

## Assembly Order and Privileges

1 Corinthians 1: 4-10, 17.

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Most of us will be departing this weekend and going to our local gatherings, and it might therefore be worth our while to ask ourselves, in the light of what has been before us — viewing the assembly of God in its public and universal setting — how are we to work out *locally* the particular features that have been before us in these meetings? How are we to face the various difficulties which may confront us, and what is going to mark us in relation to them and our service for the Lord Jesus?

May we emphasize the importance of the "Bible Readings"! If increase in the knowledge of God is desired there must be the urgent exercise to be at the Readings. We are passing through a horrible, filthy world, and only that which is of Christ in our hearts will go through and be found, not only in the world to come, but in eternity. If we laboured as urgently in the things of Christ as we are inclined so to do in the things of this world, how marked would be our growth! We are apt to forget that at any moment we may quit this world:-

"Only one life and soon to pass;

What's done for Christ alone will last."

I trust, beloved, we have all come to a true judgment of this world — a horrible, evil world in which God has left us in testimony for Himself. Let us keep as far away from it as possible! Of a few names in Sardis it is recorded they had "Not defiled their garments." We cannot go on with the things of this world in one hand and the things of God in another. We have that in us which answers to the things of this world, and we have also that to which the things of Christ appeal. Let us go in for that which we know to be of God. As a departed brother once said "He has put the very best alongside the very worst and given us the ability to say 'yes' to the best and 'no' to the worst, and every time this is done it is a triumph for God in this world." That is why He has left us here, with substance in our souls which can stand for God and serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle is writing to the saints in a locality where almost everything that could go wrong had gone wrong. As difficulties arise in our local companies we do well to search the word of God as to what is the mind of the Lord for us. How that difficulty should be met is just what the apostle is shewing step by step in this epistle. In verse 4 he says "I thank my God always on your behalf." We could perhaps understand his saying this about the Colossians or the Ephesians, but as we go on reading we are inclined to ask — "What can you thank God for, Paul, in a company like that?" Everything they *can* do wrong they appear to be doing, and he is about to tell them of those wrongs, but first he thanked God on their behalf, not because of what they were doing, but "for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ." He viewed the divine element connected with them, and before he touches the difficulty, he commends all that he could commend — the effect of the wonderful grace of God. Beloved, if we belong to the lord, then each of us is a subject of the grace of God. If God has blessed us in free favour He is bound to have given us the very best. This free favour — the grace of God — had been bestowed upon the Corinthians by Jesus Christ, and they were representing Him in their city.

He continues — "In everything ye are enriched by Him." Do you believe that in the local

company with which you are connected, with all its complications, that God has blessed you as fully as He could ever bless you in everything? This is what he says — enriched in everything! We are, perhaps, not all gifted to understand or open up the word of God "in all utterance, and in all knowledge," but we can be sure that whatever is needed will be there. If the right conditions obtain the right ministry will be there. We shall then grow step by step in the knowledge of God. Don't let us blame others if things are not going right. Do we come in the hope that the Lord will speak to us — in the hope that we might grow in divine things? If we are not getting the gain of these things we may be sure the fault is on our side. If a company like those at Corinth had been so blessed, then we may be persuaded that God has put into every company all that is needed — "all utterance, and in all knowledge." If we feel there is a lack of ministry in our locality, let us be exercised personally about it. If there is no teacher in the company have you ever got before the Lord and said, "Teach me Thy truth that I may open it out"? If we are a company of saints with the Spirit of God in our hearts there will be available all that is needed in that company, providing there is sustained exercise in relation to it. Dear brethren, if we feel it is not there let us ask the Lord to give it to us that it might be for the benefit of the little company to which we belong. These are the privileges the apostle is speaking about when he says, "enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge."

We notice six things in these verses, and the first is in verse 6: "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." What was the proof that the testimony of the Christ was confirmed in them? Paul came to Corinth preaching the gospel, and many hearts were opened to receive it. What was it they received? The truth as to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ; His burial; His resurrection; His ascension and His place in heaven above — all that was borne testimony to concerning Christ as Saviour. In speaking to the Corinthians regarding their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it was in relation to a Man whom this world had rejected, but whom heaven had accepted and who was glorified at the right of God. As belonging to God that testimony is accepted and confirmed. This was the proof of it — "You come behind in no gift." It is the work of the Spirit of God which enables us to voice to God in intelligent Christian language the various needs in relation to the meeting to which we belong. It was coming to light in Corinth, that is, the testimony concerning the Christ which they had received. Do we always carry with us the conscious knowledge that we have a divine Person dwelling in our souls? Wherever we go it is true of us that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in our hearts. Sometimes we have found ourselves in the wrong place, doing the wrong things and a bad conscience was the result. Thank God we have the Holy Spirit; if we had not we would have no troubled conscience. There is one gift we all have — the Spirit of God. Let us value this and allow Him to lead us in the right paths and to a deeper knowledge of divine things for the pleasure of our Lord.

"That ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In Paul's writings there are three words used for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the one which perhaps appeals to us most is the word "Parousia," which means His own personal presence. But in our chapter the word is "Apokalupsis," a word used for the Revelation, and which indicates the rolling aside of the veil. Is this before us, beloved, the rolling aside of the veil when that which is now known only to faith will then be known to sight as we are with the Lord?

In confirmation of that we have this third word, "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Remarkable that Paul should say that to the Corinthians when he was about to blame them for many things! How, then, can he say these things about them? Because, in that day they will stand there, not on the ground of what *they* have done, but on the ground of what *Christ has done*. Thank God we are never told to strive to get to heaven. We should never get there; but we shall be there in spite of the trials and difficulties, "blameless in the day

of our Lord Jesus Christ." It has been said that if these things are made known people will say it matters not how we live; but if we are to be there blameless on the ground of what Christ has done, we shall seek to be blameless in what we are doing in this world. Everyone of us will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive the things done in the body. We shall be thankful in that day for every right thing that we have done which will have His commendation. Why not labour with this object in view — His commendation at the end of the pathway? If God has done all this for us, let us seek daily grace to prove our worthiness "for the calling wherewith He has called us." The reward will be in the "day of our Lord Jesus Christ" — the world to come. The teaching of our Lord always connects reward with the kingdom. What we have done here in this "little while" will have its answer in those thousand years of the kingdom to which we are going. How good it would be to receive from His lips — "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Fourthly, verse 9, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." We are not called out to a mere notion or an idea, but we have been called out to the "fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." That wonderful Person who came into Manhood, and who has accomplished the things of which we have been speaking, has thus fitted us for a place in the Christian company in order that we might go on *unitedly* in the "fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." There could not be a more exalted fellowship than this.

Verse 10 — "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" — this is one of the major exercises we have to face. That Name is the Name that we profess, and people regard us as such, and they expect us to be true to our profession. They often seem to know better than we do what we ought to be as believers. How is the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ prospering in our testimony in this world? Do we so rightly represent Him in all His interests, that we need not fear meeting anyone or any charge made against us? The verse continues "That ye all speak the same thing." We may wonder how that is to be brought about! Is it possible that this can be? "That there be no divisions among you; that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." It must be possible or Paul would not have referred to it. Why *do* divisions come in? Have we not heard it said, "I am determined to do what *I* like." A brother or sister saying that is not acting as morally fit for the fellowship. What we have here is the *local* fellowship; it is not the universal fellowship to which all Christians are called, and if any demand to have their own way in a local company then inevitably there will be difficulties arising. Let us, beloved, weigh up these things and if things *do* come before us for judgment let us sincerely seek the Lord's mind in the matter. Not what we think about it, but what is the *Lord's* mind about it. As *our* minds are in line with the *Lord's* mind we shall be truly "joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Finally, verse 17 — "For Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." This is a most important exhortation! The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ — where that old man which is in us, so liable to cause all the trouble — came under the judgment of God. Who are we to claim our own rights among the saints of God? — to tell others that we will do as we like? These are the marks of the old man, which was brought to an end in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we would accept the removal in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ of what we are naturally, sinfully, the very things that may come into the assembly, bringing in disruption, and disaster will be brought under the judgment which God brought them under when he judged them in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are all well aware how much these things need thinking of. We can be either a help or a positive hindrance to our brethren. Let us bring the destructive element practically under the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the Spirit may be free for the help and the blessing of the saints of God. May we have grace given to so walk in our

local companies that the features brought before us in this chapter may be clearly in evidence amongst us.