He now turns to deal with their enquiries; and we find the words, "Now concerning," repeated at the beginning of 1 Cor. 8, 1 Cor. 12 and 1 Cor. 16. They had evidently written raising questions as to marriage, things offered to idols, spiritual gifts and collections.

Chapter 7 is almost entirely taken up with marriage, though in verses 17 to 24 instructions are given as to the secular callings that believers may be in, inasmuch as similar principles apply in both cases.

It looks as if the enquiries as to marriage had been occasioned by the fact that Paul, who was their spiritual father and example, had no wife himself. Most of them had been pagans, and hence their thoughts as to this great institution of God had been utterly astray and corrupted. The Apostle seized the opportunity to put things on the basis intended by God while maintaining that there might be a few who, like to himself, could live above the claims of nature and forego marriage, because so fully claimed by the Lord and His service.

Clearly then, for the believer the normal thing is that marriage should take place, and all its duties and responsibilities be observed. It is contemplated in verse 5 that husband and wife may separate for a season, in order more fully to be at the Lord's disposal, but that is to be done mutually, and with prayer, lest the adversary should gain any advantage by it.

In verses 10 and 11 the Apostle enforces the instructions already laid down by the Lord. In verses 12 to 16 he gives further instructions in view of complications that often arise when the Gospel has reached one partner and the other is left unconverted, at least for the moment. If a Jew, male or female, contracted a matrimonial alliance with one of the surrounding nations there was nothing but defilement for both them and their children. This is made very plain in such chapters as Ezra 9, and Nehemiah 13. With the Gospel this is reversed, as verse 14 shows us. The sanctification and holiness spoken of is not intrinsic of course, but relative. If there be but a believing wife, God acknowledges the household as set apart for Him. The unbelieving partner may so hate the light that has come into the home that he will not stay there. But if he will stay there, and the children who do stay there — they enjoy the privileges that the light confers, it is to be hoped to their ultimate salvation.

These instructions may appear to us to be of but little interest. That is because we live under the abnormal conditions which Christendom has created. Had the church maintained its proper character, as a circle of light and blessing, surrounded by the darkness of this world, yet separate from it, we should more easily see the point of it all. Those preaching the Gospel among the heathen and seeking sympathetically to help their converts in the problems that arise, find here the guidance that they need.

In the matter of one's earthly calling, as in marriage, the path for the believer is to accept the existing situation, only bringing into it a new power, to the glory of God. We are to abide in the calling in which we were called by the Gospel, only it must be "with God." (ver. 24). If we cannot have God with us in it, then we must abandon it.

Having given these instructions to the married, Paul turns in verse 25 to "virgins" and the instructions concerning them continue to verse 38. Then the two verses that close the chapter give a brief word of guidance to widows.

It seems pretty clear that in this passage the word, "virgin" is used as covering the unmarried of either sex. The Apostle's teaching may be summarized in this: that marriage is good, as is every divine institution; it is wholly right and permissible; yet that to remain in the unmarried state is better, if it is maintained in order to be more wholly at the Lord's disposal for His interests. If such do not "attend upon the Lord without distraction," their celibacy may only cast a snare upon them.

Now let it be noted that this is the point of view maintained all through the chapter. If the married couple separate it is to be as giving themselves to fasting and prayer. If in a mixed marriage the converted partner goes on peacefully and patiently with the unconverted, it is as seeking the Lord's glory in his or her salvation. If the slave, being converted goes on humbly and contentedly with his menial occupations, it is because therein he abides with God. If the "virgin" remains unmarried, it is because he or she aims at being without worldly care, only caring for holiness and the service of the Lord. If the widow remarries, she does so "in the Lord;" which means, according to His will and direction.

See, then, how this chapter, which some might feel inclined to skip as being of no particular interest, not only contains instructions as to marriage, valuable in themselves, but also enforces the great point that for the Christian the claims of God and His service take precedence of all else. We are to recognize that, "the time is short," or, "straitened:" the word used means contracted as to space, and is only used in one other place in the New Testament, viz., Acts 5: 6, in reference to Ananias being "wound up" for burial. Alas! how often we do not recognize that we are living in a straitened time, when the issue has been narrowed up by the death and resurrection of Christ, and hence we should hold all that we possess in the world with a light hand, ready to quit at a moment's notice.

Before passing on to chapter 8, let us glance more particularly at verses 6, 10, 12, 17, 25, 40.

Some of the expressions used in these verses have been seized upon by those who would deny, or at least weaken, the inspiration of Scripture.

The force of verse 6 is, "I speak as permitting, not as commanding." Certain things in connection with marriage are commanded, others permitted. This is simple enough.

Verse 10 refers to some of these commands; only Paul recalls that there was nothing new about them, for the Lord Himself had so commanded, when here amongst men.

On the other hand, beginning with verse 12 the Apostle does give commands which had not previously been issued by the Lord. The time to issue them had not come until the problems that they meet had been created by the Gospel being widely preached. There is no difficulty in this, for what the Apostle commanded, and ordained in all assemblies, as stated in verse 17, was of full authority. There is no difference *as to authority* between commands coming from the lips of the Lord when on earth, and those coming from Him in heaven, through the lips or pens of His apostles.

In verse 25 Paul carefully guards the instructions that follow, lest they be used as absolute commands to the casting of a snare upon some (ver. 35). They are but his judgment, yet judgment of a very spiritual order, for, as the last words of the chapter significantly say, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God." The application of these Spirit-given instructions all depended upon the spiritual state of those who heard them. Hence Paul was inspired to issue no command but to give his judgment.

These fine distinctions are very striking, and indicative of the wisdom of God, and of the reality and scope of divine inspiration. Instead of weakening it they confirm it.

1 Corinthians 8

THE OPENING WORDS of chapter 8 are really, "Now concerning," for evidently the Corinthians were perplexed as to the right course to adopt in relation to things offered to idols, and had mentioned the matter in their letter to Paul. No such problems confront us, yet we shall find the instructions laid down of much value, for our guidance in many a problem that does confront us.

Before coming to the point, however, the Apostle puts in parenthetically a word of warning. The Corinthians prided themselves upon their knowledge. Yet knowledge is a small and poor thing compared with love. Knowledge, if by itself, only puffs up, whereas love builds up. Moreover, at best all our knowledge is partial. It has strict limitations. We do not really know anything with a full and absolute knowledge. If we imagine that we do we only show thereby that we as yet know nothing as we ought to know it. Whereas if we love God we can rest assured that we are known of Him. And that is the great thing.

With verse 4 the Apostle commences his instructions. And first of all, what is the truth about the idols themselves? The truth is that they are nothing in the world. Deluded men may venerate these strange objects and treat them as gods, but we know them as but the work of men's hands, and that there is no other God but one. In thus speaking Paul was not overlooking the fact that demons and their power lay behind the idols, for he alludes to this sinister fact in 1 Cor. 10: 19, 20.

Pagans may venerate many gods and lords, but to us they are nothing. We know but one God and one Lord. There is the Father, the Originator and Source of all, and we are for Him. There is the Lord Jesus, the great Administrator in the Godhead, and all things, ourselves included, are by Him. This being so we may utterly decline to recognise the idols of the heathen in any way, and so treat all meats as alike — whether offered to idols or not.

However, as verse 7 says, this knowledge is by no means the portion of all. There will always be found many in the ranks of believers who are unable to view such matters in the calm, dispassionate light of pure knowledge. They do not rise above their feelings and other subjective impressions. Once these knew that the meat had been so offered, they could not get away from the feelings engendered by it. They had "conscience of the idol" and it troubled them continually. Their conscience was weak, for it was not fortified by that clear and happy knowledge which Paul enjoyed, and being weak it was defiled. How was the situation to be met? What was the stronger believer to do?

The answer is very instructive. The Apostle firmly maintains the freedom of the stronger brother. It really is a fact that meat does not commend us to God. Our practices may differ. Some may eat and some not eat. But there is no advantage in the one, nor is there any coming short in the other. There is neither plus nor minus in the question, *as before God*.

But *as among ourselves*, in the Christian circle, there is something to be considered. Apparently some of the Corinthians, strong in their knowledge of the nothingness of idols, went as far as sitting at the meat in the precincts of the idol's temple. This was carrying their knowledge to a great length, and running the risk of becoming a stumbling-block. Some of the weaker ones might be tempted to copy them, wishing for a larger liberty, and having done so become stricken by an accusing conscience, and perish. The perishing has nothing to do with the salvation of the soul. It means rather that the weak brother would be put out of action and destroyed as to his spiritual state, and consequently as to his testimony and service, by his weak conscience being wounded. No believer who falls under a cloud, owing to a defiled conscience, is of any use in the wars of the Lord.

Some of us might feel inclined to say, "Oh, but he is after all only a weak brother, and consequently of very little account as a servant or soldier of the Lord." If we should speak thus we should be guilty of forgetting that he is one of those "for whom Christ died," and therefore of immeasurable value to Him. This is the true light in which to view our brother. So dear is he that to sin against him is to sin against Christ.

The Apostle never forgot those words, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" And we must never forget them. The truth enshrined in them confronts us in a number of scriptures. Those who would strike a blow at Christ today, strike at His saints. Those who would serve Christ today, care for and serve His saints. That which is done to even the least of His brethren He will accept as done to Himself. God grant that we may not forget this. Real devotion to Christ is far more truly and effectively expressed by devoted service to His cause and people than by much outpouring of devotional and endearing language, either to Him or concerning Him.

Paul's own attitude is tersely summed up in the last verse of the chapter. Rather than be a cause of stumbling to his brother he would never eat flesh again. He would practise self-denial, and cut out of his life what was perfectly lawful, with a view to his brother's good. This is the fruit of divine love being at work. Would to God we had much more of it working in our hearts!

There is one further remark to be made as regards this chapter. Verse 6 is sometimes quoted by those who would deny the deity of the Lord Jesus. They make the point that since "there is but one God, the Father," and Jesus Christ is spoken of only as "one Lord," it must be incorrect to speak of Him also as God, even though other scriptures clearly do so.

Without a doubt, in this verse deity is attributed to the Father alone, and dominion as Lord to Jesus alone. It has however been very aptly remarked that, "The deity of Christ can no more be denied because the Father is here called 'one God,' than the dominion of the Father can be denied because the Son is called 'one Lord.'" To this we may add — or the deity and dominion of the Spirit be denied,

because He is not mentioned at all.

The fact is, of course, that the Godhead is being presented in contrast with the many gods and lords of the pagan world; and in the Godhead the Son is He who has taken the place of Lord. Read the verse as limited by its context, and there is no real difficulty.

1 Corinthians 9

CHAPTER 8 CLOSES with Paul's considerate willingness to forego his undoubted rights, if thereby he might save one of his weaker brethren from a spiritual disaster. Chapter 9 opens with a very forcible assertion of his apostolic position and its privileges. The two things are entirely consistent, but he knew only too well that the adversaries of himself and of his Lord would attempt to score a point off him in this matter. They would insinuate that this gracious consideration of his was merely a piece of camoufiage, intended to disguise the fact that he was no real apostle at all, but just an unaccredited upstart. The Corinthians had evidently been impressed by the pretentious claims of the adversaries, and their minds somewhat warped as a consequence. Hence Paul had to speak plainly as to his divinely-given authority.

He was indeed an apostle; and he had full liberty as to the matters just discussed. He had not been with Christ in the days of His flesh, as had the twelve, but he had seen the Lord in His glory. Moreover the Corinthians themselves were the fruit of his apostolic labours. Verse 2 delivers a crushing answer to any among them who, influenced by the adversaries, were inclined to question his apostleship. Why, they were themselves the proof of the validity of his work! To throw doubt on the reality of his work was to throw doubt on the reality of their own conversion. At the end of his second epistle he reverts to this argument, and he amplifies it. See 2 Cor. 13: 3-5.

Hence, if any wished to cross-examine him on the point, he had an answer that could not be gainsaid. His adversaries thought any stick good enough to beat him with. Again and again he did not eat or drink this or that out of consideration for others. He did not, like other apostles, have a wife to help him and share his travels. He and Barnabas had travelled and laboured unceasingly, without those breaks for rest which others enjoyed. And further, instead of being chargeable to others in respect of his bodily needs, he had laboured with his own hands for a living and taken nothing from anybody at Corinth. Every one of these things was seized upon in the endeavour to discredit him. As a matter of fact they were heavily to his credit; for each was within his rights. He was foregoing things that were properly his, as a man and as a servant of the Lord, because of his utter devotion to his Master's interests.

Paul was thus forced to speak of his own case. But the Holy Spirit who inspired him took occasion to lay down what is the Lord's will and pleasure as regards those whose whole time, by His call, is devoted to the Gospel, and the service of God's holy things. It is ordained that "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." That evidently is the normal thing. If any who thus labour have means of their own and do not need such help, or if any are found who though needing it are great enough, like Paul, to do without it, that is another matter. Only there is just this difference, that there is no virtue in the declining of help by those who have enough: the virtue is when those who have nothing forego their rights.

The principle that the Apostle lays down is supported by spiritual reasoning in verse 7. But then it was not merely the word of a man — even of a spiritual man: the law spoke in exactly the same way. The little piece of legislation, which seems so strangely interjected, in Deuteronomy 25: 4, established

the principle in connection with a humble beast of burden. Moreover it was also enforced practically in connection with the temple service and Jewish altars. Finally, it was definitely so ordained by the Lord Himself for the present moment. Matthew 10: 10, and other passages in the Gospels show this. The principle then is overwhelmingly established. Let all who love the Lord be very careful not to neglect any true servant called by Him to His service. If we do so we shall be flying in the face of His word, and consequently be great losers ourselves.

In passing, let us notice that the way in which Deuteronomy 25 is quoted here leads us to expect that we shall find in the law, both enshrined and illustrated, many a principle of conduct which the New Testament enjoins upon us as well pleasing to God. There is nothing surprising in this for God Himself is ever the Same. We shall however find new principles of conduct in the New Testament which are not found in the Old. Just one word of caution is needful. Keep a tight rein on the imagination when thus searching the law. The dreamy mind can produce seeming analogies, which though piously intended, are nothing but fancy running riot!

The last clause of verse 10 is somewhat obscure. The New Translation runs, "and he that treads out corn, in hope of partaking of it," which makes it quite plain. Only the application is, that he who labours to share with us *spiritual* things must not be debarred from sharing in our *carnal* things — things that have to do with the needs of our flesh.

Has ever another lived during the church's history like unto Paul — entitled to so much, yet claiming so little? His mind was to suffer all things rather than be the least hindrance to the progress of the Gospel. He would rather die than fail as to this. Blessed man! No wonder he could exhort the saints saying, "Be imitators of me."

See, too, how tremendously real to him was the call of God to preach the Gospel. He knew that a "dispensation" (or an "administration") was committed to him, and it was woe to him should he be wanting in it. It might have been displeasing to him and against his will, as it was against Jonah's will to preach to Nineveh; but then necessity was laid upon him. He would have been compelled to serve through a good deal of woe, even as Jonah was. Of course it was not distasteful. He gloried in it, though in doing it he had nothing to glory of. And doing it willingly he knew that his reward was sure. It was part of his reward to be able to preach the Gospel without charge. How lovely to be able to declare the salvation which is "without money and without price," raising no questions as to money or price in return for preaching it!

But the Apostle's zeal for the Gospel carried him further even than this. He was perfectly free. He lay under obligations to no man. Yet in calculating love he made himself servant to all that he might gain "the more," or, "the most possible." He was out to win as many as possible, so, within the limits of the will of God, he adapted himself to those he sought to win. He specifies four classes, the Jews, those under law, those without law and the weak. He accommodated himself to each class as he approached them, but of course without doing anything contrary to the revealed will of God. Testimony to this is found in the short parenthesis which occur in verses 20 and 21.

The parenthesis in verse 20 does not appear in our Authorized Version. But it should be there. "As under the law (not being myself under law) that I might gain them that are under the law." In verse 21 the parenthesis is quite evident, being printed in brackets. In the New Translation it is rendered, "not as without law to God, but as legitimately subject to Christ." This signifies that when Paul approached the man under law, he observed the conventions which the law imposed, so as not to offend their susceptibilities — everything in fact, so long as it did not deny the fact that he himself was not under the law. When he approached the man without law he did so on *that* basis. Only he was always careful

to let it be seen that he himself was not a lawless man but rightly subject to the Lord. It is evident then that the Apostle really studied the people that he approached, and their idiosyncracies, so that he might avoid everything which would needlessly prejudice them against the Message that he brought. He was far removed from that mistaken spirit that would say, "God can save and take care of His own elect," and as a result almost hurl the Gospel at people's heads, without much care as to the result.

Fancy the Apostle becoming as weak to the weak — talking in very simple and elementary terms for people of small intellect! No easy task that for a man of giant intellect! Yet he did it. This is the holy art which every really devoted and efficient teacher in a Sunday School has to learn. They need to become as a child to gain the children. This does not mean that they become childish. No, but they should become child-like, and study the mind of a child. And the one end in view is, *salvation*.

When we come to verse 24 we can see how the Apostle's thoughts began to expand and take in the whole spirit and character which should mark the servant of the Lord. We are viewed as athletes contending in the games, whether running or fighting. Hence we should be marked by zeal, directness of purpose, and a temperate, self-denying life in all things. The athlete, whether in the Grecian games of two thousand years ago, or in the contests today, is careful not to let his body get the mastery of him. The very opposite. He masters his body, brings it into subjection to a very strict regime, even buffets it with continual exercises. And all this to the winning of a crown that quickly fades. Let us aim at the same things, only of a spiritual sort, that we may be invested in due season with a fadeless crown; for, alternatively, it is possible to ignore these things, and though a very eloquent preacher to others, to be rejected oneself.

Our chapter ends upon a very unpleasing word, "castaway," or, *rejected*, or *reprobate*. A good deal of controversy has raged around it. Many have seized upon it to prove that the true believer may yet be rejected, and lost for ever. Others realizing that other passages plainly negative this, have sought to explain it as simply signifying disapproved and rejected as to service, as to receiving a prize — disqualified, in fact.

We believe, however, that the true force of the expression is seen if we allow the word to have the full and weighty meaning which is proper to it, and read it in connection with the first twelve verses of chapter 10. In our version the first word of the chapter is, "Moreover." It appears however that really the word is simply, "For." This indicated that what follows directly illustrates the point in question. "For . . . all our fathers were under the cloud . . . but with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. The great mass of Israel had the externals of their holy religion, yet they totally missed its vital power, having no faith. They did not keep under their bodies but gave themselves up to their lusts, and miserably perished. From this point of view they were types of people who, though well fortified in the profession of the Christian religion, are yet not true believers and perish.

The meaning of "castaway," seems clearly fixed thus by the character of its context. But the difficulty remains — why did Paul speak of himself in this way? Why be so emphatic, "I MYSELF should be a castaway?" The answer is, we believe, that in so writing Paul had in view not only the Corinthians, whom he had just been blaming for great laxity of life, but also — and perhaps mainly — the mischief-making adversaries who had been leading them astray. These adversaries were unquestionably men who were lax self-pleasers, the very opposite of such as keep under their body, though great preachers to others. Yet Paul did not name them directly, any more than he directly named the leaders of parties earlier in the epistle. Then he transferred the matter to himself and to Apollos. Here he does not even bring Apollos into the matter, but just transfers it to himself alone. It is after all a

very common figure of speech. Many a preacher has said, "When I owe a year's rent, and cannot pay a penny of it, then . . . so and so." The good man never owed any rent in his life, but to illustrate his point he transfers the matter to himself. Delicacy forbids that he should transfer it to his hearers, and suggest that they had rent which they could not pay.

Paul had no doubt about himself. In just the verse before he had said "I therefore so run, *not as uncertainly.*" But he had many grave doubts about the adversaries, and some about the Corinthians. And he made his warning the more effective by applying it to himself. The mere fact that one is a preacher guarantees nothing.

1 Corinthians 10

OUTWARD PRIVILEGES AND rites also guarantee nothing, as is witnessed by the history of Israel, summarized in the opening verses of chapter 10. They had things that answered to baptism and the supper of the Lord, and yet they were overthrown and destroyed. And in all this they were "ensamples," or "types," for us.

In their passage of the Sea we have a type of baptism. At that point they definitely committed themselves to the authority and leadership of Moses; just as in Christian baptism, which is in the Name of the Lord Jesus, we are definitely committed to *His* authority and leadership. Though neither cloud nor sea actually touched them, they were *under* the one and *through* the other.

Verse 3 refers to the manna; verse 4 to the rock of which they drank in Exodus 17, and Numbers 20. Both one and the other were "spiritual," for both were supernatural: and both were types of Christ. But in spite of these peculiar privileges, which were common to all Israel, the great majority of them were overthrown in the wilderness. This sad fact is referred to again in Hebrews 3 and 4, and there it is pointed out that the root of the whole trouble was that they had no faith. Our scripture tells us that what they did have was lust, and idolatry, and fornication, and the spirit of tempting God and of murmuring. Where faith comes in these evil things go out.

Now the Spirit of God has recorded these things for our warning. The true believer is marked by confidence in God, and the more simple and absolute his confidence the better. But it is correspondingly true that he is marked by no confidence in himself, and the more deep his self-distrust the better. It is when we think that we stand that we are in danger of a fall. It is quite another thing when a saint has confidence that "God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14: 4).

And not only is God able to support us, but also He keeps a watchful eye upon us in His faithfulness, not permitting us to be tempted beyond a certain limit. The temptations that confront us are "common to man," or such as "belong to man." They are not of some superhuman sort. And again there is with them an issue, or way out. "Way of escape," might lead us to suppose that we may always expect some way by which we may escape the temptation altogether. It is not that, but that God always sees to it that there is a way through by which we may emerge unscathed at the other side. Temptation may be like a long dark tunnel, but there is always visible the light of day at the further end.

Having issued this tremendous warning, the Apostle gives it a very personal turn in verse 14. The whole of chapter 8 was taken up with the matter of idols, and of meats offered to them; and now this verse brings us back to that point. That chapter asserted the liberty of the believer in regard to meats offered to idols. This verse counter-balances the matter by stressing the enormous evil of the idols themselves. Idolatry is not merely to be avoided; it is to be fled from, as an utterly abhorrent thing.

Let us in every sense of the word keep ourselves from idols.

Up to this point in the epistle the Apostle had addressed the Corinthians on the ground of their responsibility, and therefore assumed that there might be some amongst them who were unreal. At verse 15 he changes his view-point somewhat and addresses them as "wise-men." Not every true Christian could be so designated, we fear; and it is certain that no unconverted person could be. He speaks to the true members of the body of Christ, who possess His Spirit, and hence are capable of judging concerning that which he is now going to bring before them. Verses 16 to 22 contain reasonings, the spiritual force of which should come home to us.

The simple primary meaning of the cup and the loaf, of which we partake in the Supper of the Lord, is the blood and the body of Christ. This was quite evident from the moment of the original institution, as recorded in three of the Gospels. But there was a further significance, underlying the primary meaning, which does not come to light until we reach the verses now before us: that is, the thought of "communion" or "fellowship." This holy ordinance is not merely an occasion appealing to the deepest instincts of personal and individual piety; it is an occasion of communion, springing out of the fact that we who partake of the one loaf are as much one as is the loaf of which we partake.

But let us at this point carefully distinguish things that differ. The one loaf signifies the body of Christ which was given for us in death. The fact that we believers, though many, *all partake* of that one loaf signifies that we are one body. We are one body by a Divine act — see 1 Cor. 12: 13. Partaking all together of the one loaf does not make us one body, but it is the sign that we are one body. And to that sign Paul appeals to enforce his point.

The point he enforces is this, that communion is involved in the Supper of the Lord: not merely communion *with* one another, but the communion *of* the blood and body of the Lord. There is nothing here to foster superstition. That which we *break is* bread. That of which we *partake is* bread. Yet in drinking and in partaking we have communion *in that which the cup and the bread signify*; and shall be held responsible in regard to *that*, as is plainly stated in the next chapter, verse 27. This is exceedingly solemn truth — truth, which all too often is overlooked.

In verse 18 the Apostle shows that there was a fore-shadowing of this truth in the case of Israel, inasmuch as the priests were permitted to eat certain parts of certain offerings, and in the case of the peace offering even the offerer had certain parts to eat. Details as to this are given in Leviticus 6 and 7. If these chapters be read it will be seen that restrictions were laid upon those who eat. All defilement had to be kept far from them just because they were thereby in communion with the altar of God, and all that it signified. Had they taken liberties with their holy food and treated it unworthily, they would have come under serious consequences.

The same thing was true in principle of the idol sacrifices of the Gentile world. The idols they venerated represented demons; and these demons were but subordinate officers of Satan. By their sacrifices they entered into the communion of demons. Now such a communion as this the child of God is to flee at all costs.

Verses 16 to 20, then, set before us three communions, the Christian, the Jewish, the heathen; centred respectively in the Table of the Lord, the Altar in the midst of Israel, and the idol sacrifices of paganism; and expressed in each case by the act of eating. In this passage Israel's altar is not in question so it is merely introduced as an illustration; and left at that, (to be referred to further in Hebrews 13: 10). The issue here lies between the communion of Christ's death and the communion of demons. These two are totally, fundamentally and continuously opposed. It is impossible to be a participator in both. "Ye cannot," says the Apostle, twice in verse 21.

And supposing someone ignores this "cannot" and is bold enough, having partaken of the Lord's

table, to partake of the table of demons — what then? Then, he provokes the Lord to jealousy for the sake of His Name and glory. The Lord will not give His glory to another, and the offender will come into sharp collision with the Lord Himself, and taste the bitterness of coming under His dealing in discipline, possibly unto death. Disciplined of the Lord he will soon discover that he is not stronger than He, and come face to face with the toilsome road of repentance, which is the only way that leads to recovery.

In the mercy of God we are hardly endangered by "the fellowship of demons." But, because of that, let us not lightly dismiss this truth from our minds, for the principle of it is of much wider application. If we partake of the Lord's table it is necessary for us to set a watch lest we partake also in things that are inconsistent with it and its holiness. If we are in the communion of the blood and body of Christ, we shall find it great enough to exclude all other communions. We shall keep clear of communions that can only entangle us, and may possibly defile us. We fear that the implications of this truth are often ignored. It is all too possible to partake of the cup and of the loaf without giving much thought to the solemn obligations that are connected therewith. We can have no fellowship with evil things.

This serious matter disposed of, there remained the questions as to meats which had been offered to idols, to which the Apostle had previously referred. He digressed from it at the beginning of chapter 9, and he returns to it in verse 23 of our chapter. The pagan world was so full of idols that most of the animals, whose carcasses were offered for sale in their markets, had been killed in connection with idol sacrifices and ceremonies. Supposing the Christian bought his food in the "shambles," or "markets," and if he was eating in the house of someone who did not believe, and hence had no feelings on these points, what was he to do?

In this connection Paul makes the statement twice over, "All things are lawful." That is he sets us in a place of liberty. Yet he reminds us that by no means everything is either "expedient," (that is, "profitable") or "edifying;" and moreover that we are not merely to consider what is good for ourselves, but what is good for others. The two-fold test that he mentions is capable of a thousand applications. Again and again situations arise as to which we have not only to raise the question, Is it lawful? but also, Is there profit in it? and, Does it tend to building up? And further we have to consider the profit and the building up of *all*. If we ordered our lives by that standard we should be cutting out a good many things of a doubtful and unprofitable nature.

We may well thank God for the liberty which is ordained in this passage. It would have been an intolerable burden to the early Christians if they had been responsible to track out the history of every bit of meat they bought in the markets, or consumed in the house of some acquaintance. For us today, living under conditions which are highly complicated and artificial, it would be ten times worse. It is evidently God's will for His people that they accept the conditions in which their lot is cast, and pursue a simple path through, without inquisitively looking for sources of trouble, whether meat be in question or any other matter.

If, on the other hand, without any special inquisition, one becomes aware of defilement, as in the case supposed in verse 28, then it is to be carefully avoided. In so saying the Apostle reasserts what he had stated at the end of 1 Cor. 8.

This leads up to the very comprehensive instruction of verse 31, a statement which covers the whole of our lives. In all things we are to seek the glory of God: just as the next verse adds that we are to avoid giving offence to man. Indeed, taking this passage as a whole we may observe five valuable points which offer us guidance as to whether any course may, or may not, be according to the will of

God. That which is according to His will (1) is lawful, (2) is expedient or profitable, (3) is to the edifying or building up of oneself or others, (4) is to the glory of God, (5) gives no occasion of stumbling to any. Often the question is asked, How may I get guidance? Well, here is some guidance of a very sure and definite sort. Are we always so willing to be guided when we get the guidance?

Verse 32 classifies mankind under three heads. Notice how distinctly "the church of God" stands out from both Jew and Gentile. The Old Testament classified men under two heads, Israel and the Gentiles. The Church, a body called out from both Jews and Gentiles, only appears in the New Testament. Though we have thus been called out from the mass of mankind we are to consider men, seeking their highest good, even their salvation. This was Paul's way even as it was the way of Christ. And we are to be imitators of Paul. Verse 1 of chapter 11 should be treated as the last verse of chapter 10.

1 Corinthians 11

THE FRESH PARAGRAPH begins with verse 2, which stands in very direct contrast with verse 17. The Apostle had referred to the institution of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 10, as we have seen; and there had been grave disorders in connection with it, demanding very heavy censure. However there were certain matters as to which he could praise them. So first he utters a word of praise. Certain "ordinances," or "directions," had been given to them, and they had remembered Paul and observed them. So even in this we see the Apostle exemplifying what he had just been saying. He sought the profit of the Corinthians by praising them before he blamed them, and in this he followed Christ, for it is exactly His way, as exemplified in His messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

But even here there was something as to which the Corinthians were ignorant. It seems that they observed directions given as to the behaviour of men and of women in connection with prayer and prophecy, without understanding the truth that governed those directions. That the man should engage in these spiritual exercises with uncovered head, and the woman with covered head, was not a mere whim, an arbitrary order. On the contrary it was in accord with the Divine order, established in connection with Christ. Three headships are mentioned in verse 3.

The highest of these springs from the fact that in becoming Man, that He might assume the office of Mediator, the Lord Jesus took the place of subjection. Isaiah had prophesied the coming of Jehovah's Servant, who would have the ear of the learner, and never swerve from His direction: that is to say, Jehovah would be His Head and Director in all things. This was perfectly fulfilled in Christ; and the fact that He is now risen and glorified has not altered the position. He is still the Servant of the will of God (though never less than God Himself) and the pleasure of Jehovah is to prosper in His hand to eternity. So the Head of Christ is God.

But then Christ is the Head of the man, as distinguished from the woman. A certain order was established in creation since "Adam was first formed, then Eve." That order is stated also in verses 8 and 9 of our chapter. She shared in his place and his distinctions, and even in the days of innocence headship was vested in Adam. Sin did not alter that headship, neither has the coming in of God's grace in Christ. So Christ is the Head of man, and of every man. And the head of the woman is the man.

Every member of the human body is directed from the head. So the figure is very simple and expressive. It is a matter, in one word, of *direction*. The woman is to accept direction from the man. The man is to accept direction from Christ. And Christ accepts direction from God, and does so perfectly. For the rest, it is done very imperfectly. The great mass of menfolk do not recognize Christ at

all; and at the present time there is a great uprising of womenfolk against the direction and leadership of men, and that — significantly enough — especially in Christendom. Still none of these things alter that which is the divine ideal and order.

Now if any believer, man or woman, has to do with God and His things, whether it be in praying (i.e., addressing oneself to Him), or in prophesying (i.e., speaking forth words from Him), there is to be the observance of these directions as to the uncovering or covering of the head, as a sign that God's order is recognized and obeyed. Verses 14 and 15 further show that it is in keeping with this that the man has short and the woman long hair.

There is no contradiction between verse 5 of our chapter and 1 Cor. 14: 34, for the simple reason that there speaking in the assembly is in question, whereas in our chapter the assembly does not come into view until verse 17 is reached. Only then do we begin to consider things that may happen when we "come together." The praying or prophesying contemplated in verse 5 is not in connection with the formal assemblies of God's saints.

It was when the Apostle turned to deal with things that were transpiring in connection with their assemblies that he found himself bound to blame them. They came together to no profit but the reverse. In the first chapter he had alluded to these divisions or schisms in their midst, and it was when they came together that they were so painfully manifest. They still came together in one place. Things had not reached such a pass that they refused to meet any longer as one, and met in different buildings. Yet there were internal splits or fissures in the assembly, with all their disastrous effects.

Tidings of this had reached Paul's ears and he tells them plainly that he partly believed it, for he knew their carnal state. The word "heresies," in verse 19 means, "sects," or "schools of opinion;" and they are mentioned in Galatians 5: 20, amongst the terrible "works of the flesh." If saints are found in a fleshly condition, heresies crop up as sure as they are alive. Hence, says the Apostle to the fleshly Corinthians, "there must be heresies among you." These heresies may have the effect of making manifest those foolishly "approved" by men: they will certainly reveal those who refuse this party making, and hence are "approved" of God.

What must be the judgment of the Spirit of God as to us today, in view of the way in which schools of opinion are flourishing in the church of God?

It is quite clear from the 20th verse that the Corinthian saints, though very numerous, were still meeting together in one building. They came together "in the church," as verse eighteen puts it: but those words have no reference to a building of any kind, but rather to the fact that they came together "in assembly;" that is in their church or assembly character. And when they did so these sects, or parties became painfully manifest, and also their proceedings were very disorderly; so disorderly in fact that the apostle refuses to recognize their feasts, which they called, "the Lord's supper," as being truly the supper of the Lord at all. They are not he says, *the Lord's Supper*, but *each one* taking *his own* supper.

There is, we believe, a double contrast here. First, between "the Lord's" and "his own." They treated the matter as if they were the masters of it and hence could arrange it as they pleased and generally do as they liked. This led to outrageous disorder at Corinth — some getting nothing, and others getting so much of the wine as to be drunken. Similar gross disorder may be avoided today, but have not many assumed that they are masters of the situation when this holy ordinance is in question, and so felt themselves perfectly free to alter it to taste? — free to turn it into a mass, or a sacrifice, free to have it ornate, or choral, free to confine its ministrations to a priestly caste and have it so frequently as to be almost continuous, free to have it only once in several months, or to abolish it altogether.

But there is also the contrast between the Lord's supper which is a matter of *fellowship*, as 1 Cor. 10 has just unfolded, and "every one" (or "each one") taking his own supper: that is, making it a purely *individual* matter. Even supposing that saints come together and observe the ordinance quite faultlessly, as regards all its externals, and yet treat it as a *purely personal privilege*, eliminating from it in their mind the thought that we do it as one body, they have missed the mark. It is not *each one acting and eating for himself*: it is rather *all acting together*.

Now the only remedy for disorder in connection with the Lord's supper — even in apostolic days, be it noted — was to go back to the original institution in its spirit, its significance, its orderly simplicity. Paul did not argue on the subject. In verses 23 to 27, he simply reverts to what had been instituted by the Lord Himself. And he did so, not as having received authentic information from the other apostles who had been present, but as having received the ordinance directly from the Lord, by divinely-given revelation. This revelation confirms the account already given by the inspired evangelists, and clarifies its meaning. Much that passes as an "orderly" and "beautiful" celebration or observance of this institution is simply *disorder* in the divine estimation. Any "order", however ornate or beautiful to human eyes, which is not *the divine order*, is *disorder* in the Divine eyes.

God has been pleased to give us four accounts of the institution of the Lord's supper, and the fourth through Paul has its own peculiar importance, inasmuch as it makes it quite clear that it is to be observed by Gentile believers as much as by Jewish, and also that it is to continue "till He come." The materials used are of the simplest — the bread, the cup — everyday sights in the homes of those days. The significance of the materials was very profound — "My body," "the new testament in my blood." And the whole spirit of the ordinance is "remembrance." We are to remember Him in the circumstances in which once He was, in *death*, though we know Him as the One now glorified in heaven.

The supper of the Lord then begins with remembrance of Him in death. Much will flow out of this remembrance and we cannot fail to be conscious of *blessing* (it is, "the cup of blessing") and consequently *bless God* in return. But we must penetrate beneath the symbols to that which they symbolize. We must discern the body and blood of Christ; and discerning this, we shall be preserved from treating these holy things in an unholy or unworthy manner, as the Corinthians had been doing. The Lord did not hold them guiltless, and they were eating and drinking judgment (see, margin) to themselves. They were guilty in respect of dishonour done not merely to a loaf and a cup, but to the body and blood of Christ, symbolized by the loaf and the cup. This is the plain force of verses 27 and 29.

What then should we do? When the Lord smote Uzzah in judgment because he treated the Ark of God as though it had been an ordinary object (see 2 Sam. 6) David was displeased and left the Ark severely alone for a time. This was a mistake, which afterwards he rectified by honouring the Ark, and treating it as had been commanded by God. Paul's instructions to the Corinthians, in verses 28 to 30, exactly agree with this. God had interfered in judgment amongst them, many were weak and sickly and some had been removed by death. But this should not make them refuse to observe the Lord's supper further. The rather it should make them examine themselves and partake in a spirit of self-judgment. There had been *abuse*, but the remedy for this was not *disuse* but rather a careful *use*, in obedience to the design of God.

The closing verses of the chapter give us an example of God's chastening by way of retribution. They were being disciplined because of wrong committed. God chastens His children that they may not be judged with the world. And if only we judged ourselves we should be preserved from the evil and hence not need the hand of God upon us. Let us mark that! How excellent is the holy art of *self-*

judgment; and how little practised. Let us cultivate it more and more. By it we should be preserved from innumerable errors. The Corinthians evidently neglected it and much was wrong with them. The Apostle had corrected the most glaring of their errors when they partook of the Lord's supper. There were others, but these could wait until he visited them in person: so he closes the chapter by saying, "the rest will I set in order when I come."

1 Corinthians 12

THE CORINTHIANS CAME together in assembly not only to partake of the Lord's supper but also for the exercise of spiritual gifts, especially that of prophecy. In those days there were found prophets who were enabled by the Holy Spirit to give inspired utterances in the assembly. In this way God gave authoritative instruction and guidance while as yet the New Testament scriptures were in the making, and so not freely in the hands of believers as they are today. There was however a great danger in connection with this.

When God raised up prophets in Israel's history, Satan promptly confused the issue by raising up many false ones. In the days of Ahab there were 850 false to one true! The adversary followed the same tactics in the early days of the church and introduced into the public assemblies of saints men who gave inspired utterances truly, but inspired not by the Holy Spirit but by demons. Hence the test laid down in 1 Cor. 12: 3. The confession of Jesus as LORD is the test. Many testimonies could be adduced, proving that this test always is effective. It infallibly works. In modern spiritist seances demons will often utter sentiments which are apparently high class and beautiful, but they will never acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

Moreover, in the pagan world it was supposed that each demon had a special line of things in which he operated: one was the spirit of healing, another the spirit of prophecy or divination, and so on. The Apostle instructs the Corinthians therefore, in verses 4 to 11, that all the gifts of a divine sort which may be manifested in the church, proceed from one and the self-same Spirit — the Holy Spirit of God. The Spirit is one: the manifestations of His power and working are many. Whether it be the Spirit (verse 4) or the Lord (verse 5) or God (verse 6) diversity proceeding from unity is the feature. Gifts are connected with the Spirit: administrations with the Lord: operations with God.

Now the gifts or manifestations of the Spirit are expressed through men in the assembly of God. No one man possesses all. Occasionally one may possess many. More usually he possesses but one. But whether one or many what is possessed by each one is intended not for the sole benefit of the possessor but for the profit of all. The better rendering of verse 7 is "But to each the manifestation of the Spirit is given for profit." (N. Tr.) The Corinthians were evidently acting rather like children; assuming that the spiritual gift conferred was something like a new toy, to be used and enjoyed for their personal pleasure and distinction. It was not; but rather a gift conferred on one member for the benefit of the whole body.

Hence, having enumerated the different gifts, and again emphasized that all proceed from the same Holy Spirit, being bestowed at His sovereign will and discretion, the apostle passes in verse 12 to the one body, for the benefit of which all is given. The human body is used as an illustration. It has many members and yet is an organic unity. Then he adds, "so also is the Christ" — the definite article, "the," is in the Greek original.

This is a remarkable expression. It is not Christ personally; but rather that the one body — the church — being the body of Christ, His name can be called upon it.

The church then, as Christ's body, is an organic unity, just as the human body is. It has been formed by an act of God in the energy of the one Spirit. It is important that we should remember this, since by this fact its integrity is guaranteed. It cannot be violated or destroyed by man or by Satanic power, though the visible manifestation of it during its sojourn on earth may be, and has been, marred. The thing itself, divinely formed, abides, and will be perfectly displayed in glory.

The action of the Spirit in forming the one body is described as a "baptism." In baptism a man is submerged and figuratively buried. The one body was formed, and we are brought into it, on this basis; namely, that we as natural men, as children of Adam, with all our personal peculiarities and angularities, have been submerged in the one Spirit. Hence all our natural distinctions have disappeared in the one body. There was no greater national distinction than Jew and Gentile; no clearer social cleavage than bond and free. But these distinctions and cleavages, and all others like them, are gone in the one body. In the light of this how foolish and sinful were the parties and schools and cleavages among the Corinthians: how puerile their strivings for personal distinctions and profit! And how foolish and sinful and puerile are similar things which disfigure Christians today!

Let us take it to heart. We have forgotten the real force and meaning of that baptism by which we have found our place in the one body. Thank God, I am in the one body, but I am there on the basis of having my old "I" submerged. And you are there as having your old "I" submerged. And every other member of the body is there as having the old "I" submerged. And there is no other way of being in the one body but by having the old "I" submerged. If we all were really in the truth of this, what a change would come over the outward aspect of all things, amongst the saints of God.

But not only have we all been baptised in one Spirit into one body, but we each severally and for ourselves have been made to "drink into (or, of) one Spirit." This seems to be an allusion to John 7: 37-39. Each member of the body has personally received or imbibed of the one Spirit, so that He characterizes and governs each. Unity is thus produced in this two-fold way. Each has been submerged *in* the Spirit: and the Spirit is *in* each by a personal imbibing.

Verses 12 and 13 then, give us what has been brought to pass by God Himself in the energy of His Spirit, and consequently human failure does not enter into the matter. It is the ideal thing, but it is not, because of that, idealistic and unreal. It is not just a beautiful idea to be left in the airy region of mere ideas. No, it is an actual existing fact by Divine act; and faith perceives it and acts accordingly. If we do not perceive it we cannot act accordingly.

Let us then have faith to perceive what has been brought to pass by the Spirit's act, and what we have received by drinking of one Spirit; and may our whole life in relation to Christ Himself and our fellow members be influenced thereby.

If verse 13 teaches that all true believers have been baptized into one body, the next verse again emphasizes the corresponding truth that the body is composed of many members. The *unity* which God has established in the one body must not be confounded with *uniformity*. Uniformity is largely stamped upon man's work, especially in this our day, but not upon God's work. Man invents machines which turn out articles by the thousand or the million exactly uniform in all respects. In God's handiwork we see the utmost diversity in unity — unity in the most marvellous diversity.

In verses 14 to 26, the human body is taken as an illustration of this, and the point is worked out with great fulness of detail. The Apostle evidently felt it to be most important that the matter should be clearly understood. And why so important?

The answer to this is, we judge, that he knew the inveterate tendency of human hearts. It is so

natural, even to believers, to love a little party all intent upon the same thing; in which all can settle down amiably and comfortably and without friction to enjoy themselves, in connection with that upon which all are intent. Then of course others, whose thoughts or activities or functions are so widely different, can be dispensed with; and the schism or division, of which verse 25 speaks, supervenes.

The illustration of this point, given in verse 21, is very striking. The eye is the organ of sight, the hand the organ of work. Some believers are "seers" marked by intelligence and spiritual insight. They revel in an understanding of the things of God. They give themselves to study and contemplation, and probably have very little time for active work. Other believers are very active workers: they put their hand to many a hard task in the interests of their Lord. Indeed they work so hard that their danger is lest their labour becomes uninstructed, and hence astray from the will of the Lord. Now the danger is that the "eye" may say to the "hand" I have no need of thee. It is not suggested that the "hand" may say this to the "eye". Practical experience proves that it is usually the intellectual, far-seeing brother who is tempted to speak thus to the brother who is far less intelligent but a far harder worker, rather than *vice versa*.

Again, the head and feet are placed in contrast. Not only seeing, but hearing, smelling and tasting are confined to the head. Only one of the five senses is distributed over the body. If the head is to exercise its functions it needs quietude and repose. But the feet are instruments of motion. The head wishes for what is still and stationary that it may be enabled to observe and hear and think, but the feet are all for that activity and movement that will disturb it. The head may be strongly tempted to say to the feet, I have no need of you!

In the human body every member is necessary, for God has tempered it together. He has given more abundant honour to those parts which might be esteemed without honour, and given abundant comeliness to what might appear uncomely. Medical science seems to be accumulating proofs of this, by showing how obscure glands, which formerly no one thought much of, are really of great importance, exercising such a control that if they cease functioning the body dies. So it is in the body of Christ, and hence the members are to have the same care and interest in one another. If one is affected, either for good or ill, all are affected.

Observe that all through the illustration the human body is contemplated as the work of God. Verse 18 states it, and again verse 24 mentions it, and thereby schism is excluded. Again in verse 21 it does not say that the eye *should* not say to the hand, I have no need of thee, but that it *cannot*. In just the same way the one body of Christ is viewed as the fruit of God's work. It is what God has established; God's work which can never be undone by man.

Observe on the other hand that though it is God's work it is not because of that an idealistic thing, removed from the sphere of present and practical life, without any bearing upon the church in its present condition. The very opposite, for the Apostle at once proceeds to give just that present application.

That application begins in verse 27. The definite article "the," is not in the Greek, and is better omitted even though it produces clumsy English. He did not say, "Ye are *the* body of Christ," for that would have indicated to these saints at Corinth that they were the whole thing, and might have led to the further supposition that they were merely the one body in Corinth. Then there might be the one body in Ephesus, and so on, until the contradictory and inconsistent idea of there being many "one bodies" might have been reached. He said, "Ye are body of Christ," that is, they were of the body of Christ and bore the "body of Christ" character in Corinth, each of them being a member in particular.

They were members, then, of Christ's body, and from that he turns, in the next verse, to speak of

how God had set some of these members in the "church," or "assembly." We do well to differentiate in our thoughts between the body of Christ, formed by Divine act, and the assembly as found in this world, whether locally at Corinth, or in its totality. But while we differentiate we must not divorce the two, since the action of the members takes place in the assembly, and their action is to be governed and regulated by the truth just set forth as to the body.

The "gifts" or "manifestations" of the Spirit, which were granted to some of the members, are detailed in verse 28. The order of them is to be noted. Apostles come first, diversities of tongues come last. The Corinthians, who were carnal, set great store by the more spectacular gifts, as do many carnally minded believers today. To speak in an unknown tongue was to them evidently the most desirable thing of all. Their estimate was however a mistaken one. The gifts are divided according to the sovereign will of the Spirit. No one gift was given to everybody. As a rule each individual had one distinguishing gift.

Seven questions are found in verses 29 and 30. They are asked but not answered because the answer is obvious. Uniformly the answer is, No. Notice the sixth question, since there are those who insist that no one has properly received the Holy Ghost if they do not speak with tongues. But, "do all speak with tongues?" The answer is, No. Yet they had all been "made to drink into one Spirit."

What then is to be our attitude in regard to the various gifts? We are to desire earnestly the better, or greater, gifts; that is, such as prophesying, or teaching, as is evident from the opening verses of 1 Cor. 14. These are better because they are for wider and more general profit, and the gifts are given to each for the profit of all. And there is a way of more surpassing excellence by which this end may be reached. This way is the way of "charity" or *divine love*, as unfolded in chapter 13. The Apostle turns aside for a moment from the main line of his theme to stress the surpassing excellence of that love which is the very nature of God himself.

1 Corinthians 13

CHAPTER 13 HAS become famous. Its extraordinary power is acknowledged not only by Christians but by a multitude of others. Foremost men acclaim it as marvellous, one of the literary wonders of the world, without perhaps at all appreciating the real drift of its teaching. What is it that it really says? The opening verse of 1 Cor. 8 has told us that it is love that edifies. This chapter expands that fact and shows us in the first place that the most shining gifts, if without love, are of no value; and in the second place that love is the force, even when gifts are present, that really accomplishes everything.

The first three verses contemplate gifts which may be possessed and exercised without love. If they are, the sum total of all that they effect and produce is, Nothing. Speaking with tongues is mentioned first, as that was the particular gift that was becoming rather a snare to the Corinthians. But that is followed by prophecy, which later is eulogised by the Apostle as first in importance; and that by knowledge and faith, and by the practical benevolence that nowadays goes by the name of "charity"; and that again by self-sacrifice of a very remarkable kind. What tremendous assertions are these which Paul makes!

A brother rises in the assembly and speaks words of peculiar sweetness and thrill, though quite unintelligible to us. We discover that he has actually made a Divine communication in a language of heaven, which angels use. How marvellous! How we should gaze at him! Yes. But if he has done this without love he might as well have brought an old brass pan into the meeting and hit it with a poker, for

the good he has done, as regards the Lord's interests in the assembly.

And here comes another who has astonishing knowledge and understanding. He not only penetrates to the heart of Divine things, but he can communicate to others what he knows by reason of his prophetic gift. Also he has faith of an almost miraculous power. Yet he has not love! We are not told that he is like a clanging piece of brass, for it is possible that we may gain some help and understanding from what he says, and some inspiration from his remarkable faith. What we are told is, that he himself is nothing. If unspiritual ourselves we might imagine him to be a giant. Really he is less than a pigmy. He is *nothing*.

And supposing a third appears, who resolves, "I shall dole out all my goods in food," (N. Trans.) and is prepared to give his body to be burned! Why, we should feel inclined to exclaim, What a reward he will have in the coming day! But alas, he has not love. Then it will profit him *nothing*. The absence of love has rendered valueless the whole thing. In the light of these facts, negative though they are in their bearing, of what surpassing value is love!

Now we are to contemplate more closely the features that characterize love. First comes a very positive feature. It suffers long (or, has *long patience*) and is *kind*. Could anything surpass the long patience and kindness of God's dealings with rebellious man? No. Well, God is love. And in the measure in which we manifest the divine nature, we shall manifest long patience and kindness towards men generally, as well as towards our brethren.

This one positive feature is followed by negative features. Love is marked by the total absence of certain hideous deformities of character and behaviour, which are perfectly natural to us as men in the flesh. Paul strings them together. Here they are: (1) Envy of others: (2) Vaunting oneself, or vainglory, or as it has been translated, being "insolent and rash:" (3) Being puffed up or inflated with one's own importance: (4) Unseemly behaviour which follows hard on the heels of an inflated mind: (5) Self-seeking: (6) Touchiness, easily taking offence and provoked to anger: (7) Thinking evil, that is, quick to impute evil to others: (8) Rejoicing in iniquity, that is, glad to be able to point out iniquity in others, and to denounce it. The string that runs right through these eight things is, *love of self*.

Alas! alas! how often are these features discernible in ourselves, and yet we are saints of God. It is all too easy for us to be like ships stranded on the dirty mud flats of self-love. What can lift us off? Nothing but a mighty inflow of the tide of Divine love. When saints forget themselves in the uplift of that tide most wonderful transformations are effected.

Verse 6, which mentions the eighth negative feature also introduces us to the second positive feature that is mentioned. Love *rejoices*, for it is indeed a joyous thing, but its joy is in or with the truth. Love and truth go hand in hand, and truth is joyous and full of gladness for our hearts.

Further positive features follow. Four are mentioned in verse 7. Love bears, or *covers*, all things. It never condones unrighteousness of course, yet it never finds its pleasure in publishing other people's misdeeds. It rather *believes* all that it can discover of the truth; it *hopes* that all that may be lacking will be supplied in due course; it *endures* meanwhile every deficiency that may exist. It is evident that the expression, "all things," four times repeated, must be understood as limited by its context. For instance, he who believes "all things," in an unlimited way, would simply be landed into a morass of uncertainties and deceptions.

The seventh positive characteristic of love is that it *never fails*. This is at once seen if we look at it as seen in all its fulness in God Himself. If Divine love had failed, every region, that ever had been touched by sin, would have been lying in the hopeless blackness of everlasting night. In the presence of

sin's great catastrophe Divine love did not waver or fail. It designed rather the way of righteousness whereby the situation should be much more than retrieved; men blessed and the Divine Name triumphantly vindicated. True, it may appear for a time to fail. But God has a long outlook and plans by millenniums rather than days. Love always wins in the end. And so it does when Divine love works in and through feeble saints such as ourselves. It may appear to be defeated a hundred times over, but it is not: in the end it wins, it does not fail.

Now this cannot be said of even the greatest of gifts. Prophecies may fail, in the sense of being done away with, having served their purpose (the word "fail" is not the same as "faileth" which occurs just before). Tongues shall cease; they will not be needed in a coming day. Knowledge even shall "vanish away," (same word as translated "fail" in connection with prophecies). What this vanishing away means is shown in the next few verses. Our knowledge and prophesying — even that of a Paul — is in part. Presently in regard to both knowledge and prophecy, perfection will be reached and, when it is, all that is partial will fail and vanish away; just as the moon fails and vanishes away in the light of the sun.

The Apostle further illustrates this point by his own childhood. When a child he spoke, thought, reasoned, as a child. When manhood was reached he was done with what belonged to childhood's days. The application of this illustration is in verse 21. The contrast lies between now and then; between our present condition, limited as we are by flesh and blood, though we are indwelt by the Holy Ghost, and the heavenly condition into which we shall enter when we are in the likeness of Christ, even as to our bodies. *Now* it is seeing as through a glass obscurely: *then* knowing according as we have been known.

Spiritual gifts are indeed wonderful things, but we are apt to overestimate them. Wonderful as they are, they are but partial, even the greatest of them. Take note of this ye gifted men! Your knowledge and your prophesying, even when in the full energy of the Spirit, are but partial. They are not the full and complete thing. If you do not remember this you might become arrogant in your knowledge. If you do remember it you will be humble.

We are very thankful for the knowledge and the prophecies, yet we know that all of it will vanish away in the blaze of that perfect light into which we are going. There are things that abide, and the greatest of them is LOVE.

Sometimes we sing,

"When faith and hope shall cease,

And love abide alone."

That may be true, but it is not what is stated here. On the contrary, it says, "Now *abideth* faith, hope, charity, these three." The contrast is between the most shining gifts which *pass* and the *abiding* characteristics of Divine life in the saints. The more we approximate to what is carnal, the more likely we are to be dazzled by mere gifts. The more we approximate to the spiritual, the more we appreciate faith, hope, and love. And the more we shall see that love is the greatest of all.

It will be found ultimately that the greatest saint is not he of the most striking gift, but he or she that most truly dwells in love, for, "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (1 John 4: 16).

No gift counts for much except it is controlled and energized by love. LOVE is indeed the more excellent way.

1 Corinthians 14

CHAPTER 13 BEING a parenthesis, showing the surpassing excellence of divine love, the first verse of 1 Cor. 14 is connected with the last verse of 1 Cor. 12. Love is to be pursued as the thing of all importance, for where it is, spiritual gifts may safely be desired. Where love reigns, they will be desired not for personal advancement or distinction, but for the profit and blessing of all. Hence the gift of prophecy is given the first place. It is amongst the best gifts which may be coveted earnestly.

The Apostle at once proceeds to contrast the gift of prophecy with the gift of tongues, which evidently had great attractions in the estimation of the Corinthian believers, being so obviously supernatural in its origin. He does not cast any doubt upon this particular spiritual manifestation. The "tongues" to which he alluded, were the genuine manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit, and *under the control of the speaker*. The Apostle spoke with tongues himself in larger measure than any of the Corinthians, but he did so in a controlled and restrained way. Verses 6, 15, 18, and 19 show this. The point is, that even when the gift of tongues is at its best, it is of less profit than the gift of prophecy.

When the Corinthian saints came together in assembly before the Lord, He was to be their Director in all things, and all their activities were to be in the energy of the Spirit of God. This chapter furnishes us with many directions from the Lord — directions of a general character, which are binding at all times. Whether on a given occasion this or that brother should take *any* audible part, and if they should, *what* part, is a matter which must be settled in reference to the Lord's will when the occasion comes. But when they *do* take part, they must do so in subjection to the general instructions given by the Lord in this chapter, acting as men of a sound mind enlightened by the word of the Lord. It may be remembered how Paul speaks to Timothy of God having given us the spirit "of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." This is exemplified in the chapter before us. 1 Cor. 12 shows us the Spirit of power in the assembly; 1 Cor. 13 the spirit of love; 1 Cor. 14 the spirit of a sound mind.

Spiritual activities in the assembly may be Godward or manward. Activities Godward are mentioned in verses 14 to 17 — praying, singing, giving of thanks. But in the main the chapter is concerned with what is manward — prophecy, tongues, doctrine, interpretation. These gifts are to be exercised for the benefit of others, and the test the Apostle applies is that of general edification. If the exercise of the gift edifies it is of profit. If it does not edify it is to no profit.

According to verse 3 the end to be attained is threefold. The simple meaning of edification is building up. The foundation is laid when the Gospel is received; but upon the foundation an immense deal has to be built up, so that edification may rightly continue throughout a long Christian life. Exhortation, or encouragement, follows. We pass through a hostile world, subject to all kinds of adverse influences. Hence we continually need what will stir us up to spiritual vigour. Then thirdly, comfort, or consolation is a continuous need in the assembly; for there are always those present who are face to face with sorrow and trouble and disappointment, and who need that which will lift them above their sorrows. We might summarize this threefold end as, *building up, stirring up, and lifting up*. Prophecy leads to the attainment of these three things.

Prophecy is not only the foretelling of future events. It includes the forth-telling of God's mind and message. In the apostolic days, before the written New Testament Scriptures were in circulation, there was prophecy of an inspired sort, such as is claimed by the Apostle Paul for himself and others in 1 Cor. 2: 13. We have not that today, nor do we need it, having the inspired Scriptures in our hands. Prophecy of an uninspired sort we may still have, for we may still find men gifted of God to open up to us, from the inspired Scriptures, the mind of God and His message for any given moment, and when we find it we do well to be very thankful for it. Such ministry of the Word of God does indeed build up,

and stir up, and lift up.

As to the gift of tongues; its exercise is not forbidden, but it is definitely and strictly regulated in this chapter. The regulations laid down are of much importance. They make it certain that this gift if present, and exercised, shall be used for profit. Further, we have no hesitation in saying that when and where the gift is claimed, and yet those exercising it systematically ignore these divinely given regulations, a doubt is at once raised in any sound mind as to the genuineness of the alleged gift.

Even apart from this, however, these regulations are full of profit for us, for what is laid down must obviously apply in other directions also. For an instance of what we mean take verses 6 to 9. The immediate point of these verses is that mere vocal sounds are of no value. What is uttered by the voice must have some meaning to those who listen. It must be *intelligible*. Is that only of importance in connection with the gift of tongues? By no means. It applies universally. In our meetings it will not be enough that the speaker talks in English, for he may be enticed into a display of his learning by using hosts of long words of uncommon use, which leave the minds of his learners a complete blank as to his meaning. Or he may speak with such rapidity, or with such mystic obscurity, as to be unintelligible. In all such cases people merely "speak into the air," and there is no profit.

We might wonder at Paul writing as he does in verses 14 and 15, did we not know what sometimes takes place even in our day. It is not God's way that even the speaker himself should be ignorant of the meaning of the words he has just uttered. He is to utter words, whether in speaking to others. or in prayer, or in song, which he himself understands and which are understandable to others.

If anyone address himself to God in the assembly, whether in prayer or thanksgiving he must remember that he does so as giving expression to the desires or the praises of the assembly. He is not speaking merely on his own behalf. Consequently he must carry the assembly with him; and they, understanding and following his utterances, ratify them before God and make them their own by saying "Amen" (signifying "So be it") at the end. They cannot intelligibly and honestly say "Amen" at the end if they are quite unaware of what it is all about. Far better is it to speak but five words profitable for instruction, than ten thousand words that mean nothing to the hearers.

Take note that verse 16 supposes that each in the assembly, even the unlearned and insignificant, do say "Amen." They *say* it, and not merely *think* it. If our experience be any guide, a very small percentage in the assembly say "Amen" today. Test what we say in an average prayer meeting. If a brother in prayer really voices our desires let us ratify what he has uttered with a good distinct "Amen." If he has not, honesty compels us to refrain from saying it. If the earnest, fervent outpouring of our desires were ratified by all of us in the utterance of a hearty "Amen" at the close, and the wearisome parade of information, and discussion of doctrines with God, which sometimes is inflicted on us at great length as a substitute for prayer, were ended in a rather chilling silence, the offender might possibly be awakened to what he is doing. When however every prayer finishes in silence save for a few feeble "Amens," no such discrimination can be felt, and one begins to fear that all may be formalism and with little or no meaning or depth. Let us think on these things and cultivate reality.

Also we are to cultivate understanding in the things of God, while retaining a child-like spirit in other regards, as verse 20 tells us. When tongues are misused, as indicated in verse 23, it only shows a complete lack of mature sense. Children might act in that foolish way, just as they love to show off their new clothes. But the believer is to act as having the understanding of a man, not a child. The prophetic ministry of the Word of God brings the soul into the very presence of God. And the power of such ministry may be felt even by an unbeliever who happens to be present.

It is not enough that there should be prophecy. The gift must be exercised according to God's

order, which is laid down in verses 29 to 33. The Corinthians were highly gifted, and the tendency in their assemblies was evidently to have a great excess of talking. Verse 26 shows this. Each was eager to exercise his gift and get it in evidence. Confusion, disorder, tumult, was the result. God was not the Author of this.

So definite instructions were laid down. Speaking in tongues was not forbidden, but it is strictly regulated in verses 27 and 28; and if no interpreter is present it is forbidden. Prophecy too is regulated. Two or three speakers in any given meeting are enough. How wise is this regulation! The Lord knows the receptive capacity of the average believer. If two speak at considerable length it is enough. If more brevity marks the speakers, three may find an opportunity. Then it is enough. Someone may ignore this ruling and insist on giving us his word, but we are wearied and end by retaining less than if we had heard only three.

Note that the others who listen are to "judge." That is, even in days when inspired utterances by direct revelation (see verse 30) were given in the assembly, those who listened were to do so with discernment. They were not to receive without testing what they heard. They were never to adopt the attitude of: — "Oh, everything that dear brother A — says must be right!" Such an attitude is a direct incitement to the devil to pervert the ideas of brother A — and so encompass the fall of many. It is a disaster for brother A — as well as his admirers. There is liberty for all the prophets to prophecy, though not of course on any one occasion. If on any given occasion a prophet may have something to say and yet no opportunity occurs, he must restrain himself and wait on God till the opportunity comes. He himself is to be master of his own spirit and not mastered by it.

Verses 34 and 35 deal with the silence of women in the assembly. The instruction is very plain and the word used for "speak" is the ordinary word and does not mean "chatter" as some have made out. This regulation cuts across the spirit of the age, without a doubt. But if that be a reason for ignoring Scripture, there will not be much Scripture left that is not ignored.

The Spirit of God foreknew how these regulations would be ignored or challenged. Some at Corinth evidently were inclined in that direction. Hence verses 36 and 37. The Word of God came *out* through the Lord Himself and His apostles and not through the Corinthians. It came *to* them. They might fancy themselves as spiritual people. If they really were spiritual they would prove it by discerning that these rules laid down by Paul were not just his notions, but the commandments of the Lord through him. The test of our spirituality today is just the same.

Take note that the Word of God does not come out through the church. It comes to the church. The crowning pretension of the great Romish system is that "the church" — and by that they mean the Romish authorities — is the teaching body. We need not here concern ourselves with their claim to be "the church," for it is evident from this passage that the Apostles are the fountains, whence have flowed the pure waters of the Word, and we have them today in their inspired writings — the New Testament Scriptures. The church is not "the *teaching* body" it is "the *taught* body." The Word of God comes to it, and its duty is *to bow to the Word of God*.

1 Corinthians 15

THE OPENING WORDS of chapter 15 appear at first sight rather extraordinary. Why, we may ask, should the Apostle declare the Gospel to people who had already received it?

There was, we believe a little wholesome irony in his words, as also there had been in 1 Cor. 14: 37, 38 of the previous chapter. As we have noticed several times previously the Corinthians had

inflated ideas of themselves, their gifts and accomplishments, so the Spirit of God confronted them with realities. The intellectualism they affected was leading them to deny, or at least question the resurrection from the dead — a fundamental truth of the Gospel. Paul had to begin declaring the Gospel to them all over again.

The Gospel saves us if we "keep in memory" or "hold fast" its message. If we do not hold fast the Word it does not save. Some people do not like the "If," but it is there nevertheless. It is easy to say, "I believe," and as result be numbered amongst the believers. Yet time tests us. The real believer always holds fast; the unreal does not. With that proviso we can say to all who take the place of Christians, "The Gospel has saved you, and in it you *stand*." Consequently he who tampers with, and disturbs, the truth of the Gospel is cutting away the ground from beneath his own feet.

Now the Gospel brings us tidings of facts. First, the fact of Christ's death for our sins, as the Scriptures had foretold — Isaiah 53: 5 and 8, for instance. Second the two facts of His burial and resurrection, which are grouped together, as according to the Scriptures — Isaiah 53: 9 and 10, for instance.

There was no question as to the first and second of these facts: they were publicly known. The third was not publicly known, but it was the prominent theme of apostolic preaching as recorded in the Acts. It was the third that was being called in question here, and hence Paul reminds them of the overwhelming witness of its truth that existed. He cites six different occasions on which He was seen in resurrection, ending with his own case when He was not only risen, but also in glory. Paul's list is by no means exhaustive, for he does not cite any of the occasions on which He appeared to the believing women.

However, he himself came at the end of a long line of witnesses, and this reminded him of the fact that when the other apostles were having a sight of their risen Lord, he was an opponent and a persecutor, at least in heart. The thought of this humbled him, and made him feel unworthy to be numbered amongst the apostles. At the same time it filled his heart with a sense of the grace of God — grace which not only had called him, but also led him into a life of labour for his Lord more abundant than all the rest.

Still as regards their testimony there was no difference. Whether the twelve or himself, they had all equally preached the Gospel of the risen Christ. The Corinthians had heard no other Gospel from their lips than this. Upon the risen Christ they had believed.

Now the whole truth as to resurrection hinges upon the resurrection of Christ, as verse 12 indicates. How can resurrection be denied, if Christ be risen?

However the Apostle proceeds to argue the whole matter out in orderly fashion. First he contemplates the assumption that after all there is no resurrection, and shows what the logical results would be. This occupies verses 13 to 19. Quite obviously if there be no resurrection then Christ is not risen. And if Christ be not risen, what then?

Then a whole sequence of results must necessarily ensue. Paul's preaching then was vain, for he must be convicted of preaching not a fact but a myth. Their faith was equally vain, for they had believed a myth. This explains the remark at the end of verse 2. The "believing in vain," there spoken of, does not refer to faith of an inferior or defective kind but to faith, be it ever so vigorous, which rests in an unworthy or false object.

Then further, it would mean that the apostles were not true men but false witnesses, and that the Corinthians themselves, in spite of their faith in that witness, were yet in their sins. It would mean that

those believers — some of them Corinthians — who had already died, had not entered into bliss but perished. Indeed it would narrow down any benefit or hope to be derived from Christ to things within the confines of this life. What a tragedy! Every bright hope of an eternity of glory extinguished in the night of death from which there is no awaking. All that Christ can give us is whittled down to a kindly example, which, if followed, would somewhat improve our short lives in this world.

There is no exaggeration in the statement that if that is all, "we are of all men most miserable." Of course we are! Every Christian, worth the name, has deliberately turned his back on the sinful pleasures of the world. So he is in the position of denying himself what he might have, the pleasure that comes from gratifying his lusts, in view of a future, which after all does not exist. In that case we are indeed like the dog in the fable who dropped the piece of meat in clutching at its shadow. The out-and-out worldling at least has the pleasures of sin, whereas we should draw a blank in both worlds.

In verse 20 the Apostle turns from this negative line of reasoning to a positive argument. He starts now from the glorious fact that after all Christ is risen from the dead, and risen as the Firstfruits of the sleeping saints. The saints are the after-fruits of the same order as Himself. This important truth is expounded fully in the later part of the chapter; it is implied here in the use of the word, "firstfruits." No one would present you with a potato as the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, or even a plum as the firstfruits of the apple crop. They would be incongruent. But there is nothing incongruent here. Though Christ is God yet He became Man, and as the risen Man He is the firstfruits of them that have died in faith. His resurrection must involve the resurrection of all that are His.

This point is of such importance that the flow of the argument is interrupted for a moment, and it is enlarged upon in verses 21 to 23. Death was introduced by man, and so now resurrection also is by Man. Adam brought death in, and all who are in him, that is, of his race, are under the death sentence. Christ has brought in resurrection, and all who are in Him, of His race, are to be "made alive," or "quickened." This quickening is special to those who are Christ's. Though the unjust will be raised their resurrection will not involve quickening. The saints are going to enter into what is properly "life." How complete and glorious has been God's answer to man's sin!

But in resurrection an order is to be observed: "each in his own rank." (N. Tr.) as verse 23 puts it. Christ rose from amongst the dead first, and is pre-eminent. Afterward, at His coming, all who are His are also to rise from amongst the dead, leaving the unsaved dead in their graves. And, "then cometh the end," when the unsaved dead will be raised, though this is not explicitly stated here, but implied in verse 26. If Revelation 20: 11 - 21: 4, be read, it will be seen that death is destroyed when the wicked dead have been raised.

What is plainly stated in our passage is that the end which is to be reached in virtue of resurrection is the complete subjugation of every adverse power, so that all may be in subjection to God, who is to be all in all. This brings us to the eternal state, which is also alluded to in 2 Peter 3: 13, and is described at greater length in Revelation 21: 1-5. The millennial kingdom will serve the purpose for which it is designed. There will be found in it the perfection of government, and it will not end until the last enemy has been brought to nothing.

When that point is reached the whole work of redemption and new creation will have reached finality, and the Son will deliver up the kingdom to the Father. In becoming Man the Son took the subject place, and that place He retains to all eternity: a clear proof that He has taken up Manhood for ever. Subjection, be it remembered, does not necessarily imply inferiority. The Son was no whit inferior to the Father when here on earth, nor will He be in eternity. In the eternal state God is to be everything, and in everything; but of course the Spirit is God, and the Son is God, equally with the

Father. The Son however retains His place in Manhood, the Head and the Sustainer of the new creation universe, which exists as the fruit of His work; this guarantees that it shall never be encroached upon by evil, but remain in its original splendour for ever.

Before passing on, just notice this contrast: that whereas the denial of resurrection worked out to its logical result leaves us in our sins and in hopeless misery, the fact of resurrection, accomplished in Christ, lands us into the eternal state of glory.

Verses 20-28 are somewhat parenthetical in nature, and hence verse 29 picks up the thread from verse 19 and reads on quite naturally, though its meaning is perhaps rather obscure. We believe that "for" in this verse indicates "in the place of." A large percentage of the dead amongst the early Christians had fallen as martyrs, and so Paul views the newer converts as stepping by baptism into the place of the fallen, to become themselves targets for the adversary. Very courageous; but of course foolish and futile if there is no resurrection of the dead.

This interpretation of verse 29 is confirmed by verse 30. Why should the Apostle and his associates expose themselves to the adversary, if there were no resurrection? And in asking this he was not indulging in a mere figure of speech. It was a hard fact, and a daily fact with him. Not long before he had gone through the terrific riot in the Ephesian theatre, as recorded in Acts 19, when men fought against him like wild beasts, and every day his life was in danger. What an absurd man he was to live a life like this! Apart from the fact of resurrection one had better adopt the motto of the godless world, "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." In this way once more do we reach the logical result of discarding the truth of resurrection. Not only are we left the most miserable of all men, but we are left with nothing better than the gratification of our animal appetites.

Having reached this point the Apostle appeals very pointedly to the Corinthians. They were being deceived, and all evil teachings have a reaction in the sphere of morals. If we think wrong we cannot act right. This throws light on the immorality amongst them, denounced in 1 Cor. 5 and 1 Cor. 6. Questioning the resurrection of the body, they had the more easily fallen into sins involving the abuse of the body. They needed to awake to what was right and gain the knowledge of God.

But the Corinthians, though having so little knowledge of God and righteousness, were an intellectual, reasoning people; so two questions that were sure to spring to their lips, are anticipated in verse 35. The first raises the question, *How?* the second, the question, *What?* The answers to these questions occupy practically the rest of the chapter. The second question — being more definite perhaps — is answered first.

Intellectualism proves itself again and again to be a great snare for believers. Having begun with faith some are inclined to continue on the basis of mere intellect, unaware that the things of God (as 1 Cor. 2 has told us) are so deep as to entirely submerge the greatest human intellect. Nothing baffles human thought more than resurrection, as may be discovered if one listens for a little to the pronouncements of "Liberal Theologians." We cannot fail to know what the Liberal Theologians think of God, for they are sufficiently vociferous. Here we see what God thinks of the Liberal Theologians. He dismisses them with one word — "Fool!" That one word is as much inspired of God as is John 3: 16.

Still Paul was writing to saints, even though they had got tainted with that peculiar folly which is so fully developed in the Liberal Theologians of today. So having plainly indicated to them their foolishness, he proceeds to answer the question.

Nature itself furnishes us with a striking analogy on the point, an analogy used previously by our

Lord Himself. When He said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit," He indicated His own death and resurrection.

Here the same analogy is used but with a different application. A seed is sown in the earth, yet, though its identity is preserved, it comes up with a vastly different body. The acorn is buried, but the oak springs up. Every seed has what we may call its own special resurrection body in which it comes forth. The bearing of this on the point before us is plain. The dead body of that saint is laid in the grave: in the resurrection it will come up vastly different, yet with its identity preserved.

Again nature teaches us that this presents no difficulty to God, for He is of infinite resource. Look at the variety seen in creation. These are different orders of flesh — men, beasts, fishes, birds: and within those orders there are again vast differences of body. Again, there are bodies of a heavenly order — as to which at present we know so little — and bodies of an earthly order, which we know well. It is very probably true that no two stars are in all respects the same.

This conducts us to the marvellous declaration of verses 42-44. The body that is sown in the grave is characterized by corruption, dishonour, weakness, souliness, — if we may be allowed to coin that word, for the word, "natural" is more literally "soulish," something fitted for the animal soul rather than the spirit. It is raised in incorruption, glory, power, and a spiritual body rather than a soulish one. The identity is preserved, as witnessed by the words, four times repeated, "It is sown . . . it is raised." Nevertheless the condition in which it is found is of a different order entirely. This answers the question, "With what body do they come?"

The first question of verse 32, "How are the dead raised up?" gets a very full answer in verses 45 to 54. In this question the force of "How" seems to be "In what condition?" rather than, "In what way?" or "By what means?" Otherwise there would be no conclusive answer to the question in the chapter. Moreover, if God did condescend to explain in what way or by what process He will raise the dead, we should be no wiser for the explanation would be utterly beyond us. As it is, we have an answer. In a nutshell it is this — we shall be raised in the image of the heavenly Christ.

In order to understand it we must consider the contrast between the two Adams, the first and the last. The first was made a living soul, as Genesis 2 tells us. The last is of another order entirely. Though as truly Adam (i.e. Man) as the first, He is a life-giving Spirit. The one, then, is "natural" or "soulish": the Other, spiritual. We might have expected that the Spiritual would take precedence of the soulish as to time. But it is not so, as verse 46 points out. The first Adam was constituted a living soul by the Divine in-breathing. Consequently he was "soulish," and he possessed a "natural" or "soulish" body (verse 44) which was "earthy." He has reproduced himself in abundance, but all who spring from him are earthy also, as being of his order (verse 48).

The last Adam stands in sharp contrast to the first. Though truly Man, being a life-giving Spirit He is God. He is the "Lord from Heaven." He is not only Man, however — the "Second Man" as stated in verse 47 — He is *Adam*, i.e. He is the Progenitor and Head of a race. And He is the *last* Adam, for He is never to be succeeded by another head. In Him God has reached perfection and finality. God be praised for this! We are amongst the heavenly ones who are of His order.

Let it be emphasized in our minds that He is not only "last Adam," but also "the second Man." This latter expression shows that between Adam and Christ no man is counted. Cain was not the second man. He was only Adam reproduced in the first generation. So were all men — only Adam reproduced in their various generations. But when Christ was born, He was *not* Adam reproduced. By the "virgin birth," under the action of the Holy Ghost, the entail was broken, a new and original Man appeared worthy of being called "the second Man." He, in His turn becoming the Head of a new race, He stands

forth as "the last Adam."

Now we all started as children of the earthy Adam, bearing his image. Brought to Christ, we have become subjects of the Divine workmanship and find ourselves transferred from the earthy to the heavenly. That transference however has not so far touched our bodies, for we still bear the image of the earthy, and consequently our bodies decay and are subject to death and the grave. In resurrection we are to bear "the image of the heavenly." We are to be conformed to the image of God's Son, not only as to our characters, but as to our very bodies. Most glorious fact! How are the dead raised up? In a condition of perfection and glory such as that!

Do not let us overlook the fact that, though we must wait for the realization of this perfection, we have not to wait in order to be under the headship of the last Adam, to be linked up with the second Man. The end of verse 48 does not say, "such are they also that *shall be* heavenly" — but "that *are* heavenly." We *ARE* heavenly. Is not that wonderful! Does it seem too wonderful? Are we inclined to shrink from it? Do we feel that its implications are very sweeping and make demands upon us which we cannot face? Well, let us beware of paring down the truth to suit our low walk. Behaviour which is low, and carnal, and earthly, and worldly, does not befit those who *are* heavenly.

With verse 50 the Apostle passes on to speak of the great moment when the change from things earthy to things heavenly shall reach our bodies. We are going to inherit the kingdom on its heavenly side and find ourselves in a scene of absolute incorruptibility. We cannot enter there in our present "flesh and blood" condition, to which corruption is attached.

"Behold I show you a mystery," he says. These words indicate that he is going to announce something hitherto unrevealed. That there would be a resurrection of the dead, that the Lord was coming, they knew. They had not hitherto known that when the Lord came He would raise the dead saints in a condition of glorious incorruptibility and change the living saints into a like condition. It seems that saints of Old Testament days conceived of resurrection as being a raising up of the dead to a glorified life on earth. It is certain that they had no knowledge as yet of the resurrection *out from among* the dead, which believers are to enjoy at the coming of the Lord. Until the truth of the heavenly calling of saints, of the calling out of the church, came to light, the moment had not come for the full truth as to resurrection to be made known. This orderly progress of doctrine can be noted all through the New Testament.

Now it is plainly revealed. We shall not all "sleep" (i.e. die) but we shall all be changed, whether alive or dead at the moment when the Lord comes *for* His saints. The change will involve the swallowing up of all that is mortal or corruptible about us, in life and in victory. We shall "all be changed," you notice, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" — not in many, or at least several, different moments, as would be the case if by a partial rapture, or series of partial raptures, the church is destined to enter into its glory.

The mighty change will be wrought instantaneously by the power of God, at the "last trump." In verse 29 believers were considered as soldiers stepping into the ranks by baptism to take the places of their fallen comrades. In verse 52 we see them all — whether in the ranks still, or fallen out of them by death — put, in one moment at the last trump, beyond death and corruption. Their warfare will be over. They will never need another trumpet blast for ever!

As regards ourselves, the saying of Isaiah 25: 8 will be fulfilled when we are changed bodily into a condition of immortality and incorruptibility. This illustrates what we have just said. The Old Testament has in view the victorious resurrection power of God exercised on earth. Our Scripture brings to light a greater fulness of meaning, lying dormant in the verse until the Gospel day was

reached. When the saints reach the image of the heavenly, death will be swallowed up in a victory that none can deny. Our Scripture, you notice, does not speak of the "rapture," the catching up of the saints. For that we must turn to 1 Thessalonians 4.

The sense of how great the victory of that day will be, moves the Apostle to an outburst of exultation. He flings a triumphant challenge to death and "the grave" — or more strictly "*hades*." The fact is, the victory is already ours. It has been won in the resurrection of Christ which has been so fully established in this chapter. The resurrection of saints is merely the outworking of *that* victory, and we can treat it as being as good as done. The victory is ours today — thanks be to God!

With what tremendous force does the closing exhortation of the chapter come! "*Therefore — .*" Behind that word lies all the weight of the glorious truth established in the earlier 57 verses of the chapter. Having entertained doubts as to the truth of resurrection they must have become unsteady, easily moved, slack, and inclined to subscribe to the motto, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

Resurrection however is a glorious certainty. Christ is risen, and we, being of His heavenly order, are to join Him in His heavenly likeness. These things being so, THEREFORE an unmoveable stability becomes us. Instead of fooling away our time eating and drinking, we are to abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that nothing really done for Him shall be lost. All shall be found again as fruit in the resurrection world.

Are we living in the light of that resurrection world? We may recite the creed correctly, and have resurrection as a prominent item in it; but if our souls really have it full in view, we shall be diligent and untiring workers in the service of the Lord, as He may be pleased to direct us.

1 Corinthians 16

THE LAST DIRECTION of the Apostle in this epistle concerns the special collection being made at that time for poor saints in Judaea. Today in many religious circles money is so often the first topic. Here it is the *last*. Still it comes in, and instructions of abiding value are given. In verse 2 *systematic* giving is advocated as opposed to haphazard. *Proportionate* giving is also what God expects — in proportion to the prosperity which God Himself may have given. In Jewish days God fixed the proportion at one tenth. He has not fixed any proportion for us who are under grace; but depend upon it we shall hear something pretty serious at the judgment seat if we fall below the standard set by the law. If all believers practised giving which is both proportionate and systematic, there would be no money problem in connection with the work of the Lord. The chapter division perhaps leads us to miss the connection between 1 Cor. 15: 58, and 1 Cor. 16: 2.

The closing messages of a personal sort begin after this, and verses 5 - 12 are illuminating if compared with the history of Acts 18: 24 - 20: 6. Paul wrote from Ephesus while in the midst of a great work with many adversaries, whose opposition culminated in the great riot in the theatre. Apollos had preceded Paul at Ephesus, and then after being further instructed in the way of the Lord through Aquila and Priscilla, he visited Achaia, where Corinth was situated. Paul had come to Ephesus while Apollos was at Corinth, but by this time Apollos had passed on from Corinth. Meanwhile Paul contemplated passing through Macedonia and visiting Corinth on the way. This visit to Macedonia was accomplished, as Acts 20 records, though his second epistle shows that his visit to Corinth was delayed. He had begged Apollos to pay them another visit, but without avail.

Observe from this that if God raises up a servant he is responsible only to the Lord who commissions him, and not even to an Apostle. Paul assumed no jurisdiction over Apollos. The fact that

he begged him *to go* shows that he entertained no feelings of jealousy towards this fresh man of gift who had suddenly appeared. The fact that Apollos felt he should *not go* to Corinth at this juncture probably indicates that he on his part had no wish to push himself forward lest he should fan the flames of that partisanship and rivalry which would say, "I am of Apollos."

The Corinthians had been unwatchful. They had been vacillating as to the faith of the Gospel. They had behaved more like weak children than strong men. Hence the graphic exhortations of verse 13. We must keep those exhortations connected with verse 14, or we may go astray. All our things are to be done "with charity," or "in love." Otherwise our manliness and our strength will degenerate into something fleshly and almost brutal. Christian manliness and strength exercised *in love* is according to God and very powerful.

Verse 15 gives an interesting side-light on service. The household of Stephanus had "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints," or "devoted themselves to the saints for service." They laid themselves out to serve the saints realizing that thus they would be serving Christ in His members on earth. There might be a lot that was commonplace and humdrum in such work, but it was rendered to Christ. Such service is not very common, we fear. It receives mention and commendation in verse 16. It exemplifies, we judge, what is meant by "helps," mentioned amongst the gifts in 1 Cor. 12: 28.

The three closing verses are a blending of solemnity and grace. The Corinthians were prominent as to gift but deficient as to love. Hence verse 22. Many of us are like the Corinthians. Let us take it to heart that it is love that counts. Not to love the Lord Jesus means a curse at His coming when all profession will be tested. Maran-atha is not Greek but Aramaic, signifying "The Lord is coming."

For those who do love the Lord there is a full supply of grace from Him, and the outflow of love from those who are His, as seen in the affectionate closing salutation of the Apostle Paul.