1 Corinthians: An Expository Commentary

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Prefatory Note To The First Edition

For nearly two years, 1934 and 1935, it was my privilege to attempt to expound the Corinthian Epistles at the regular Sunday morning gatherings, numbering from 2500 to 3500 people, in the auditorium of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. With radio equipment these addresses were broadcast over a large stretch of territory, thus reaching many thousands more. So insistent has been the demand for their publication in printed form that I have decided to send them out in this way. The original messages were taken down by a competent reporter and have been considerably revised and shortened, as otherwise it would have taken several volumes to reproduce them.

I am more firmly convinced than ever that there is need to emphasize the fundamental principles set forth in these letters given by inspiration through the apostle to the Gentiles, in order that Christians generally may be called back to the simplicity of early days. In 1 Corinthians we have the order that should prevail in Christian assemblies, while the second Epistle deals more particularly with the ministry of the church. If it please God, the addresses on that second letter will be published later.

I hope my readers will not come to this book looking for a critical analysis of the Epistle. If so, they will be disappointed. The object I had in view was to expound the Word as simply as possible for the edification and instruction of plain people who have neither the time nor the learning to follow heavy and erudite comments. If any such are helped to a greater appreciation of the

value of this portion of the Word of God, I shall be abundantly repaid for the time and labor required to reproduce the spoken messages.

H. A. Ironside

Chicago, 1938

Chapter One We Preach Christ Crucified

The two letters to the Corinthians, the letter to the Romans, and the letter to the Galatians form a quartet of Epistles that were apparently written during Paul's third missionary journey and are intimately related to each other. In Romans the great fundamental doctrine of justification by faith alone is set forth. In Galatians that doctrine is defended after having been questioned by legalistic teachers. Therefore these two Epistles, Romans and Galatians, form the very foundation of Christian teaching. In the two letters to the Corinthians Paul gave instruction concerning the church: in the first Epistle, the ordering, calling, and discipline of the church; in the second Epistle, the ministry of the church. If we should lose all the rest of the New Testament—and God forbid that we should—and have only these four letters preserved, they would be sufficient to show us the way of salvation and to show us how to conduct ourselves as Christian people coming together in a church relationship. Therefore we can see the importance of being thoroughly familiar with these letters.

How the gospel reached Corinth we learn from Acts 18, where we are told that after his visit to Athens, the apostle Paul traveled to Corinth and began the work in a very quiet way. He did not enter the city with a blare of trumpets; he was not advertised as a great evangelist or Bible teacher; he simply went to work as an unknown craftsman. He was a tentmaker and in association with his two friends Aquila and Priscilla, who were engaged

in the same business, he opened up an establishment. Elsewhere we are told that they labored night and day, and that by means of tentmaking the apostle was able to support not only himself but also those who ministered with him when the churches forgot their responsibility to them.

Paul was a great foreign missionary and when the churches of God did recognize their responsibility and send gifts, as in the case of the Philippian church, he gladly received the money and used it for the glory of God. But when he was neglected, he did not sit down and pine and whimper because of the coldheartedness of Christians in other places; he simply created a job for himself and went to work making tents and providing the wherewithal to carry on his testimony. This in a way was helpful to his ministry, for sometimes when a preacher or a missionary goes out as a well-supported individual bearing an official title and relationship to the church, people are not as interested in him and his message as they would be if he had come to work with his own hands as they have to do.

Having established his business in Corinth, the apostle began to move among the Jews. He attended the local synagogue where he doubtless listened to the regular services and then when opportunity was given, presented the gospel. There was a great deal of freedom in a Jewish synagogue. Jewish visitors, particularly if attired in the teacher’s garb, were permitted to take part in the service. Undoubtedly when Paul went there, he wore the garments that showed that he was a graduate of the school of Gamaliel and therefore the apostle was recognized as a teacher.

On one occasion when he and Barnabas attended a synagogue, the rulers, having completed the first part of the service, recognized the two men as teachers and said, “Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” And we read, “Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience” (Acts 13:15-16). This would be the customary procedure in the Jewish synagogue. There was nothing irregular and nothing disorderly about it; Paul was simply availing himself of a privilege.

So from sabbath to sabbath—that was on Saturday of course— he reasoned with the Jews and any Gentiles who might be present. It was a common thing for inquiring Gentiles to attend the Jewish services. Tired and weary of the customary recurring heathen festivities, finding nothing in paganism to answer the yearning desires of their hearts, they sought in the synagogue what they could not find elsewhere. When they in a measure at least accepted the Jewish doctrines, they were recognized as “proselytes of the gate” or “God-fearers.” To these people as well as the Jews, the apostle presented the message; he reasoned with them on the sabbath day.

Some of our present-day legalistic friends who have never known the blessedness of deliverance from law say, “We read in the book of Acts that Paul preached on the sabbath day, and that day is Saturday; so we are duty-bound to recognize that day rather than Sunday as the Lord’s day.” The fact is that the apostle was simply accommodating himself to the Jews who met on their sabbath. If he wished to reach them, he had to reach them on that day. The Christians themselves met

together on the first day of the week to break bread and pray. This was their custom from the beginning, but on the Jewish sabbath they found opportunity to minister to the Jews and so used that day for that purpose.

Paul at first simply dealt with them from the standpoint of the Old Testament, but “when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia [to Corinth], Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:5). The apostle’s work up to this time was preparation, but now that he had the backing of other helpers, he felt the time had come to give a clear ringing testimony, to show that all these Old Testament Scriptures pointed to the One who had been crucified outside Jerusalem, who had been raised from the dead, and who had ascended into Heaven. When many of the Jews opposed this message and turned from him, Paul did a very significant thing. Shaking the long eastern robes that he wore, he said, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). And so he left the Corinthian synagogue, never to enter it again. He found a preaching place in the house of a man named Justus.

Evidently Justus was a Gentile proselyte; his house adjoined the synagogue and he had accepted the Jewish revelation about God. When Paul began preaching in the home of Justus, one of the first converts was Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue; he believed “with all his house.” The work went on for a year and a half “and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

Notice the order: they heard the message; they believed the gospel; and then they were publicly baptized, thus

confessing that they had received the crucified One as their own personal Savior. I emphasize that final step because some people imagine that in his Epistles the apostle seems to minimize the importance of Christian baptism. He did not ordinarily do the baptizing himself, but he always insisted that it be done. The fact that Paul himself was generally not the baptizer does not indicate that he slighted the ordinance.

As we go on in that eighteenth chapter of Acts we read of the insurrection stirred up against Paul in the days of Gallio, and we are told that the Greeks caught Sosthenes, who had become the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him for attempting to foment a riot. It would seem that the beating did him good because when we next find his name, it is linked with the apostle Paul's in 1 Corinthians 1:1. Of course we have no positive proof that this Christian brother is the same man, but I take it for granted that he is. His beating brought him at last to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior.

A mighty work of God was accomplished during the year and a half that Paul was in Corinth. It was not a likely field for missionary service. This metropolis with a population between six and seven hundred thousand people was given over to the worship of the goddess Aphrodite, the Greek name for the one whom the Romans worshiped as Venus, the goddess of lust or carnal love. In celebrating the rites of Aphrodite, the Corinthians gave themselves up to the most shameful licentiousness. So notorious was their worship that in all parts of the Greek-speaking world if men or women were found behaving in an unclean way, the worst that anyone could say of them was that they acted like

Corinthians. Today if it is said that a person is like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, we at once understand that he lives a life of the vilest uncleanness; similarly in Paul's day if it was said that a person was Corinthianized, the intimation was that he had totally lost all sense of morality and decency.

Such was the city into which Paul went to preach the gospel of the grace of God, and in that city the gospel won many to the knowledge of Christ. It was the means of delivering people from their lives of wickedness and making saints out of those who had been vicious and utterly lost to all sense of decency.

The Sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:1-3)

What interest this background gives to the opening verses of 1 Corinthians! "Paul, called an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother." I left out the italicized words "to be" (which had been added to 1:1 by the editors of the King James version) because I wanted to convey the fact that they should be left out of the second verse also. Paul was not called "to be" an apostle; he was an apostle—a "called" apostle, an apostle by divine calling. And so you and I are not called "to be" saints if we have trusted the Lord Jesus; we are saints, saints by calling.

Keep in mind that Paul's apostleship, as he told us in Galatians 1:1, was "not of men, neither by man." No one had anything to do with putting him into the apostolate except the risen Lord. An apostle was one who had seen the Lord and went forth to proclaim His message. Paul, as Saul, saw the Lord that day on the Damascus turnpike and went forth to proclaim Christ to the Jews

and Gentiles. It was “the will of God” that made him what he was.

Notice how Paul linked himself with “Sosthenes our brother.” I take it for granted that this must have been the Corinthian Sosthenes because those receiving the letter would at once recognize his name. A thrill would go through their hearts as they exclaimed, “Yes, Sosthenes, once the persecutor but converted here in our own city, is still with the apostle Paul and is sending his greetings to us!” Just as we value the greetings of those we love and respect in the Lord, and when they go elsewhere we are always pleased to hear from them, so the Corinthians would find pleasure in seeing his name linked with that of the apostle Paul.

Paul wrote “unto the church of God which is at Corinth.” What a change had taken place since the years when this very man—as Saul of Tarsus—persecuted the church of God! I have heard of a strange teaching that the church of the book of Acts is not the church of our day, that the church, the body of Christ, did not begin until after Paul was put in prison in Rome. But Paul persecuted the church of God when he was still unconverted; how could he have persecuted that which had no existence? The church had its birthday on the day of Pentecost, and after that, churches of God were established in local communities.

The local church in Corinth was composed of those who were once legalistic Jews or blind Gentiles, but were now all one in Christ Jesus. And the apostle spoke of them as the “sanctified… called saints.” Often we think of a saint or a sanctified one as a sinless person. We see someone in whom the grace of God shines out most

wonderfully and we say, “Well, certainly there is a saint.” Or perhaps someone has just gone home to Heaven and we speak of him as “the sainted so-and-so” because he has gotten beyond the reach of sin. But that is not the way Scripture uses these terms. It says “them that are sanctified,” not “them that are sinless”; it says “saints,” not “absolutely holy ones.” The saints are the separated; the sanctified are those set apart to God in Christ Jesus.

“Sanctified” and “saints” are two words that come from the same root meaning “separated, set apart, devoted to a holy purpose.” If you are saved, the moment you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, God separated you from a world under judgment and set you apart for Himself in Christ Jesus. In that instant you became a saint; in that moment you were sanctified, and that sanctification is a perfect one.

We read in Hebrews 10:14, “He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” I used to be taught, and perhaps some of you have been told, that a man has to be justified first, and then sometime afterward he goes on to receive what some call “the second blessing” and he becomes sanctified. When I turn to the Book of God, however, I find that the order is just the opposite. I find that a man is sanctified by the work of the Spirit in his heart even before he comes to the knowledge of Christ. It is the sanctifying, separating work of the Spirit of God that leads him to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The moment he puts his faith in Christ, God sees him as sanctified in Christ Jesus, as set apart to God, as separated from the old life, from the old ways, from the world to which he once belonged; that moment God

counts Him as clean in His sight because of the infinite value of the atoning work of His beloved Son.

You may say, “I would hardly dare say that I am sanctified. I know I am a Christian. I trust I am justified. But I am afraid I am not good enough yet to say that I am sanctified.” But just as your goodness had nothing to do with your justification, it is not your goodness that entitles you to take your place among the sanctified. When you were justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, all the past was put away forever and God gave you a new standing before Him.

Sin makes men not only guilty but also unclean. Because we are guilty we need to be justified; because we are unclean we need to be sanctified. We are cleansed by the blessed atoning blood through which we are justified. So we read of being sanctified by the blood of His covenant: “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).

Jesus said, “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19). The moment He rose from the dead God saw all believers as linked with Him. In Hebrews 2:11 we read, “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” So if you are a Christian and have any doubt about your sanctification, put the doubt away and thank God that you are in Christ and therefore sanctified.

As we go on reading in 1 Corinthians, we will find that the apostle had to bring to the attention of his readers many things that needed correction. He told them that they were carnal, for they were taking one another to

court and tolerating all kinds of unholy things in their midst. Some of the Christians in Corinth had wrong ideas about the marriage relationship, and some were ignorant about their relation to their past idolatry, but still the apostle speaks of them all as the “sanctified in Christ Jesus.”

Observe that Paul not only addressed this letter to “the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints”; he widened out the address so that it takes in every Christian to the end of the dispensation: “with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” Do you see the importance of that? There are many things in this Epistle that some Christians today try to dodge and get away from, and very often you will hear them say as the Epistle is read, “Oh well, that was for that age and that day, or for folks living in Corinth, but not for people today.” They ignore the fact that the letter is addressed to each one who seeks to acknowledge the lordship of Christ.

As we study the Epistle, let us accept it as a personal message from the Holy Spirit of God to each one of us as Christian individuals. We would not like to think that the passages about grace were only for the Corinthians, so we should not attempt to apply the passages about responsibility only to the people of Corinth. We must remember that the whole letter was written for the whole church of God until the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto Him.

In the third verse we find the apostolic salutation, “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” We are saved by grace,

but of course this is not the grace to which Paul here referred. He knew that people who are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” are already justified by faith, saved by grace. And all Christians have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (italics added). It is a settled thing.

In 1 Corinthians 1:3 Paul was not praying for Christians to obtain saving grace. He was praying for the grace that sustains Christians in all the trials of the way, the grace that enables us to overcome in every hour of temptation. In Hebrews 4:16 we are bidden to “come boldly unto the throne of grace [upon which our Great High Priest sits], that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” We need grace every day of our lives. The grace of yesterday will not suffice for today. Morning by morning we need to draw down from above, through meditation and prayer, supplies of grace to start the day aright. Throughout the day we need to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17); our hearts should continually be reaching out to God so that new supplies of grace may come down to us constantly. We cannot keep ourselves even for one moment, so we need the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And the peace that Christians need is not peace with God, but the peace o/God, the peace of which we read in Philippians 4:6-7: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” You see, this has nothing to do with the sin question; that has been

settled. We have peace with God because our sins have been forever put away. The peace of God has to do with the question of things that would keep us anxious, the trials of life that would trouble our hearts. How blessed is the privilege to go to God about them all!

I am afraid that many dear Christians miss a great deal of peace because they have never learned to go to Him about their temporal affairs as well as their spiritual needs. Some look at me aghast when I tell them of praying about money and family matters. They say, “You do not mean to say that the God who created the world is concerned that I have money to meet my rent and to pay for food? Are you saying that He will intervene in my family problems?” Scripture answers, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing [that word is all-inclusive] by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter what trial comes to you, no matter what perplexity you are called on to face, no matter what need you have to meet, God invites you to come to Him about it, and He will “supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). That is a promise.

The Fellowship of God’s Son (1 Corinthians 1:4-9)

We cannot help noticing how frequently the full name and title of our Savior is used in these verses—and throughout the entire Epistle. We will never find in the Bible the undue familiarity in the use of divine names that is so common in the irreverent days in which we live. No one in Scripture ever addressed our blessed Savior merely as Jesus. He was sometimes spoken of as

Jesus; for example, by divine inspiration when His atoning work was particularly in view, the angel said, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). But when He was addressed directly, and ordinarily even when He was spoken of by His followers, He was called the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ our Lord.

I am sure there is a lesson for each one of us in Paul’s reverence. The One who brought the Corinthian Christians out of darkness into His marvelous light is the One who through grace has brought those of us who are Christians today to a saving knowledge of Himself. He is our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us ever remember when we approach Him in prayer that He is our Lord. Let us ever remember when we speak of Him to others that “God hath made that same Jesus [who was] crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Let us also beware of calling Jesus Lord and then slighting His commands.

If He is not Lord of all,

Then He is not Lord at all.

The Epistles to the Corinthians emphasize His lordship throughout. Christ said to His disciples, “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am” (John 13:13). Thank God, we delight to know Him as our supreme sovereign Master.

Later in 1 Corinthians Paul pointed out many irregularities in the church at Corinth and reproved the believers there for a number of things that were bringing dishonor to the name of the Lord. Yet in this introductory portion of the Epistle the apostle first of all

gave God thanks for what His grace had already wrought. As he remembered the year and a half that he labored in Corinth, during which time most of those he was primarily addressing in this letter were brought into a saving knowledge of Christ, he said, “I thank my God always on your behalf.” It brought great joy to the heart of that soul-winner to think of those whom he had the privilege of pointing to Christ.

Paul expressed gratitude for “the grace of God,” for His free unmerited favor toward those deserving the very opposite. For the moment he was not thinking merely of the grace that saves. The Corinthian Christians were saved by grace and we are saved by grace; no one is saved in any other way. But having been saved, we are endowed by grace with all we need for our journey through this world. Among other things, provision is made for us to be built up as companies of believers when we gather together in church fellowship. God’s will is that believers gather in various localities as churches, and the Lord makes Himself responsible to minister that which will profit and edify such assemblies of believers. It is this aspect of grace on which the apostle was particularly dwelling here.

He thanked God for the grace given by Jesus Christ so that “in every thing [the Corinthian Christians were] enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge.” In other words, the church at Corinth was greatly blessed with gifts of the Spirit. Some of the Corinthians could minister the Word of God most acceptably; others who had the gift of evangelist could go out and carry the message to the world; some who were gifted as teachers could impart spiritual instruction to their brothers in Christ; many had miraculous gifts (see 1 Corinthians

12). It is questionable that there ever was a Christian church more enriched with spiritual gifts, yet it is a solemn fact that although the Corinthians were so wonderfully endowed, they were very carnal.

That fact leads us to realize that gifts in themselves are not preservative. One may have great ability individually, yet not have a close walk with God. One may be very gifted, yet not be guided by the Holy Spirit in the use of His gift. A church may have in its fellowship many on whom God has bestowed special gifts of the Spirit, but these gifts do not in themselves prove that that church is more spiritual than other fellowships.

We live in a day when there is a very unhealthy craving for what we may call the miraculous gifts, and people have an idea that if these were more in evidence in the church there would be more spirituality and more accomplished for God. I think the history of the Corinthian church proves the unsoundness of such reasoning. No church that I know of has ever been blessed with more spiritual gifts, yet they were anything but a truly spiritual church.

In Ephesians 4:7 Paul wrote, “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ,” and then he went on to mention the different gifts that the ascended Christ has given to the church. It is the grace of God that leads the Holy Spirit to bestow such gifts on His people. How much we need to respond to the grace of God by holding each gift in subjection to Him and by not becoming occupied with the gift rather than the Giver! The Corinthians became so occupied with the gifts that they all wanted to do miraculous things, and so their eyes were taken off Christ and fixed

on demonstrations of supernatural power. As a result they lost the sweetness of communion with Him.

We should be careful never to confuse natural talent with spiritual gifts. God gives the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, teaching, preaching, and exhortation, but those gifts are altogether different from any mere natural ability along what we might call oratorical lines. A man may be a born orator; it may be just as natural for him to preach in an interesting, compelling way as it is for another to sing beautifully. But whether speaking or singing, one needs something more than mere natural talent to be truly effective, and that something is the power of the Holy Spirit. If a man is naturally talented, he is not to discard his talents when yielding himself to Christ, but they are not to be put in the place of spiritual gifts. Mere natural talents are displaced by spiritual gifts when the Holy Spirit of God takes possession of a human instrument, works through him, and anoints him.

After people are converted and yielded to Him, the Holy Spirit bestows gifts on them “severally as he will” (1 Corinthians 12:11). Often the Spirit gives amazing power to people who are not at all remarkable for natural talent in presenting spiritual truth. Such power is a divine gift.

The apostle said, “Covet earnestly the best gifts” (12:31), so if you are already saved, if you are trusting Christ as your Savior, look to God to bestow on you some special gift of His grace so that you may be better able to win others to Christ and better able to help His beloved people. But never confuse mere human eloquence with divine ministry; never substitute mere oratory for the preaching of the Word. Preaching the

Word may be oratorical or it may lack that characteristic entirely.

The apostle Paul was naturally a wonderful orator, but when he stood before people to preach the gospel, he said he held all that back lest their faith should stand in the wisdom of man rather than in the power of God (2:5). Divine gifts enable servants of Christ to minister to edification, to the salvation of sinners, and to the building up of saints. But one may have these gifts and be out of fellowship with God; therefore it is important to live day by day in the spirit of self-judgment so that He may have the controlling power in the exercise of the gifts.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “The testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift.” The apostle had come to Corinth to minister the Word; they had believed and in turn ministered to others. God graciously confirmed that testimony in blessing until there was no gift that was not found in their assembly. In other churches there may have been a few people with some special gift, but in Corinth there were a great number. Yet as we read the Epistle, we are amazed to find how far many of them had dropped from faithfulness to Christ and true communion with the Lord. Surely this is a warning to us.

Paul went on to say that the Corinthian Christians were “waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word translated “coming” here in 1:7 is not parousia, the term generally used for the coming of the Lord to the air when saints rise to meet Him; the Greek word here is apokalupsis, which refers to His unveiling when He is revealed to the whole world. We too are waiting

for the unveiling of Jesus Christ. This of course is the goal. The Lord's descending and calling His people to meet Him in the air is a preparation, but the goal is the unveiling. When He is revealed in glory, we will be manifested with Him. We should be content to live quiet, godly, unworldly lives now because in that day we will have our reward as we shine forth with Him. That revelation of Jesus Christ was put before the Corinthian saints as the goal of all their hopes. Then the apostle told them that the One for whom they were waiting would keep them until the end.

I wonder whether you have noticed the method of the Spirit of God throughout the Scriptures when He has to reprove Christians because of failure in their lives. He begins by commending them for all that He can and by assuring them that everything is going to come out all right in the end. In Philippians 1:6 the apostle assured his readers, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [complete] it until the day of Jesus Christ." In 1 Corinthians 1:8 Paul said, "[He will] confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Note that both verses mention "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." The day of our Lord Jesus Christ is the day when He will return to call His own to be with Himself, the day when we will stand before His judgment seat. On that day we will be turned inside out, as it were; all our hidden motives will be brought to light and we will be rewarded according to deeds done since His grace saved us.

Until that day the Lord will "confirm" us. Some people make confirmation a ritual in a special church service—a child is under the care of the church until a certain year

and then he is confirmed and brought into the full membership of the church. The Bible has much to say about confirmation, but never presents it as a rite. Confirmation in the Bible is always the work of the Spirit of God making His truth real to the soul. This is our confirmation.

Paul was saying to the Corinthians, “I am absolutely sure that your confirmation will go on until the day of Jesus Christ.” In other words, the apostle did not have the slightest thought that anyone who had ever been born again would fail to reach Heaven. He knew that many of them might fail grievously on the way, but he also knew that they were not responsible to keep themselves, for they were being kept by the power of God. People say to me, “Oh, you are one of those old-fashioned folks who believe in the perseverance of the saints.” I generally answer, “To be perfectly frank, I am not at all conceited about the perseverance of the saints. My experience with myself and with a great many other saints is that most of us are not very much given to perseverance. We need to be prodded along most of the time.”

I heard Sam Jones explain why the Lord allowed the Presbyterians to believe once-saved-always-saved and the Methodists to believe that a person would only be saved at last if he held on. Jones said he sometimes thought the reason was that some of the Presbyterians were “such an ornery crowd” that they never would go on if they did not feel sure that they were eternally saved, and some of the Methodists were “such a poor type” that if the Lord did not keep the whip over them, they would never go on! That could be said of a great many people, but when we turn to the Word of God we

find that everything for a Christian depends on the perseverance of the Savior. He who took us up in grace has committed Himself to carry us through to the end. He knows how to deal with each individual saint so that he may be confirmed unto the end. And the final consummation is this, that every believer will appear "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The word translated "blameless" here in 1:8 may also be translated "unimpeachable" or "unaccusable." In other words, when we stand at last at the judgment seat of Christ, God Himself is going to see to it that no charge can stand against any believer because the Lord Jesus Christ has atoned for all our sins with His own precious blood. Every failure in the life will be dealt with there; all the wood, hay, and stubble will be burned in the fire of that day and we will stand before our Lord unimpeachable.

The next subject Paul brought up is most precious to every Christian's heart: "God is faithful." I would like to take time to dwell on those three words, but I do not really need to say much about them. You who have known the Lord for years, do I need to try to reason with you to show that God is faithful? As you look back over the years, do not all His dealings with you tell the story that you have served a faithful God? You can be sure that when we come to the end of the way, when at last we meet with loved ones around the throne, we will realize then as never before the faithfulness of God.

When I shall meet with those that I have loved,

Clasp in my eager arms the long-removed,

And know how faithful Thou to me hast proved,

I shall be satisfied.

I never have been and I am afraid I never will be faithful in the absolute sense, but I have to do with a faithful God who has promised to see me through.

“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” God does not save us merely as individuals, but having saved us individually, He introduces us into a wonderful fellowship of which our Lord Jesus is the risen glorified Head in Heaven. Every local church should be an expression of this fellowship of the body of Christ. As the apostle said in 10:16: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” If you have been redeemed by His blood, if by the Holy Spirit you have been baptized into the body of Christ, you are called into the fellowship of God’s Son, and you are one with every other believer on the face of the earth. It makes little difference what labels people may use—denominational, interdenominational, or undenominational. The important question is, Are they members of the fellowship of God’s Son?

The word translated “fellowship” in 1:9 really means “partnership.” We have been taken into partnership in a wonderful firm of which the Lord Jesus is the Head and in which every believer has a place. Do you wonder that some of us never crave any other fellowship? In His we have found all we need.

When we trace this word “fellowship” through the New Testament, we find that many beautiful truths are associated with it. In 1 John 1:3 we read that we have

been brought into fellowship with the Father and the Son. Is not that a wonderful thing? We are in partnership with the Father and the Son! We share their common thoughts. When you are interested in something that I am interested in, we get together and have fellowship, but just think of it: God the Father and God the Son have taken us into partnership with Them in Their thoughts in regard to redemption, the glorious plan of salvation!

In Philippians 2:1 we read about the fellowship “of the Spirit” because it is not a natural thing. It is produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. There is no real Christian fellowship apart from Him, and that fact shows the incongruity of unsaved people uniting with the visible church of God. Lost souls cannot have fellowship with God’s redeemed ones because that fellowship is produced by the Holy Spirit and He does not dwell in unsaved people.

The apostle Paul commended the Philippians for their participation in the fellowship of the gospel (1:5). Fellowship is not only a sweet and lovely sentiment; it is a practical thing, for we labor together for the blessing and the salvation of a lost world. Each one is to do his part. The preacher is not to do all the work; we have been called into a company in which each partner has service to do for the blessing of all. In 2 Corinthians 8:4 Paul spoke of “the fellowship of the ministering,” in which every believer (not just certain individuals) ministers according to his or her ability. This is the Christian ideal, and if you and I seek wholeheartedly to walk in accordance with it, we will have real blessing in our church relationships.

I wonder if anyone who is reading this commentary is saying to himself, “If in order to have fellowship like this I must possess the Holy Spirit, I am afraid I got into the visible church too soon, for I am not conscious of possessing the Spirit of God; I am not conscious of the indwelling Christ.” If those are your thoughts, what you need to do is to come to God as a poor sinner, put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and come right out into the light where God is, for it is written, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Contention in the Fellowship (1 Corinthians 1:10-17)

We have seen that God has established here on earth a wonderfully blessed fellowship into which He has called His saints. The fellowship of God’s Son is that communion of saints embracing all believers everywhere, all who have been washed from their sins in the precious blood of Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Men, however, have formed denominations, and so the visible church of God is in our day divided into many different factions, and unhappily some of these factions are very markedly un-Christian in their attitude toward others. Yet in all real Christian groups there are those who belong to the fellowship of God’s Son and who, I am sure, are often troubled and distressed as they think of the way Christians are divided among themselves.

I have heard people justify these denominational divisions by saying that each one represents a different regiment in the army of the Lord; just as the military has

the cavalry, the infantry, the artillery, the air corps, and the engineers, we have different denominations, and each Christian can choose for himself the one he prefers. This is a very comfortable way of looking at it if one does not want to have his conscience exercised by present-day conditions, but the fact of the matter is that Scripture tells us that divisions are the work of the flesh. It is not the Spirit of God who divides His people into these different companies. It is the work of the flesh in believers that leads them thus to separate from one another.

You say, “What should we do under such circumstances? Should we leave all the denominations and start another company?” I reply, “If you started a new group, in what sense would you be better than the denominations? You would simply be adding one more to the many divisions of Christendom.”

But what should we do? We should recognize the fact that in spite of man’s divisions there remains “one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4). We should welcome all real believers who uphold the truth of God as fellow members with us in the body of Christ and thus endeavor to rise above the spirit of sectarianism and denominationalism that prevails in so many places.

It was not denominationalism, however, that the apostle was directly rebuking in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Rather it was incipient divisions in the local church, for the Corinthian believers were not as yet separated from one another into various sects. Within that one church in Corinth there were cliques and factions, and so there

was dissension and trouble. The members were losing sight of the blessedness of true Christian fellowship.

Notice how the apostle addressed them: “Now I beseech you, brethren.” How in keeping that approach is with grace! Where grace rules, “I command” becomes “I beseech.” The admonition that followed was to refrain from murmuring and complaining and from fractiousness in the local assembly of Christ in order that all might be bound up together “in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Of course the Spirit of God speaking through the apostle does not attempt to force all believers to look at everything from exactly the same standpoint. That will never happen. No two people ever see the same rainbow. If you were to stand near me looking at a rainbow, you would get a slightly different view because you would be a little bit away from me—besides that, my eyes are very astigmatic and yours may be perfect. How foolish it would be for us to stand there and quarrel about the rainbow’s tints! Instead I should say, “I am so glad you are able to see it so much more clearly than I am; with your perfect eyes you can get a much better view of it than I can with my astigmatism.” And you should think kindly of me and say, “Well, I hope the day will come when you will be able to see as clearly as I do.”

Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing,” and “If in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (3:16,15). But we do not see eye to eye even as we read the Scripture. So much depends on our education, our cultural standards, our environment. We often

misunderstand statements of Scripture because of not being more familiar with the languages in which the Bible was originally written. If we were to insist that we could have no real fellowship unless we agreed on everything, I am afraid our church fellowship would become a very small circle indeed. I do not know where you could find a dozen people who see eye to eye on everything.

We have all laughed at the old Quaker who left one meetinghouse after another until finally someone said to him, “Well, what church are you in now?”

He said, “I am in the true church at last.”

“How many belong to it?”

“Just my wife and myself, and I am not sure about Mary sometimes.”

Our church would boil down to just that if we could not have fellowship with any except those who saw things exactly as we do. How then can we be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”? Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 2:16 that “we have the mind of Christ.” So “the same mind” is the lowly mind, the subject mind, the mind that was displayed in Jesus. You may look at things one way and I may look at them another way, but if we have the mind of Christ, we are not going to quarrel; we will get along in true, happy fellowship, considering one another and praying for one another.

And “the same judgment”—what does that mean? It does not refer to judging one another; it refers to discernment. Every believer has the Spirit of God dwelling within him to give him discernment, and when

things come up about which we differ, if we depend on the guidance of the Spirit of God, He will give us the good judgment we need. Philippians 1:9 tells us that we are to increase “in knowledge and in all judgment,” but I am afraid that some of us never get very far in real discernment because we neglect the study of our Bibles.

We are discerning about our food. If a dish that is brought to you smells as if something is wrong with it, you do not want to eat it. Your nose helps you avoid food poisoning. In Old Testament times a man who had a flat nose was not allowed to be a priest. Why? The nose speaks of discernment. A flat-nosed priest was one who could not discern, and God said that he could not serve (Leviticus 21:17-23).

We are called “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9), but I am afraid that many of us as believers are flat-nosed. We are taken up with almost anything that seems to have some Scriptural backing; we listen to all kinds of teaching and pay little attention to the careful study of the Word of God. Some people say, “I go anywhere; I listen to everything, for I can get a little good out of everything.” But when they do that, they soon lose all ability to discern the truth as it is in Jesus. It is barely possible that you could train your digestive powers to get nourishment out of sawdust, but why eat that when you can eat good substantial oatmeal? What is the use of going after all kinds of fads and follies when you can have the pure unadulterated Word of God? “Ye shall know the truth,” John 8:32 says, “and the truth shall make you free.”

After pleading with the believers in Corinth to be of “the same mind,” Paul stated one of his reasons for writing:

he had heard a bad report about these “brethren.” Observe that the apostle wrote to them about it and told them exactly who had brought the report to him. He would have had no sympathy with anonymous authors who write letters like the following:

Dear Pastor:

Perhaps you do not know it, but there is a woman in the church doing very prominent work who is a thorough hypocrite. I hope you will see that she is disciplined.

Sincerely yours,

A lover of Christ

The apostle would never have paid any attention to such a letter, nor would he have taken any action if a person came to him and said, “Brother Paul, I am sorry to speak to you about this, but there is one of our brethren—don’t for anything say that I told you—but Mr. so-and-so—oh, it is perfectly dreadful. I do hope you will do what you can, but don’t give him the least idea that I told you.” I think Paul would have sternly said, “What business do you have coming to me and slandering a brother when you are not willing to face him openly about it?”

And so when Paul received a bad report regarding the Corinthians, he wrote to them about it and said that it had come from the house of Chloe. Paul was straightforward about the source. If the report were not true, the house of Chloe would have to face the fact that they had been guilty of libeling the Corinthians, but in this case the report was true.

“It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe,” the apostle wrote, “that there are contentions among you.” So one

reason for writing the letter was that there was division right in the local assembly of Corinth. Paul added an illustration to show what he meant: “Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.” We can almost overhear their heated discussions:

Some favor Paul, the teacher. “I am of Paul,” one of them says. “I like real Bible teaching. I do not have much use for evangeUsm and exhortation. I like Brother Paul, for he feeds my soul.”

ApoUos is “an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures” (Acts 18:24), so some prefer him. One of his admirers says, “I am of ApoUos. I like a man who can stand up and give a wonderful oration, a man who gives a great address and winds it up with a marvelous conclusion that almost lifts me out of my seat. He is the man for me. I am not inspired by dry Bible teachers. I want to hear something that thrills my soul.”

Someone else says, “I am of Cephas. I like practical men, exhorters such as Cephas, who over and over again says, ‘I stir you up.’”

“Well, you can have Paul and Apollos and Cephas,” objects a man from another faction; “I am of Christ. I am not interested in anyone else. I do not need a man to teach me, for I am of Christ and I do not recognize human leaders. Stand by, for I am holier than thou.” (Have you ever seen that crowd? They are the most conceited of all.)

But Paul was not using actual names in this illustration. In 1 Corinthians 4:6 we read, “These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men

above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another." There Paul was saying, "You see, I have simply used the names of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas figuratively." The division in Corinth was not actually over Paul and Apollos; it was over local men, and the Corinthians were saying, "Well, I am for this brother," or "I am for that one," or "I am of Christ and I am not interested in any of the rest of them." And so Paul used his own name and the names of Apollos and Cephas to show how wrong the contention was.

Then Paul asked the question, "Is Christ divided?" (1:13) In other words, "Is it only one little group who are 'of Christ'? Even those who sometimes say, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas' are all 'of Christ' if they are truly converted. No one group should arrogate that distinction to themselves."

Paul asked another question: "Was Paul crucified for you?" What did he mean by that? He meant that we are not to make any man the head of a party. We are to remember that the fellowship to which we belong is that of the One who was crucified for us. It is true that we owe a great deal to Paul. I think that after I have seen the Lord Jesus Christ and my father and mother in Heaven, the next one I want to see is the apostle Paul; I want to have a good talk with him and tell him how much the messages he left on record have meant to me. But Paul was not crucified for me. He just helped to give me a better understanding of the One who was crucified for me and so I value his ministry.

Why did Paul go on to ask, "Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" The reason is that the only One whom we are to recognize as the Head of the church of God is the

One in whose name we were baptized. Do not get the idea as some have that the apostle was putting a slur on baptism, that he meant to imply that baptism was an unimportant thing and eventually would have no place in the church of God. By basing his argument on baptism he was recognizing it as a tremendously important thing.

When you became a Christian, in whose name were you baptized? You were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You belong to Him and you should recognize the entire fellowship of which He is the Head. But do not try to make His name the head of a party; and do not make the names of His servants the heads of parties, for the only real Head in the fellowship is Christ.

Because of the fact that the Corinthians were making so much of individuals, Paul said in effect, “I am very thankful as I look back that I personally did not do the baptizing in many cases.” He was not saying, “I am thankful that you were not baptized,” for they were baptized. Acts 18:8 says, “Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” Their baptism followed their believing. Paul was saying, “I am very thankful, since you are so given to a party spirit, that few of you can say, ‘I was baptized by Paul.’”

Paul’s actual words were, “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus [the ruler of the synagogue] and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas.” Evidently Stephanas was not with the Corinthians at the time Paul was writing, for we read in 16:17, “I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on

your part they have supplied." Stephanas apparently was a traveling preacher, and his household "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (16:15). Besides Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas, there was no one else in Corinth Paul could remember baptizing.

Giving his closing argument in reference to baptism, Paul said, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Observe, he was not saying that he was not commissioned to baptize. He was saying that he was not sent to make baptism the important thing. He was sent to preach the gospel. As an apostle he went out preaching, and when any believed the gospel they were baptized. This sequence is the opposite of the order of events in Roman Catholic missions and other church systems today. When Romanism goes to a new missionfield, the priests make it their first order of business to get as many infants together as possible and baptize them.

There are numerous things that are right and proper in their own sphere and that must of necessity occupy much of a preacher's time, but it was not to do these things that he was set apart as a servant of God and sent into the world. He was ordained of God to preach the gospel. Likewise Paul's great ministry was making Christ known, "not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." He depended not on mere human oratory or rhetoric, but on the power of the Holy Spirit enabling him in all simplicity to present to the people a crucified, risen, ascended, and returning Christ, that all hearts might be focused on Him and brought to put their trust in Him. As Christ is presented to the hearts of God's people they become

occupied with Him, their glorious Head. As they are drawn to Him, they are drawn together. That is the thing that unifies.

The Simplicity of Preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18-24)

The apostle Paul's great business was proclaiming the cross. "The preaching of the cross," he said, "is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." There is a challenge in almost every word of this verse.

The word translated "preaching" here is not the usual term that can also be translated "announcing" or "proclaiming"; it is logos, the term that is used to refer to Christ Himself in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). In its ordinary sense, logos refers to a spoken message, and in 1 Corinthians 1:18 Paul used it to put the word of the cross in contrast to the word of wisdom in 1:17. There he said that his aim was to preach the cross "not with wisdom of words [logos]" or—changing the order to give the exact meaning of the original—"not with the words of wisdom."

When Paul presented the doctrine of the cross, he did not want to hide it with beautiful verbiage; he would not obscure the message with human eloquence, or weaken or dilute the message in any way with charming rhetoric. He did not desire people to listen to him with admiration and go away exclaiming, "What a brilliant preacher, what a splendid orator!" instead of saying, "What guilty sinners we are and how amazing is the love

of God that sent His Son to die for us and bear the shame of the cross for our redemption!”

Some years ago a gentleman living in a country town in England went to London and while there heard some renowned preachers. Writing home to his wife, he said, “Last Sunday I went in the morning to hear Dr. so-and-so [he named one of the most eloquent men occupying a London pulpit at that time] and in the evening I went to the Metropolitan Tabernacle to listen to Charles Spurgeon. I was quite impressed by both of them. Dr. so-and-so is certainly a great preacher, but Mr. Spurgeon has a great Savior.” Do you see the difference?

Since it is possible to spoil the message by dependence on that which simply appeals to the human mind, the apostle tried not to preach Christ with words of wisdom —that is, this world’s wisdom— “lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” With eloquence, oratory, or rhetoric, a preacher can win the appreciation of even the most utterly godless man, but it is not the will of God that any of His servants should tickle the ears of their hearers. His will is that they should grapple with the consciences of those to whom they are speaking.

An unsaved person is in a most precarious position. If the brittle thread of his life should snap, he would be ushered out into a Christless eternity. How foolish and wicked we would be if when we preach to people who are still in their sins, we simply entertained them! We would be guilty before God if we sought the admiration and praise of our hearers instead of bringing them face to face with their sins and urging them to flee to the cross for refuge.

The thought of souls going to Hell had gripped the apostle Paul. He knew that men were lost without Christ, that there was no hope for them except in the cross, so he said in effect, “I do not want to say anything that will hide the cross. I do not want to decorate the cross with flowers and ribbons and tinsel, and make people lose sight of what it really is.” The cross is the declaration of man’s utter depravity and the demonstration of God’s infinite love. This word of the cross, compared with the world’s word of wisdom, “is to them that perish foolishness.”

What do we mean when we speak of the cross? I wonder sometimes if we have any conception in our day of what the cross meant when Paul wrote about it. Cicero said, “The cross, it speaks of that which is so shameful, so horrible, it should never be mentioned in polite society.” Yet Paul exclaimed, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). The cross meant far worse than the gallows or the electric chair means today because the cross declared that the one who was hanging on it was guilty of the vilest, the most awful crimes, that he was utterly unfit to live, that he was rejected of man and accursed of God. And a cross bore our Lord Jesus Christ! What does it mean? It means that man’s heart was so wicked, so sinful, that there was no way for him to be saved unless the eternal Son of God became man and suffered the most ignominious death for his redemption.

The cross also means that man’s heart has been completely exposed, for when God thus sent His Son, man cried, “Away with Him! Crucify Him! crucify Him!” There at the cross man told out the very worst of his

nature while God told out the infinite love of His heart. Peter said to the men of his day, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). If you want to know how wicked you are by nature, if you want to get an understanding of the awfulness of the sins of which your heart is capable, stand in faith before that cross and contemplate again God’s holy, spotless Son hanging on that tree suffering unspeakable anguish. That anguish is the very expression of man’s attitude to God; it is the word of the cross.

It was not merely the physical suffering that men heaped upon Jesus that made atonement for sin, for we read in Isaiah 53:10, “Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin” (italics added). God made Him to be the great sin-offering. And so the word of the cross is the story of God’s infinite love for guilty men. Righteousness demanded that sin be punished, and there on the cross it was punished to the full in the person of our blessed substitute. Now the word of the cross goes out to all the world, and since man at last is going to be judged by his attitude toward that cross, the word of the cross “is to them that perish foolishness” (italics added).

I am sorry that the translators used the English word “perish” here in 1 Corinthians 1:18, for that may throw us off the track. Some may think Paul meant that if a person rejects the cross and the One who died there, he is in danger of perishing, but that is not what the apostle was saying. He meant something far more solemn, something that ought to affect you very much more if you are unsaved. What he was really saying is, “The word of the cross is foolishness to them that are lost”

The same Greek word is found in 2 Corinthians 4:3: “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” Do you realize the solemnity of that? They are not just in danger of being lost by and by. For them it is not just a case of being lost if they persist in rejecting Christ and die in their sins. That would be terrible enough. But Paul’s thought was even more solemn: they are lost.

If the Christ of that cross is not yet your Savior, you are lost. If you get into your car and drive off, you drive off as a lost man or a lost woman; and if there is a crash and you are suddenly ushered into eternity, you go into eternity lost, to be lost forever.

People do not think of these things; they do not face these facts. They say, “I do not understand it at all. The very idea that a man, no matter how good He was, could be nailed to the cross and there make atonement for my sins, is foolish. The idea is repugnant to me.” My response is, “Very well, the Bible says, ‘If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.’“ That is why people do not understand; they do not understand because they are lost. What a terrible condition to be in!

Now let’s go back to 1 Corinthians and look at the other side: “But unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” Of whom was Paul speaking? He was speaking of people who once were lost but are now saved. Someone might object, “I do not get that. Don’t you mean they they are in the process of being saved? Nobody can be sure of his final salvation until the day of judgment when at last he stands before God and the question is there definitely decided.” But that is not what the Book teaches; it speaks of people already lost and people already saved. Remember, “By grace are ye saved

through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

I am reminded of an old Scottish woman who had always been very religious; she had gone to church all her life and she hoped that at the end of her life she would get dying grace and be fit for Heaven. She went one time to a meeting where two earnest servants of God were preaching and when she came home, her grandchildren said to her, "Well, Grandma, how did you like the preachers?" "Well," she said, "I could not make them out. The first man got up and talked to folk he said were saved already. He talked to folk who were so good that I did not know there were any of them in our town. And then another man got up and preached to folk who were so wicked that he said they were lost and going to Hell. But there was not one word for me." She was not lost and she was not saved, according to her own estimation.

But there are just the two classes of people: those who are lost; and "us which are saved"—that is, those who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. These have faced their sins in the presence of God and have seen in the work of the cross that which has satisfied God and that in which their hearts can rest. They are saved right here and now.

Years ago my father had an old friend who was a familiar figure in our home when I was a boy. One day after he had been saved for many years someone said to him, "Mr. Ross, do you ever doubt that you are saved? Has the thought ever crossed your mind that you may have been mistaken and that you are not really saved?" He said, "It is strange that you should ask me that question

today, for last night when I was on my way to the meeting where I was to preach the gospel, a voice seemed to say to me, 'Donald Ross, what an old hypocrite you are! You have never been saved at all.' I could hardly tell whether it was the voice of the devil or the voice of the Lord. I said, 'Man, could that be true? After years of preaching Christ to others, could it be true that I have never been saved?' And then I said, 'Well, Lord, if it is true that I have just been thinking I am saved, I am so thankful that Jesus died for hypocrites, and I come to Him now just as I am.'"

Just as I am, without one plea

But that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,

O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

(Charlotte Elliott)

That dear old saint said that in a moment the cloud was lifted and he knew that he had been listening to the voice of the devil and not the voice of God.

If you are not sure you are saved, you can lift your heart to God right now and trust the One who died on the cross for you; you can trust Him as your Savior. "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38).

To us who are saved, the word of the cross is "the power of God." There is no human energy that converts people; we cannot convert them by using any ability of our own. Somebody said to me a short time ago, "You know Dr. so-and-so, well, he is a grand man of God. He converted me ten years ago." I know that he meant that when this

dear servant of God had presented the gospel, he had believed the gospel, for it is not servants of Christ who do the converting. We cannot save people; we cannot give men peace with God. Here is what happens: a poor, troubled, anxious soul does not know what to do or where to go; suddenly the Spirit of God presents the cross, the fact that on the cross “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3); then faith leaps up in the heart, and the soul says, “Thank God, He died for me!” In a moment that soul passes from death to life. The word of the cross is the power of God.

Sometimes we have to preach about a great many other things, but in a sense I begrudge the time that has to be given to other subjects when I think of men who might be sitting before me who have not seen the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. The word of the cross writes “folly” over everything of the natural mind.

Referring to Isaiah 29:14, the apostle said, “It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Men pride themselves in their philosophies, in their reasoning powers, but no philosophy in the world would ever have reasoned out the need of the cross or suggested that only through the death of God’s Son could sinners be saved. Reasoning amounts to nothing in the light of the cross.

“Where is the wise?” Paul asked. “Where is the scribe?” In other words, “Where are the reasoners?” When he mentioned the scribe, he was naturally referring to the Jews, the wise men in Israel who tried to work out a way of salvation through systems and ritual. The apostle

brushed them to one side, for they did not know of the word of the cross.

“Where is the disputer of this world?” With this question Paul was referring to the Greek philosophers, proud of their learning, investigating all the various sciences and systems of thought of their day. But not one of them would ever have dreamed of Christ dying on a cross as the means of salvation for sinners. So the apostle said, “Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” Mere wisdom would never have delved into the mystery of the cross.

It is a striking fact that our English word “world” is made to do duty for two Greek words in 1:20. The verse might also be rendered, “Where is the disputer of this age? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” In the first instance the Greek word is aion, “the age,” and in the second instance it is kosmos, this “ordered universe” in which we live. The whole trend of the age is against the word of the cross. The wisdom of this age would never have thought that only by the death of the Son of God on the cross could salvation be worked out.

As far as our explanations of the universe are concerned, the things that men pride themselves in are only foolishness in the sight of God. “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Psalm 2:4). Well might the omnipotent God laugh (I do not say this irreverently) as He hears the ravings of godless professors in our universities, trying to explain the mystery of the universe as they measure everything by their own little twelve-inch rulers. They delve into things utterly beyond human comprehension

and deliberately turn away from the revelation that would make everything plain.

In His wisdom God has permitted man to grope and grope and do his best to find out these hidden mysteries and to come to an end of himself at last. “After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” What is preaching? It is a simple proclamation, and it has pleased God by what looks to man like foolishness, by the simplicity of making an announcement, to save them that believe.

I stand up in the name of the God of Heaven and declare that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (15:3-4). The world says, “Foolishness! You could not prove that if you had to.” No, I could not; but I repeat the announcement: “Christ died for our sins…” And whenever a man is humble enough and lowly enough to believe the announcement, he is saved.

It pleased God by the simplicity of an announcement to save those who believe, but “the Jews require a sign.” In other words, they say, “Give us some evidence that the word of the cross is true; work some miracle.” Now and then people ask me, “If you could work miracles today, wouldn’t it be wonderful?” I do not know that it would. If I had apostolic power and could in front of an audience lay my hands on a poor cripple so that he would leap to his feet well and whole, I imagine large crowds would come to my meetings, but I have never heard of anything like that causing poor sinners to awake and turn to Christ. When the apostles performed miracles,

men turned on them and tried to kill them, as in the case of Paul at Lystra.

It is the preaching of the cross that saves. That is what guilty sinners need. “The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we,” Paul said, “preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” Someone might have asked Paul, “If you know it is a stumblingblock and foolishness, why don’t you serve it up to your audience in such a way as to get rid of those offending elements?” And Paul would have answered, “If I make the message attractive to the natural man, it will not be the means of salvation to sinners.” The preaching of the cross involves the work of the Spirit of God; He must prepare the heart. His work is the effectual call.

There is a general call that goes to all men, and there is an effectual call when the Spirit of God drives the truth home and a man realizes that God is tugging at his heart to draw him to Christ. “Unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” This was the apostolic message. In Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). That God-given message has the same power today as it did in Paul’s day. We are to preach it in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Christy the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:25-31)

“The foolishness of God is wiser than men.” What a striking expression—“the foolishness of God”! I remember on one occasion a friend of mine, a very faithful preacher, advertised on a large signboard in a Canadian city that he would preach on these words. He

was almost immediately summoned before the magistrate and asked if he knew that there was a law in Ontario against blasphemy. He had to explain that the topic advertised was simply a quotation from Holy Scripture.

The expression of course is akin to “the foolishness of preaching” (1:21), which as previously suggested might be rendered “the simplicity of preaching”; and so here in 1:25 we learn that the “simplicity” of God is wiser than men. Paul was saying that the program of the gospel, which seems so simple to the worldly-wise, is actually the source of all wisdom and is wiser far than all of man’s philosophies.

The apostle went on to say that “the weakness of God is stronger than men.” The weakness of God refers to the cross. Christ was crucified through weakness. He, the omnipotent One, chose in infinite grace to take the place of a helpless prisoner in the hands of His enemies. At any moment He might have destroyed them by His power or, if He was still to stay in the place of weakness, He could have prayed for help from above and twelve legions of angels would have been sent to rescue Him. But He did neither. “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death” (Philippians 2:8), “that through death he might destroy him that [up to that time] had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

The believer’s calling is brought out very effectively in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. In making up the members of the body of Christ, God has not chosen many from among the wise, the mighty, the noble, or the great men of this world. Lady Huntingdon, who was a friend of Whitefield and the Wesleys and took an active part in the great

revival movement of their day, used to say that she was only going to Heaven by an “m.” When someone asked her what she meant, she stated that she was so thankful that Scripture does not say, “Not any noble are called.” It says, “Not many noble” (italics added), and therefore she got in by an “m.”

Had God selected those whom the world admires to be the pillars of His church, to a large extent He would have destroyed the very thing He had in view, for it was His desire to demonstrate the results of His grace. He works not with what He finds, but with what He brings. He delights to take up those whom the world looks down on and make them devoted saints and faithful servants who will “be to the praise of his glory” throughout all the ages to come (Ephesians 1:12). So we read that “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” He has in His sovereign grace taken up “the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” Paul went on to say that “base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.”

Look back over the history of the Christian church. What wondrous stories it tells of grace reaching down to the lowest, the poorest, the most insignificant, and bringing such to repentance; grace creating faith in their souls by the word of truth of the gospel; grace regenerating them, justifying them from all blame; grace sanctifying them by the Holy Spirit and the Word, and then sending them out as ambassadors for Christ to turn the world upside down by the simplicity of preaching the message of the cross. The early followers of the Lord Jesus Christ were, with very few exceptions, men from the lower

walks of life: fishermen, tax-collectors, Galilean peasants! Judas from Judea was the only “gentleman” in the entire apostolic band—he was the treasurer of the little company—and he turned traitor. God filled those men from the common walks of life with the power of His Holy Spirit and through them won thousands more to a saving knowledge of His Son.

Paul himself stands out in vivid contrast. Whether saved or not, he would have had some great place among the people of his day, but he is the one who wrote the words that we have been considering. He counted himself among “the base things” and the “things which are not” and thanked God that to him was given the opportunity to be used of God “to bring to nought things that are.”

The reason for all this comes out clearly in the succinct statement in 1:29: “That no flesh should glory in his presence.” Had God taken up the wealthy and the powerful, it would have given their abilities prominence in the eyes of men at least, but by choosing the weak He had the greater opportunity to display His own power. In themselves the early believers could accomplish nothing; through Him they did valiantly. Therefore all the glory belongs not to them but to Him. As He said in Isaiah 42:8, “My glory will I not give to another.”

How we need to remind ourselves again and again of these things today! It has always seemed to me that there is so much mawkish sentiment linked with so-called religious leaders, even in the professing church of Christ. It is considered the proper thing to do when presenting teachers and preachers to audiences, to laud them to the skies, to elaborate on their brilliancy and learning and wonderful personality—until I myself have

often felt grieved and shocked and thoroughly ashamed as I listened to such laudations. One cannot imagine the apostle Peter so introducing his beloved brother Paul, nor can one think of Paul presenting Epaphroditus, Titus, or Timothy in such a manner to those to whom they were to preach. Paul did indeed say the kindest things about these fellow laborers, for he loved them truly and was grateful to God for all their good traits; but as he spoke of them, he dwelled not on their ability or personality or charm or wonderful gifts, but on their devotedness to Christ in suffering for His name's sake. Surely there is a lesson in all this for us. If we give to man the glory that belongs to God alone, we may be certain that we will incur divine displeasure.

Let us now consider 1 Corinthians 1:30, and as I quote this wonderful verse, let me make a slight change from the text of our splendid King James version, a change that I believe any scholar will recognize as warranted by the original text. The change brings out more vividly the actual truth that the apostle meant to set forth: "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom: even righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Paul was telling us not that Christ is made four things to the believer, but that Christ is made one thing to the believer, and out of this one three others spring. Christ is made unto us wisdom. He Himself is the wisdom of God. He is the One "in whom," as we have seen in Colossians 2:3, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

People often speak of the "problem of Jesus," the "problem of Christ." There is no problem of Christ. Christ is not a problem; He it is who explains every problem. Listen to that poor sinful Samaritan woman at

the well. She had many questions over which she had puzzled for years. As she conversed with the Lord Jesus, the conviction evidently grew in her that here was One whose wisdom was superhuman. Timidly, and yet hopefully I am sure, she exclaimed, “I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.” No doubt the thought in her mind was this: Oh, if I could only see Him. If He could come in my day, I would go to Him with all my cares, with all my problems and perplexities, and He would explain everything.

Jesus, looking at her with those kindly eyes of His (they had already seen into the very depths of her soul), answered, “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:25-26). Startled, she looked at Him again and feasted her own eyes on that wonderful face until she was absolutely convinced that the words He had spoken were true. One might have expected a torrent of questions, but no—she had found the Messiah and every problem was settled. Away she went to the city to call others to meet Him too. And so I say again, there is no problem of Christ; Christ is the key to every problem. To know Him is to have all the knowledge that is really worthwhile.

Returning to 1 Corinthians 1:30, we read that we who are saved are in Him—”in Christ Jesus.” Paul used that remarkable phrase over and over again. It speaks of our new standing before God. It tells of the intimate union that exists between the risen Lord and all His own. In Him there is no condemnation. In Him—in all His own blessed perfection—we are acceptable to God. And God has made Him to be our wisdom. Everything we need for our souls’ deliverance is found in the knowledge of

Christ. Our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption—all are found in Him.

We have no righteousness of our own, for “it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). We have learned that all that we thought to be righteousness is like polluted rags in the sight of an infinitely holy God. But He has set forth the risen Christ, who once bore our sins “in his own body on the tree,” as the expression of the righteousness of God, and we are “made the righteousness of God in him” (1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21). “This is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness [Jehovah-tsidkenu]” (Jeremiah 23:6), and so we stand before God in a perfect, unchallenged righteousness, complete in Christ.

Our sanctification is also found in Him, whether we think of it as practical or positional. To be sanctified is to be set apart. For us of course, to be sanctified means to be set apart for God, set apart in all the perfection of Christ’s finished work. This is our positional sanctification. Our practical sanctification involves being set apart from the sin, pollution, uncleanness, and corruption that prevails in this world, as the Word of God is applied to our lives. Our Lord prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). It is as our hearts are taken up with Christ that we will know the reality of this.

Our redemption is found in Him as well. We who had sold ourselves for nought have been redeemed without money. We “were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,…but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). He gave Himself for us; His

life was the price of our redemption. His life was given up to death so that we might be delivered from the fear of death and enter into life eternal. We have everything in Jesus, and Jesus is everything to us.

And so we have nothing for which we can give ourselves credit. Therefore, as Paul reminded the Corinthians, “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” Like David, each one of us can exclaim, “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord” (Psalm 34:2). John Allen, the converted railroad section hand who was one of the first officers of The Salvation Army, declared as he was dying, “I deserve to be damned; I deserve to be in Hell; but God interfered!” Yes, and each redeemed one may say the same. The sinning was ours, the disobedience was ours; the curse, the wrath, the judgment—all were our desert. The holiness is His; the perfect obedience unto death is His. He became a curse for us; He drained the cup of wrath for us; He bore the judgment for us. Thus He has become in very truth our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and to Him belongs all the glory now and through eternal ages.

Chapter Two The Deep Things Of God

Jesus Christ and Him Crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-8)

The book of Acts gives an account of Paul's entry into Corinth. After a year and a half of earnest work there he left behind a church that was blessed with every spiritual gift, but when he first went into that brilliant but godless city, the apostle's soul was deeply stirred. He found that the people of Corinth not only gloried in human ability and human attainment and made much of the various arts; they also deified human lust and they knew nothing of the true God.

A few days before entering Corinth, he had been in Athens. There he had gone by invitation to the place where the philosophers, the intelligentsia, gathered "to tell, or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21), and where at their own request he attempted to explain the message of the gospel. However, they did not permit him to come to the crucial point, for they interrupted him as soon as he spoke of a Savior who died and was raised again, and they refused to listen to any further explanation. Probably a more eloquent sermon was never preached than that which the apostle delivered on Mars hill, yet the results were somewhat meager. There were a few who "clave unto him, and believed" (17:34), but the great majority turned away, rejecting him and his proclamation.

From Athens Paul went to Corinth. I do not believe there is any reason to think that he felt he had made a mistake in preaching as he did at Athens. His rule was this: "I am

made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). At Athens he was addressing men of the highest culture and he realized that he had to present the message in a way that he hoped would appeal to them. But upon going to Corinth he put aside, as far as he possibly could, everything that was merely human and went in absolute dependence upon the Spirit of God with one great message: "Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

He later wrote to the Corinthians, "I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God." He realized it was quite possible with the flowers of rhetoric to cover up, to obscure the shame of the cross, so he did not permit himself any flights of fancy or of the imagination in presenting the glad tidings. He seriously, earnestly, solemnly, as became a man who stood between the living and the dead, preached the message of the cross in all simplicity, for he had "determined not to know any thing among [the Corinthians], save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

That should be the method of any servant of God, for after all, there is no other message that will avail for the salvation of sinners or the edification of God's beloved people. Everything centers in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Jesus Christ, and him crucified"—that is the person and the work. The person of Christ was always presented in apostolic preaching. Men were not asked to believe a creed or to subscribe to a system of doctrine, but they were asked to receive a person, and that person was the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think we make a mistake if we suppose that just pinning our faith to a verse of Scripture will save us. I wonder how many have deceived themselves in that way. I hear people speak of knowing that they are saved, and when they are asked why they know, they reply, “Because I believe John 3:16,” or “Because I believe John 5:24”; then I look for some evidence of a new life in them and I do not find it. They never appear at a prayer meeting, but if there is a social affair, they are present. Apparently they have no real interest in the Word of God, for they never attend a Bible study. They have time for anything that ministers to the flesh, but very little time for spiritual food. I tremble for them because I cannot think of anything more dreadful than for one to go through life thinking that he is really saved and then at the end to be suddenly ushered into eternity where he will wake up forever lost.

You see, believing a text does not save anybody. Believing in Christ saves all who trust Him. I believed every text in the Bible before I was converted. I never thought of doubting one of them until after I was converted. That may seem like a strange thing to say, but as a lad I believed all that I was told; I accepted all of the Bible as the Word of the living God, but I was not saved. Some years after I was converted I became perplexed over certain things and began to doubt; the doubts led me to a deeper investigation and then my faith was confirmed. But in all those years before I was saved, I believed everything in the Bible. Yet I had never been regenerated; I had never received a new nature. I was lost and if I had died in my sins, I could have quoted hundreds of Bible texts—I could have repeated chapter after chapter of Holy Scripture in the flames of Hell—

while bewailing the fact that I had never been acquainted with the person that these passages of Scripture glorified.

Do not make any mistake here, for it is one that can never be remedied if you go into eternity resting on a false hope. Examine your foundation. Ask yourself, Is Christ Himself precious to me? If He is, why do I not enjoy His Word more? Why do I not love to spend more time with Him in prayer? Why is there so much frivolity and levity and carelessness in my life? Why do I do so many things that I know the Lord Jesus would never do? Do I really love Him? Remember, He said: “If a man love me, he will keep my words”; “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:23, 15).

What is the use of professing to be a Christian if there is no evidence of salvation in my life? What is the use of speaking of the new birth, or of talking about having eternal life if I live the same kind of life that tens of thousands of respectable Christless men and women live all around me? There is no difference between my life and theirs. If, however, I have opened my heart’s door to Christ and received Him, He has come to dwell in me and that has changed everything about my life. “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

So we preach the person (“Jesus Christ”) and the work (“him crucified”). Some just say, “We preach Christ,” but the Christ who lived on earth for those thirty-three wonderful years could never have saved one poor sinner apart from His death. When Jesus Christ was crucified, it

was as though God said, “That cross, the symbol of shame and agony, will become the great altar upon which will be offered the one supreme sacrifice that atones for the sin of the world.”

The crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ throws into relief several tremendous facts. For one thing, it emphasizes the wickedness, the corruption, the vileness of man. Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh; He was here in the world that His hands had made, and His own creatures cried, “Away with Him! Crucify Him!” Could there be any worse commentary on the iniquity of the human heart than that? Man, as far as he was capable, was guilty of the awful crime of deicide; he murdered God, drove Him out of His own universe.

Psalm 14:1 says, “The fool hath said in his heart, no God.” The King James version reads, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,” but that translation is not exact. Many a man who admits there is a God says, “No God,” and that is what the verse really tells us in the Hebrew. The fool says, “No God for me.” In other words, “I do not want God to come into my life; I do not want to be troubled about God; I want to take my own way, to do my own will.” And because men were set on having their own way, they nailed the Christ of God to a cross. If there is anything that reveals what man is, Christ’s crucifixion does.

Stand in faith by that cross; see the blessed Savior suffering, dying there; see the nails on which He hangs and the blood dripping from those awful wounds; see the thorns crushed on His sacred brow and the blood enwrapping His naked body as with a crimson shroud. That is what sin has done, the sin that is in your heart

and in mine. That scene shouts the story of the wickedness and the deceitfulness of our hearts. The men who thronged about that cross and cried out in derision, “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matthew 27:40), were not different from us; their hearts were like our hearts. They were representative men. We may see ourselves among them.

The cross brought out and declared all the malignity that was in the heart of man, but it also proclaimed the infinite love that was in the heart of God. One might well have understood if God, looking down on that scene, had let loose the thunders of His wrath and the lightnings of His judgment and had destroyed that throng in a moment. One might have expected Him to say, as He did so long ago, “My spirit shall not always strive with man…I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth” (Genesis 6:3,7). But He didn’t. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). When man cast Him out and nailed Him to a tree, God in infinite love for sinners made His soul an offering for sin. What wonderful evidence of God’s love for sinners is seen in that cross!

In the light of that cross how can men still go on doing the things, living in the sins, that led to it? The cross of Christ casts its light on everything that men glory in in this world and outshines all this glory, so that the apostle could say elsewhere, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). Did you ever think of the cross

in that way? You profess to be a Christian and you say that you owe everything for eternity to the One whom the world rejected, but what effect does that have on your life? Do you still have fellowship with the world that cast Him out? Do you still participate in the things that characterize that world?

One day a Christian decided to go see a questionable movie. He walked down the street toward the theater, came to the very entrance, even stepped up and bought his ticket, and then the next moment a thought came flashing into his mind: If I go in there, I "crucify…the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:6). He tore his ticket up, ran from the place, and was thankful to be delivered.

If a Christian goes back into the things of the world from which the death of Christ has separated him, he is denying the cross of Christ. If we understood this, what a separated people we would be! We would do away with all our dilly-dallying with the world and its folly. We would realize that we owe too much to the One whom the world rejected to be a part of the world system that has thus treated the eternal Lover of our souls.

Paul was determined to preach Christ crucified, but he said to the Corinthians, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." I think every preacher feels a little bit like that. Often as I think of facing an audience, my heart fails and my spirit cries out, "O Lord, what can I do? What can I say? Suppose I should make a mistake. Suppose I should give the wrong message. How dire the effect might be on some! I would never be able to undo the consequences for eternity!" I can see Paul bowing before God every time he

contemplated going out to preach the Word, and crying out, “O Lord, keep me from mistakes. Let me have just the right word. Let me be Thy messenger. Save me from trying to attract attention to myself. Save me from glorifying man.”

Paul continued, “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” The apostle recognized the fact that there is such a thing as meeting man on the soul-plane. A preacher might depend on that which simply appeals to the human mind, and finding that at the right psychological moment he has gotten a grip on the audience by telling a tender story, he might ask for decisions; and when the people respond, he might say, “There now, what a lot of people have come to Christ!” But perhaps in that crowd not one conscience has been reached nor one soul convicted of his sins.

Paul was afraid of that. He said in effect, “I do not want to preach in such a way that my human effort will persuade men. I am depending on the Holy Spirit of God and divine power to do the work.” In the Epistle the apostle gave the Corinthians his reason: “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” If a person makes a profession of salvation on the strength of a discourse that has simply stirred his emotions and made him feel that he ought to do something, and if he has been stirred because of his admiration for the preacher, what will happen when the preacher is gone? When the new convert’s emotions are no longer stirred, he will find himself wondering whether he is converted or not, and whether there is any reality in the message or not. He felt so different under the spell of that emotion and now he does not feel that

way at all. If, however, the Holy Spirit of God has presented Christ to him and he has received Him, he does not have to worry about his feelings. He is saved, and saved for eternity. His faith stands not “in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” The truly converted person can rest on His sure testimony.

The apostle did not mean that we have nothing but the simplicity of the gospel message to give to men; we seek also to lead believers into the deep things of God. “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect,” Paul said. What does that mean? Did you ever see a perfect Christian? Surely not in the absolute sense. Paul meant perfect in the sense of “well-developed.” When he talked to the unsaved or to young believers, he had one message, and when he talked to mature saints he sought to lead them further into the wisdom of God. He did that in this Epistle and elsewhere.

When Paul said, “We speak wisdom,” he was not referring to “the wisdom of this world.” Christianity is a divine revelation, not a human theory. The apostle said, “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom.” The mystery is hidden from the Christless, but the Spirit of God reveals it to believers. There are rich treasures of wisdom, wonderful truths for a preacher to make known, for in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). And as we go on with Him, we enter into a depth of understanding that the world knows nothing about.

This wisdom, Paul told the Corinthians, is something “which none of the princes of this world knew.” If they had only known that the man who stood in Pilate’s judgment hall that day—so meek, so lowly, answering

never a word as He was vehemently accused— was God manifest in the flesh, “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” And so God meets mankind on the ground of ignorance and says in effect, “I am going to excuse your ignorance, but there is one thing I will never excuse. After I enlighten you and present My Son to you, if you do not receive Him, I will never excuse that.” Men are excused because the light has not come, but they are not excused when the light has come. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

I am not saying that God will not judge sin wherever it is found; I am simply saying that He holds men responsible for the knowledge of His truth that they have, and not for what has never come to them. “All have sinned” and all are “guilty before God” (Romans 3:23, 19), but judgment will be according to works and rendered in perfect righteousness.

When one trusts the Lord Jesus, he is delivered forever from judgment. What a wonderful thing it is to know Him—“Jesus Christ, and him crucified”!

Divine Revelation (1 Corinthians 2:9-13)

The apostle declared that in making known the gospel he sought to use simplicity of speech, but when it came to opening up the truth of God to believers, he spoke of deep things that form the hidden wisdom of God, wonderfully precious things that cannot be given to the world at large. Just as the world has its various schools of philosophy, its intellectual pursuits to which the average man on the street does not pay much attention,

God’s deep things are not for the world outside; they are for those who have already received the gospel message.

The Lord Jesus Himself warned His disciples against casting pearls before swine. What did He mean by that? Simply this: the unsaved man, the man who has never been regenerated, has no more ability to appreciate, enter into, or enjoy spiritual unfoldings than swine have to set a value on beautiful pearls. Therefore the message for the unsaved is the gospel; but to the Lord’s own people He would impart hidden wisdom.

“None of the princes of this world” who “crucified the Lord of glory” knew that wisdom. “It is written,” Paul said, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” The apostle was quoting from Isaiah 64:4. The singular thing is that a great many people stop at the end of this Old Testament quotation in 1 Corinthians 2:9 and say, “You know we cannot understand; we cannot be expected to understand or enter into the things that God hath prepared for us, because the Word tells us, ‘Eye hath not seen…’” And so they settle back and conclude that we must be content to be ignorant of these things, for God has said that they are not for us to know.

But let us look at that passage in the Old Testament and see the context in which it is found. The English translation of the Hebrew reads, “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.” The quote in the New Testament is the translation of the Greek version of the Old Testament—

hence the difference in words, though the meaning is exactly the same. Isaiah was telling us that no man apart from divine revelation can understand what God has in store for His people in times to come. That was true in Old Testament days, but now God has revealed Himself in the person of His Son and given the revelation of the new covenant in the Gospels and the Epistles, so when we read the New Testament, we must not stop at 1 Corinthians 2:9.

We must not be content to take for granted that we are still where God's people were in the Old Testament days, for that is the very thing the apostle told us is not the case. He went on to say, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (italics added). In other words, the Old Testament speaks of times when there were great and wonderful mysteries that were kept hidden from all men; even the prophets themselves, enlightened as they were, knew nothing of the special truths of this dispensation, but God has made them known now.

Read the books of the Old Testament; read the Psalms, for instance, which give you the highest inspiration of the saints before the veil was rent. You get no inkling there of the heavenly calling or of believers entering through the rent veil into the very presence of God without a priest officiating as a go-between. You read nothing of Christ exalted at God's right hand, or of believers linked with Christ and thus able to say that God "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6).

In the Old Testament we read of the preparation time. There God's people are presented as children going to

school, learning through symbols and types and shadows, but with no realization of the wonderful truths now made known, and therefore Isaiah could say, “Eye hath not seen…” But all that has changed today. Now our eyes do see, our ears do hear, and our hearts should be able to comprehend the glorious things that God has prepared for those joined to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit,” Paul said.

We still need the Old Testament, for things were written there “for our learning” (Romans 15:4). When we read the Old Testament, we see the exercises of the people of God in years gone by, but we do not stay there; we learn important lessons, but we move on to the full revelation that God has given in the new dispensation. It is here our souls revel in the precious truths now made known.

Christians sometimes imagine that if they come to God in worship, singing the very words of Holy Scripture—as some of our friends do who sing the Psalms—their worship is of a higher character than that of Christians who sing what they call manmade hymns. Yet we might gather together and sing the Psalms week after week and year after year and always be conscious of the fact that we are singing the very words of Scripture, and there would not be a syllable that would give us our place within “the holiest” as “accepted in the beloved” (Hebrews 10:19; Ephesians 1:6). You will find that where Christians are content thus to approach God in worship, they have no realization of the fullness of the Christian’s position. They could not, because the Psalms as all other Old Testament Scriptures lead us up to the door, but they do not carry us inside into the fullest blessing. Therefore you will generally find that people

who are wedded to the Psalms, precious as they are, are a legal people, knowing very little of the fullness of grace, and most of them are content to go through life thinking it is altogether too much to believe that a man can be saved and know it in this life. They think that if they go on trusting and hoping, perhaps God will give them dying grace at last.

A good old Scottish woman said, “We will not sing any of these manmade hymns; we will sing just the Psalms of David to the tunes that David wrote!” The fact is that a Spirit-taught Christian today can enjoy in a hymn precious and wonderful truths that would have been amazing to David, truths of which he knew absolutely nothing. What a wonderful thing it is to think that we live in the dispensation of the grace of God!

By the Holy Spirit, God has now revealed things formerly hidden, “for the Spirit searcheth all things,” Paul told the Corinthians, “yea, the deep things of God.” “The Spirit searcheth” may seem like a peculiar expression. The Holy Spirit is One with the Father and with the Son. Our Lord Jesus put the trinity all on a level of equality when He told His disciples to teach and to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We would not think of substituting the name of a created being, of baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the blessed virgin Mary or in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy apostles. We could not do that, for we would be putting God’s creatures on a level with Himself. When we say, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” everything is in keeping because all are coequal and coeternal.

In what sense then does the Holy Spirit have to search to find out the mind of the Lord? In Himself the Holy Spirit does not need to search; He does not have to study to learn the mind of God. But the marvelous thought is that in our dispensation the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in us, and it is through Him that we do the searching and the studying, and the Spirit of God opens the truth of God to us.

You might say, “I do not know how some folks get such wonderful things out of their Bibles. I do not get them out of mine. I know I ought to read my Bible, and I do read it, perhaps a chapter a day, but I do not have much appetite for it. I do not get much out of it.” I will tell you why. The reason is that you do not sit down with your Bible in a self-judged, humble spirit, putting out of your life everything carnal, everything worldly, everything unholy, and then depend absolutely on the Holy Spirit who dwells within you to search the Scriptures for you and open the truth of God to you. God has given you the Holy Spirit for that very purpose. The Lord Jesus Christ said:

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you (John 16:13-14).

If a poor, simple, ignorant Christian who can barely read or write sits down with his Bible and reads it in dependence on the Holy Spirit of God, he will get more out of a given passage of Scripture than will a doctor of divinity or a doctor of psychology with a lot of learned

tomes about him who depends on his intellect instead of the Holy Spirit. I am afraid that many of us are absolutely careless of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. We are trying to make our own way through the world, trying to find out what is right and wrong in spiritual things instead of handing over everything to the Spirit of God and depending on Him to guide and lead and unfold the Scriptures. He came to do this very thing and He delights to fulfill this mission.

The Holy Spirit knows everything that goes on in the mind of God. Is not that a wonderful thought? Paul strikingly illustrated this truth for the Corinthians: “What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” What did the apostle mean by “the spirit of man”? Materialists tell us that the spirit of a man is the breath of a man, for in Greek and Hebrew the same word may be translated “spirit,” “air,” “breath,” “wind.” They say the spirit has no personality. If that were true, would it not be absurd for the apostle to speak as he does here? If we substituted the word “breath” for “spirit,” the verse would read, “What man knoweth the things of a man, save the breath of man which is in him?” Is it your breath that knows things? Is it your breath that reasons and weighs evidence? Surely not. It is the spirit of a man. And what is the spirit of a man? It is the real man.

When God created man, He created him a spirit living in a human body and therefore God is called “the Father of spirits” (Hebrews 12:9). God is a Spirit and man is a spirit and therefore in that sense even unregenerated men are God’s sons. The spirit is the personality. It is that which differentiates him from the lower creation

and enables him to think, to weigh evidence, to reason, to investigate.

I cannot read your thoughts; you cannot read my thoughts. There are people who profess to be able to do so, but they always make a botch of it. We try to read people's minds by studying their faces and as a result we often accuse them of things that are not so, as Eli falsely accused Hannah. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" I might talk as humbly as possible and you might be foolish enough to go away thinking, "What a lowly man that is," and all the time I might be a kind of Uriah Heep with a false humility. Someone else might seem to you to be proud while in reality he might be very humble. So Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1).

If my human spirit knows what is going on in my mind, do you not see Paul's argument? The Holy Spirit knows everything that goes on in the mind of God. And He has chosen to make these things known to us. I can make known my thoughts to you, and you can make yours known to me. Likewise the Holy Spirit of God makes known the thoughts of God to us. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

This blessed Holy Spirit has been received by believers. He has come to indwell us, to control us, for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and in order that we might understand the truth. That is the secret of learning the Bible: if you come to the Book and study it in dependence on the Holy Spirit who dwells within you,

He will make the truth clear. But let me give you another secret: He won't do that if you are grieving Him. As long as the Spirit is happy within you because you are living in a godly, unworldly, consistent manner, it is His delight to take the things of Christ and open them up for you. But the moment you give yourself to unholy thoughts or worldly behavior, the moment you yield to carnality or to things contrary to the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom you are called on to represent here, you grieve the Spirit of God. Then instead of the Holy Spirit being free to do what He delights to do—that is, to show you the things of Christ—He has to take the time to show you your failures and sins and shortcomings in order to bring you to the point of repentance and confession where you will seek to put everything right before God. So the secret of getting the mind of God as you study His Word is to live in the power of an ungrieved Spirit and to go to the Book in dependence on Him.

We have received the Holy Spirit "that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." We have these things here, but do we know them? It is one thing to have a vast amount of knowledge shut up between the covers of a book; it is another thing really to know it. You may have a large library. Everything in all those books is yours. But it is quite another thing to make all that accumulation of knowledge yours practically. It requires diligent study and careful reading. The same is true of God's wonderful Library, the Bible. We need the illumination of the Holy Spirit as we meditate on its wondrous truths, for only by depending on Him can we enter into the Bible's treasures.

This Book was not written by men; they were just used as penmen. It was given by God. "Holy men of God

spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). What folly to expect to understand it just by approaching it from a carnal or intellectual standpoint! That is not the way to know God's truth. He has given it to me, but if I am to appreciate it, the Spirit must open it up, and I must walk in the Spirit.

Some people wonder what we mean when we speak of the verbal inspiration of the Bible. There are those who talk of the Bible being inspired in the sense that God gave to the writers of the different books certain thoughts and they embodied them in their own language to suit themselves, but that is not the truth of inspiration as taught in the Book. Referring to its content, Paul said, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth." The penmen did not take divine truths and write them down in their own words. They expressed divine truths in the words that the Holy Spirit gave. He gave the words as well as the thoughts. Verbal inspiration means inspiration of the words. If the Bible is inspired at all, it is inspired in its words, and that is what the apostle insisted on. If when you study this Book you recognize the fact that the words were given by God, you will have such a conception of the wonder of the Book that you will delight in lingering over every syllable.

Often when I have studied the Book and one little word has seemed to jump out at me, I have looked up the original meaning in the Hebrew or the Greek, found out what the root was, and discovered that there was no other word that would have expressed that truth. The Bible is like God Himself—perfect.

Paul concluded this passage with an expression that is a bit peculiar, and theologians have had a great many different views about it: “Comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The expression may suggest a comparison of one divinely-imparted line of truth with some other opening-up of eternal verities. That perhaps was the thought that the translators had in mind, and it is a good thought, but there is something deeper than that in the Greek.

Another translation reads, “Expounding spiritual things to spiritual minds,” which surely is an important idea. If men are not spiritual, they cannot take in spiritual truth. One might endeavor to give them the deepest and most wonderful revelation from the Word of God, but they would not be able to understand it.

Here is an illustration from the natural sphere: I heard a man once tell of going to hear Jenny Lind, the famous “Swedish nightingale” who eventually gave up the concert stage for love of Christ. Beside the man sat a sea captain who had paid five dollars for his ticket, but who drowsed and slumbered all through the concert. He came out of curiosity to see the noted singer, but he had no ear for music and was unable to appreciate her remarkable voice. To enjoy music, one must have music in his own soul. Similarly, to understand spiritual things, one must be living a spiritual life; he must be born again and be walking in the Spirit.

A third translation reads, “Communicating spiritual things by spiritual methods,” or “by spiritual words.” This rendering might be better, for the expression is not exactly personal in the Greek; it does not necessarily refer to individuals. What it suggests is that it is the

business of servants of Christ to communicate spiritual things by spiritual methods. They should not stoop to the cheap claptrap methods of the world as they seek to expound the Word of God, but in a reverent way and with suitable words they should explain the testimony that the Holy Spirit Himself has given men. May God give to each one of us a deeper appreciation of the marvelous revelation that we have in His Word.

Natural and Spiritual Men (1 Corinthians 2:14-16)

In 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:8 Paul presented three kinds of men to us: the natural, the carnal, and the spiritual. We often say that there are only two classes of people in the world: those who are regenerated and those who are not, or to put it another way, those who are saved and those who are lost. Of course that distinction stands, but here in chapters 2 and 3 the apostle divided mankind into three classes. He began in 2:14-16 by introducing two of these classes: the natural man and the spiritual man.

Who is the natural man? We read that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The natural man has only experienced natural birth. Our Lord Jesus said in John 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh [that is the natural man]; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit [that is the genesis of the spiritual man].”

But the word translated “natural” in 1 Corinthians 2:14 does not merely mean “of the flesh.” It is the adjective form of the Greek word meaning “psyche,” which refers to the soul. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 the apostle Paul

said, “I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He was showing that man is tripartite. The spirit, the highest part of man, is that which differentiates him from the lower creation and gives him intelligence above that of the brute. By the spirit man reasons and weighs evidence, and by the spirit he is able to listen to the voice of God. The second part of man is the soul or the psyche.

Someone has well said that when God created man, he was like a three-story house—the lower story being the body; the second story being the soul, the seat of his natural instincts and emotions; and the third story being the spirit, the highest part of man from which he could look up to God. But when man sinned there was a moral earthquake and the top story fell down into the basement. That disaster left the soul in the pre-eminent place instead of the spirit and left him a natural man.

When you remember that the soul is the seat of man’s emotional nature, you will realize that the natural man is a creature led not by conscience, and not by an enlightened spirit, but by his own affections and desires. Every sin appeals in some way to the emotions of the natural heart. We sin because we think we will find a measure of satisfaction in that sin. Sin is always selfish and the natural man is a selfish being. He is self-centered, for the soul is the self. The natural man therefore is the man who lives the self-life, the man whose spirit has never been quickened into newness of life. His spirit is still a captive down there in the basement, if you will.

You can see at once whether the label “natural man” applies to you. What is your motive in life? Are you living to glorify God or are you living to enjoy yourself? Are you seeking your own desires or are you seeking to please the Lord Jesus Christ? As every saved person looks back to the old life, he can say:

I lived for myself, for myself alone,

For myself and none beside;

Just as if Jesus had never lived,

And as if He had never died.

The natural man may outwardly be a good man, a gracious man, a courteous man, and a kind man as long as he can have his own way. He lives for himself, but he learns as he goes through life that honesty is the best policy, that he is happier when he is honest— and therefore many an unregenerate man is a model of integrity. He gets a degree of happiness out of meeting the needs of other people; there is a glow of warmth in his heart when he hands something to a needy person and that person responds, “God bless you, sir; you don’t know how much good you are doing.” The natural man may find a certain satisfaction in doing good, and yet have no thought of living for God, no thought of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some natural men grovel in things that are debasing; their appetites lead them into licentiousness and drunkenness. Other natural men take what has been called the clean side of the broad way, but it still is the way that leads to destruction. If you walk down that broad way, you will find all classes and conditions of people—some openly immoral, some vicious, some

abominably unclean, some eminently respectable, some admired by their fellows. Some on that broad way are very religious and feel that they are doing the right thing when they wend their way to a great cathedral or a little chapel, as the case may be. They sit in a Christian, Jewish, or some other kind of service and are affected by the music; if the preacher happens to be eloquent and appealing, they enjoy listening to him, and sometimes even if he is not eloquent, if he is earnest they like to listen to him.

When Charles Spurgeon was at the height of his fame as one of the greatest preachers of the gospel, many unbelievers thronged to hear him; many men who rejected Christianity delighted to listen to his sermons. On one occasion a well-known infidel was returning from Spurgeon's meeting and he met a friend who said, "Where have you been today?"

"I have been to hear the great preacher Charles Spurgeon," the infidel said.

"You surprise me," said his friend; "you do not believe a word he says."

"No, I do not, but he does, you know; and I get a certain amount of satisfaction in listening to a man preach as though he really believed what he was preaching."

So it is very possible that one may value earnestness and intensity, be outwardly good, conduct his business with integrity, be kind and benevolent, have a certain amount of religious feeling, and yet be a natural man.

What is needed to bring a man out of that state? He needs a new nature, a renewing of the mind; he needs to be born of God. "Except a man be born again, he cannot

see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The natural man at his best with all his amiability and respectability cannot understand divine things.

If you talk to him of the wondrous truths of the Word of God, he will look at you in amazement and say, "I do not see the importance of those things." If you tell him that God became man for our redemption, that He was born of a virgin, he will smile tolerantly and say, "If you get any comfort in believing that, all right, but I cannot accept such a biological miracle." If you tell him that Christ died for our sins on Calvary's cross, that there He shed His blood for our redemption, he will smile again and say, "Rather an old-fashioned idea, that idea of blood atonement. I notice in my studies it has quite a large place in all the ancient religions, but of course I do not see it at all." As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:3, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."

If you talk to the natural man about the physical resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, he will say, "Of course it does not make very much difference whether His body rose; that is a small thing. His principles have been resurrected after being rejected by the men of His day, and those principles abide. If we follow the rules He laid down, everything will be all right."

It is only as the Spirit of God lays hold of the natural man and enables him to see his lost condition that the gospel appeals to him. Believing it, he ceases to be a natural man; he is no longer to be placed in that category. He may be a babe in Christ, but he is a Christian.

As you think of the category of Christian, you may ask, "Are all Christians alike?" Paul's comments in 1

Corinthians 3:1 seem to suggest that there are two classes of Christians: the spiritual and the carnal.

Who are the spiritual? They are those who walk in a spiritual way, who are guided by the Spirit of God. The highest part of man is in ascendancy in a spiritual man. Self does not predominate in him, for he lives to glorify Christ.

Paul said, “He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man” (2:15). The word translated “judgeth” here is translated “discerned” in 2:14, so verse 15 could be rendered, “He that is spiritual discerneth all things, yet he himself is discerned of no man.” What did the apostle mean? He meant that the spiritual man is able to see the difference between what is of God and what is of man, between what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit, and between what is of the new nature and what is of the old nature.

The spiritual man is discerning, but he cannot be discerned. Other men cannot understand him if they are not spiritual. They say, “He is a strange kind of man. He does not seem to be actuated by the same motives as other men. He is not dominated by the principles that dominate other men.” Sometimes they even say, as they did in Hosea’s day, “The spiritual man is mad” (Hosea 9:7); in other words, “He is not normal.” Of course he is not normal according to the present world’s value system, for he is controlled by a higher power. One of those old New England philosophers wrote, “If I do not seem to keep step with others, it is because I am listening to a different drumbeat,” and if a man of God does not seem to keep step with the carnal and the worldly and the Christless, the reason is that his ear is

attuned to Heaven and he is getting his instructions from above.

I remember reading a long time ago a little poem that seems to me to bring out very preciously what should characterize the spiritual man:

There is no glory halo around his devoted head,

No luster marks the sacred path in which his footsteps tread; But holiness is graven upon his thoughtful brow, And all his steps are ordered in the light of heaven e'en now.

He often is peculiar and oft misunderstood,

And yet his power is felt by both the evil and the good,

And he doth live in touch with heaven a life of faith and prayer, His hope, his confidence, his joy, his all are centered there.

Would you like to be a spiritual man or a spiritual woman? If you would, there is a price to pay. You must surrender your own will; you must yield yourself unreservedly to the control of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. That means putting an end to all human ambitions. Thenceforth it will make no difference what men may think or say, for you will have only One to please, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some Christians talk a lot about surrender and spirituality, but they reveal by their demeanor the carnality that controls them. Paul went on to describe carnality in chapter 3.

Chapter Three The Temple Of God

As previously noted, in 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:8 Paul presented three kinds of men: the natural, the carnal, and the spiritual. He introduced the natural man and the spiritual man in 2:14-16, and in chapter 3 he introduced the carnal man.

Carnal Christians (1 Corinthians 3:1-8)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal.” Let us look at the word “carnal.” The Greek word translated “carnal” is an adjective form of the word meaning “flesh.” The term “flesh,” as used doctrinally in Scripture, refers not to human flesh as such, but to the nature that we have received from Adam—“That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6).

Now in Biblical terms a carnal man, strange as it may seem, is a believer. There are many such persons. The carnal man has been regenerated, he has received a new nature, and his spirit has been quickened into newness of life. That spirit that fell into the basement is being elevated into its proper place by divine power, but the man is still under the control of that old fleshly nature in large measure. Many a Christian’s life is made up of mingled victories and defeats. As he walks with God, as he takes the place of lowliness and humiliation before God, as he feeds on the Word, and as he breathes the atmosphere of prayer, his spiritual life is developed and he grows in grace and in the knowledge of God. But if this believer is slothful in availing himself of the means of grace, he may find that even after being saved

for some years, he is still far from being the kind of Christian that the Lord wants him to be.

What does Scripture say about the carnal believer? In 1 Corinthians 3:3 we read: “Ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions [factions], are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” Let’s say that you enjoy making the acquaintance of a fellow Christian, one who has really trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, but as you get to know him more intimately, you find he is a very selfish person. He is delightful to be with as long as he can have his own way. As long as he can run everything to suit himself, he is perfectly happy and agreeable, but if you cross him in the least degree, if you suggest something that is contrary to his own desires, at once there is a stirring of the flesh within him; and he is shown to be a carnal man because there is strife.

Think of the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter how He was treated, He was always the meek and lowly One. His enemies could not rouse His temper by ill-treatment, and yet He had a temper. A spiritual Christian is not one who has no temper. Just as a knife amounts to very little if not properly tempered, the Christian amounts to nothing if he is not properly tempered. We read of our Lord Jesus Christ being angry. Once when He was in a synagogue on a sabbath day, a poor man with a withered hand was there, and His enemies watched Him to see whether He would heal him on the sabbath. He asked them, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days…?” and when they would not answer Him, He “looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3:1-5).

What made Him angry? It was their hypocrisy. Hypocrisy always provoked the indignation of the Lord Jesus Christ. They could heap every insult on Him they desired; that never roused Him to anger. But when they heaped insults on one of the least of His children, that stirred Him to the very depths of His being. When Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the Christians, Christ Jesus spoke to him and said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4) He never talked that way to people when they ill-treated Him on earth, but when they ill-treat His own while He is in glory, He feels it keenly. When you find a Christian who is quick to resent what you do to him but not at all quick to resent what is done to others, you may be sure he is still carnal.

Envy is another mark of carnality. We are members of one body. If I and every other Christian are really members of the same body, I ought to be delighted when my brothers in Christ are honored (just as delighted as I would be if I were the one being honored) and I ought to be deeply concerned when my brothers are distressed and in trouble (just as concerned as I would be if I were in their place). Scripture says that if “one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). And we are exhorted to “rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15).

How different it often is! I can do something reasonably well, but someone else’s work is preferred before mine, so I cannot appreciate what he does. I think I can preach a good sermon, but someone else’s preaching is enjoyed more than mine, so instead of saying, “Thank God for the way He is using His servant,” I sit in a corner and think, What is it that makes the people so interested? I

don’t see anything in that kind of preaching. When I do this, I am carnal, and if you cannot enjoy having someone else preferred above you, you are carnal.

Some carnal men are faction-makers, division-makers; they try to bring in strife among the people of God. At Corinth the Christians were divided into little cliques, saying, “I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos.” Everyone had his favorite and Paul said in effect, “That is just carnality. When you go on like that, you are acting like little babies.” Christians would be ashamed if they realized that when they compare one with another and say unkind things about some and laud others to the skies, their words sound like baby-talk.

Paul was telling us that such talk only reveals carnality. He told the Corinthians in effect, “There you are in Corinth. You have such wonderful attainments and are so proud because you have all the spiritual gifts. Yet you are so immature that I cannot explain the things that I would like to explain to you. I have had to feed you with milk, and even now you are still not able to eat meat. You are still big babies.”

The Corinthians gloried in men and in great swelling words. Some I suppose listened to Paul and said, “We don’t get anything out of his preaching; we learned all that years ago. Why doesn’t he go into the deeper things?” The reason was that they were “babes in Christ.”

A candidate for the pastorate of a country church preached for the congregation on the text, “Thou shalt not steal.” The congregation thought the sermon was great and the pulpit committee met after the service to decide whether or not to give him a call. Finally one of

the members spoke up and said, “I don’t believe in calling any man on the basis of one sermon. That was a fine sermon he preached, but I think we should ask this brother to come back again before we call him.” So they decided to ask him to come back the next Sunday.

He came back, used the same text, “Thou shalt not steal,” and preached the same sermon. At the close of the service the committee met again and said, “He must have forgotten that he preached that sermon last Sunday. We had better ask him back again.”

So the next Sunday he got up in the pulpit and said, “You will find the text for my sermon in the twentieth chapter of Exodus: ‘Thou shalt not steal.’“ Before he could go on, a member of the pulpit committee got up and said, “You are forgetting that you preached that sermon here twice already; we want to hear you preach on something else.” The preacher replied, “I am going to preach on that text every time I come to this church until you learn to keep away from Widow Jones’ hencoop at night.”

Paul too had to keep repeating himself. He said in effect, “I cannot unfold the great things to you because you are still little babies. You are not developed yet; you are just carnal.”

The spiritual are a different class, walking on a higher plane than the carnal. As believers we should be spiritual Christians, controlled by God and guided by the Holy Spirit. The apostle wanted the Corinthians to be spiritual and thus occupied not with man, but with Christ; so he asked, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the

Lord gave to every man?" And what are ministers? They are servants.

Just imagine a wealthy family with a number of servants —Chloe, Nellie, Tom, and Bill—and the whole family is upset because various members are saying, "I am of Chloe," or "I am of Nellie," or "I am of Tom," and "I am of Bill." The whole family is divided over the servants. What absurdity!

God's ministers are the servants of the people of God; let the people accept the service thankfully, but never let them put the servant in the place of the Master. Paul said, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." The servant has no power to cause the Word to produce fruit. "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." The servant is nothing; God is everything. "He that planteth and he that watereth are one"; they are both just nothing—two ciphers. But put Christ in front of the ciphers and then you have something worthwhile. However, "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."

The Test of Fire (1 Corinthians 3:9-23)

The apostle had warned the people of God against putting His servants in a place that belongs only to the blessed Lord. Every minister is simply what that name implies: a servant. The danger is that the servant will be exalted and the Master lost sight of, or that the servant will be so censored and blamed that the message will be refused and the Master dishonored. The servants in themselves are nothing but channels through whom God speaks to His people. The important thing is the message they bring. And so now Paul spoke of himself

and his fellow servants as “labourers together with God.”

God could do all His work without us. He does not need to use us to spread His gospel. He could write it in letters of fire across the heavens or He could send angels of glory to preach the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8), just as He sent them to proclaim the birth of Christ and direct the shepherds to Bethlehem’s manger. The wonderful thing is that He has chosen to give to us the privilege of making known the riches of His grace—a holy privilege that carries with it a heavy responsibility.

This responsibility should lead every servant of Christ to ask himself, “Am I really in touch with God? Am I seeking my own interests? Can it be that I am actuated by selfish motives or vainglory? Am I simply trying to attract attention to myself and my ministry instead of taking a place like that of John the Baptist who, pointing the people away from himself to Christ, said, ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ (John 3:30)?” John’s attitude, which was shared by Paul, will be the attitude of every true minister of God.

The laborers work “together with God”—they are not left to work in their own strength. They are to give out their message in dependence on the indwelling Holy Spirit, and that is the difference between preaching and worldly oratory. An orator may take a passage from the Bible and expound on it in a most thrilling way, but if he is not doing it in the power of the Holy Ghost, he is not preaching. On the other hand, if a poor unlettered man stands up and preaches the gospel in halting English but with divine power, men’s hard hearts will be broken and

they will be led to confess their sins and trust the Savior. That is what Paul meant when he said, “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

God’s servants would preach better if you prayed for them more; there would be more response to their preaching if they were more upheld in the secret closet of prayer by the people of God. How the apostle felt his dependence on the prayers of God’s people! He pleaded often with the saints to remember him in prayer that he might preach as he ought to preach. So I plead with you, for Christ’s sake and for the sake of dying men and women, take the ministry to God in prayer daily that those who preach the Word may proclaim it “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (2:4). It is only as God works in and through us preachers that anything is accomplished.

Turning from preachers in particular to God’s servants as a whole, Paul likened them to a field and a building. First we read, “Ye are God’s husbandry [tilled field].” You remember how the Lord Jesus Christ used similar figurative language in Matthew 13. The sower sowed the Word, and the people who believed it were like wheat in a field. So a tilled field of wheat is a beautiful picture of God’s people. One lovely thing to notice in that picture is that the heads of wheat rising up toward the sun are much the same height. Likewise we are all “members one of another”; one is not to tower above the other, but together we are to bring forth fruit to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then we read, “Ye are God’s building.” The building in 3:9 is really the temple referred to in 3:16: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” When Solomon built his temple, he built it on the solid rock of mount Moriah. The hilly nature of the terrain made it necessary to create a level foundation, so stones were collected in the quarries below and brought up to make a great platform for the building to stand on. Thus when the apostle said, “Ye are God’s building,” he meant that the church of God collectively is the temple of God.

In 3:16 Paul was not speaking of the individual. In 6:19 he was; there he wrote, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?” And in one sense you are a temple of God apart from every other believer, but in 3:16 the apostle was speaking of the assembly of God, which as a whole constitutes the temple of God, “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

Continuing the comparison to the temple in 1 Corinthians 3:10, Paul said, “I have laid the foundation.” Just as a foundation was laid before the temple was erected, Paul came to Corinth and by preaching the Word laid the foundation of the church; that is, he was used to bring the first members into the church of God in that locality. Very few of us can do foundation work like that these days. Our missionaries often have that privilege—they usually do not have to build on another man’s foundation—but most of us work where the foundation has already been laid.

Paul laid the foundation in Corinth—it did not need to be laid again—and others were building on it, but the apostle warned, “Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” In other words, they should preach the truth of God in the power of the Holy Ghost and not allow unscriptural and worldly and carnal things to mar the work that the Spirit of God was doing.

Paul continued, “Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble…” The word translated “precious” in 3:12 should be translated “costly,” so “precious stones” refers not to diamonds and rubies, but to the great and costly stones built into the temple of old. Paul was saying that converts should be added onto the foundation of the spiritual temple of the Lord, for if unconverted, worldly, careless people are brought in, they will hurt and hinder the work of Christ.

This twelfth verse primarily has to do with building up the church through the servants of God, but if you apply the words to each individual believer, the same principle abides. If you are a Christian, you rest on the one foundation, Christ, and you are building a life, a character. How are you building and with what are you building? You may build with gold, which speaks of divine righteousness; silver, which speaks of redemption; and costly stones, which speak of that which will stand the test of that coming day. On the other hand, you may build with wood, hay, and stubble. Wood may be fashioned to be very beautiful and has a certain value attached to it; hay, though less valuable than wood, has a measure of worth because it contains nourishment; stubble is utterly worthless. Wood, hay, and stubble speak of life-building materials that will not

stand the test of fire. Stubble should have no place whatever in the lives of the people of God. How are you building?

God takes care of us so marvelously. When we wonder how we are ever going to get through, God brings us through. We have found that the things we have worried about should have just been left with Him. Someone has well said, “I have had a great many troubles in my life, but most of them never happened.” God has been so gracious. Is this not a good time to look back and take stock? How have you been building?

Everything in our lives that has glorified God will be looked on in that day of testing as the gold that has His approval. If we have acted like men and women redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, our actions will shine out as silver. All things that have been in accordance with the Word and have sprung from the renewed nature that we have through grace, will be like costly stones built into the edifices of our lives.

How have you been building? Do you see a great many things that make you pause and say, “There has been so much selfishness, so much carnality, so much downright bad temper, and so much that is unchristlike”? Then, dear believer, go to God and judge all these things in His presence, and they will be burned up now and you won’t have to face them later. If you do not judge them now, you will have to face them at the judgment seat of Christ. “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (11:31). We are called to confess all the things that the Spirit shows us are merely of the flesh.

A great deal that is called Christian work is done in the energy of the flesh. It is not done for the glory of God at

all. What motives actuate us? How do we feel if others are preferred before us? Asking ourselves these questions is a good way to test ourselves to see whether what we are doing is for the Lord. Only that which is done for Christ will be rewarded in that day. He Himself will point out the differences.

“Every man’s work shall be made manifest,” Paul said. He was referring not to the judgment of the great white throne, but to the judgment seat of Christ, before which believers will stand at the Lord’s coming. “The day [the day of Christ] shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire.” Paul was referring to the purging, testing fire of divine approval, discernment, and righteousness, for He is going to judge everything by His standards, not by ours. “The fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” I beg of you, consider that little word s-o-r-t. The apostle did not say “how much it is”—there may be much that amounts to very little in that day. He said “of what sort it is.” It is the character of our work that counts; the motives that lie behind our service are what matter. The secrets of the heart are to be revealed. God will test everything in the light of His own truth.

It is a great comfort, when you cannot do all you would like to do, to know that if your work is of the right character, you will be rewarded just the same. This lovely thought reminds me of the story of the dear woman who anointed the feet of the Lord. When others objected, Jesus said, “She hath done what she could” (Mark 14:8). Is that what the Lord will be able to say of you in that day? “He hath done what he could”? “She hath done what she could”?

And then I do like the word that the Lord spoke to David when he wanted to build a temple to the Lord, but God would not allow him to do so. The Lord said, “Thou didst well that it was in thine heart” (1 Kings 8:18).

Possibly there is a sister in Christ who wanted to be a foreign missionary, but because of poor health was not able to go. Perhaps she was a semi-invalid at home for years and was only able to write kind and helpful letters to those in distress or give of her slender means to others so that they could take the gospel to the ends of the world. She might say, “I feel as though my life has amounted to so little; I wanted to be a missionary, and instead of that I have lived this humdrum existence.” I would tell her, “Do not be discouraged; if what you did was done for Christ, He will say, ‘She hath done what she could; thou didst well that it was in thine heart.’“

Perhaps there is a brother in Christ who as a young man thought, How I would like to go into the ministry; how I would love to devote my life to proclaiming the gospel! But that would have required years of preparation and study, and during those years when he would like to have been going to school, he had an aged mother depending on him, or he had to be the wage earner of the family because his father was sick. And so he toiled on to help those dear ones, and now he says, “Well, I have missed it; my life has not been the kind I wanted it to be; I wanted to be a minister of the gospel and here I have had to live in this matter-of-fact kind of way, handling butter and eggs, working in an office.” My response would be, “My dear brother, the Lord has taken note of all that self-denying care you have given your father or mother, and He is not going to lose sight of any of it. In that coming day He will say, ‘Thou didst

well that it was in thine heart,' and He will give you the same kind of reward you would have earned if you could have gone out and preached the gospel."

It is the heart God looks at—"of what sort it is." God grant that our work may be of the right sort.

Paul said, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward." This reward is in addition to salvation. We are saved by grace, but the reward is for faithful service. Of course the reward too is of grace, for we cannot earn anything but by divine power. The Lord enables us and then rewards us. So after we are saved, there is superabounding grace.

On the other hand, Paul said that "if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss." What does that mean? It means that in that day I will come before the Lord and He will review my life from the day His grace saved me. As my life passes like a panorama before me, He will give a reward for everything that was the outworking of His Holy Spirit, for everything that was in accordance with His Word. He will gather that which was for His glory together and say, "I am going to reward you for that." But He will bring everything to light that was of self, that was contrary to the Spirit of Christ, and say, "All that is just so much lost time. If you had devoted all that time to My glory, I could have rewarded you, but I cannot reward you for that which did not please Me. But I am going to burn it up, and you will never hear of it again for all eternity." There will be nothing left but that which brought glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Suppose that in that day it is revealed that someone has done nothing to glorify Him; he has trusted Him as his

Savior but his life has amounted to nothing. Paul said that such a person “shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

Let’s say that you have a beautiful home. You have spent a long time in building it, but one night it catches fire and you wake up to find flames roaring through the halls. You leap out of the window and are saved, but the house is burned up. That is an illustration of what will happen to many a believer whose life has amounted to nothing. If his life and testimony have been wasted, there will be no reward, but the believer himself will be saved, “yet so as by fire.”

Look at Lot. He spent years in Sodom building up a great reputation and even became a judge, but he had no business being there. We read, “That righteous man…in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds” (2 Peter 2:8). Abraham’s soul was not daily thus distressed. Why? Because he was not there at all; he was separated from the lawlessness. Finally God destroyed Sodom with fire and saved Lot—“so as by fire.” Everything he had lived for was burned up. Believer, what a solemn thing it would be if that should be true of you or of me when the blessed Lord takes account of our service!

The apostle presented an extreme case in 1 Corinthians 3:15, but in 4:5 he showed that actually no believer will lose everything. There Paul said, “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.” God will find something in every believer’s life that He can reward—some little act

of unselfishness, some feeble testimony for Himself. Everything that was of the Spirit will be rewarded in that day. But Paul used strong language in 3:15 to help us distinguish between salvation, which is of grace alone, and reward which is related to service.

So Paul spoke of various members of the church of God: those who build with gold, silver, and precious stones; and others who build with wood, hay, and stubble. Then in 3:16-17 he spoke of a third group: those who "defile the temple of God." Paul was now referring to those who are the enemies of God's truth, who attempt to destroy His church, who seek to ruin the work of the Lord—men from the outside who creep in. I tremble when I think of what will happen to men who profess to be servants of Christ and ministers of God, but despise His Book and deny every fundamental truth of Holy Scripture. For filthy lucre's sake they get into pulpits of orthodox churches and instead of building with gold, silver, and precious stones, they build with wood, hay, and stubble, thus destroying as much as they can of the temple of God. God said in effect, "I will destroy them; they will have to account to Me by-and-by."

I dwell on 3:16-17 because some have misunderstood the passage and have thought of the temple as the temple of the human body. They have thought the verses might mean that if someone fell into some kind of habit that defiled the body, God would destroy him. If you allow yourself to indulge in any habit that injures your body, you will have to answer for that, but in these verses the apostle was talking about the temple that is the church of the living God.

Paul went on to write about “the wisdom of this world.” Note that he was not writing about the knowledge of this world. Knowledge is perfectly right and proper—gain all you can. But the wisdom—the philosophy, the reasoning—of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, “for it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.” Men may think they are very wise, but God is ahead of them. Because He has “made foolish the wisdom of this world” (1:20), how absurd it is for Christians to glory in the wisdom of man.

“Let no man glory in men,” Paul wrote, “for all things are yours.” Christians have been given title to a fortune. We are rich beyond our wildest dreams. “All things” includes “Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas [the ministers of Christ], or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come.” Is the world mine? Yes, because “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof (Psalm 24:1). This is my Father’s world and I can say, “Thank God, it all belongs to me, and I am going to reign over it some day.” Is life mine? Yes, life is mine; in life I can glorify God. Is death mine? Yes, death is the servant that will usher me into the presence of the Lord. Are “things present” mine? Yes, they are all mine—the trials, the difficulties, and the perplexities as well as the happy things. Are “things to come” mine? Yes, and what riches are soon to be revealed! “All are yours; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” What a wonderful culmination to this chapter that emphasizes our responsibility!

Chapter Four The Ministers Of Christ

Stewards of the Mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

As we have seen, there was a tendency to factionalism and sectionalism in the church at Corinth because the Christians were rallying round various leaders and exalting them instead of recognizing that those leaders, evangelists, pastors, and teachers were simply servants of Christ who were given by God for the blessing of the whole church.

In chapter 3 Paul sought to put the servants of Christ in their right place in the minds of the saints at Corinth. Chapter 4 follows very naturally, for it concerns the responsibility of the servants of Christ. Paul wrote, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

We are inclined to go to one extreme or the other: either we laud and praise and overestimate the ability and character of God’s servants, or we set them at naught and disdain the instruction and help God intended them to give. God would have us take the middle course, not foolishly flattering His servants, but recognizing that we have a great responsibility toward them as they seek to fulfill their responsibility toward us. “They watch for [our] souls, as they that must give account” (Hebrews 13:17) and we are not to be angry or indignant if they have serious things to say to us at times concerning worldliness, carelessness, and carnality. Rather we are to judge ourselves in the light of the Word of God that they bring to us, for they are ministers of Christ.

Notice that in 1 Corinthians 4:1, Paul did not use the word “servant,” which he used so frequently in his Epistles in the sense of “bond servant.” Instead he used a word that conveys the thought of an official minister who has been specially appointed to a particular service.

When Paul said, “Let a man so account of us,” he was linking himself not only with Cephas, who was an apostle, but also with Apollos, who was not. Apollos, that “eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures” who first preached “only the baptism of John,” was not above being instructed by a godly woman and her husband, Priscilla and Aquila; when Apollos had learned the gospel more fully from them, he went forth to preach with greater liberty and power (Acts 18:24-28). Paul said in effect, “Do not put Peter, Apollos, and me on pedestals and form parties around us. Think of us as official ministers of Christ. We are sent with a commission from the Most High to proclaim His Word, and we are responsible to do it faithfully. We are stewards of the mysteries of God.”

A steward is one who is entrusted with certain things that he is to use for the benefit of others. Paul wrote of such things to Timothy: “That good thing [deposit] which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (2 Timothy 1:14). God had committed His truth to Paul, and he was responsible to teach it faithfully. We too have been made stewards of the divine mysteries.

We have seen that the New Testament mysteries are not abstruse truths that are difficult to understand, but sacred secrets that had not been known in previous ages. In Deuteronomy 29:29 we hear Moses speaking to

the people of Israel on the plains of Moab just before they went over the Jordan to take possession of the promised land; he says, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God.” But when our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, he uttered “things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:35), and before He left His apostles He said:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:12-13).

And so the truth revealed by the Holy Ghost in our dispensation constitutes the mysteries, the sacred secrets, that the servants of God are now to make known. What are some of the mysteries?

There is the mystery of the gospel, that grand and wondrous truth that the mind of man would never have ferreted out if God had not revealed it—“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). The good news is that Christ on the cross died “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself”; that having been “delivered for our offences, [He] was raised again for our justification” (Hebrews 9:26; Romans 4:25). Now in resurrection life He sends the message out into all the world that he that “believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This is God’s great secret. Man never would have thought of it.

I know that the gospel is from God, for I am somewhat familiar with almost all of the religious systems

prevalent in the world, and apart from that which is revealed in the Bible, not one of those systems ever intimates that God Himself should provide a righteousness for sinful man. They all demand a righteousness from man and simply point out different ways by which men are supposed to work out for themselves a righteousness that will make them fit for God. The gospel alone explains the mystery of how righteousness is provided for men who never could obtain it themselves. Our Lord Jesus Christ "is made unto us wisdom, [even] righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30) and we are stewards of this great mystery of the gospel.

There is also the mystery of godliness or piety—that is, the great mystery of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus, who was God and man here on earth in one person. We read in Matthew 11:27, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." It is utterly impossible for human intelligence to understand the union of deity and humanity, yet this mystery is plain to us who believe. We simply accept the revelation that God has given and end all questioning. People talk about "the problem of Christ." Christ is not a problem; He is the key to every problem. Everything else is made plain when we know Christ in whom dwelleth "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).

Another mystery that Paul wrote about is the great mystery of Christ and the church. The apostle compared their relationship to that of a body and its head, and to that of a bride and a bridegroom. The glorified Lord Jesus Christ is characterized as the Head of the body,

and every believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit as a member of that body, which thus becomes “the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:23).

Christ is also characterized as a bridegroom, and the church as His bride. What a beautiful picture! We are told that He who made Adam and Eve in the beginning made them male and female and “therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), and in speaking about this marriage relationship, Paul said, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32).

Linked with this is the mystery of the rapture and that of the olive tree—that is, Israel’s present rejection and future regeneration. These various mysteries are the revelation to us of things kept secret from the foundation of the world. To unfold these mysteries is the responsibility given to Christ’s servants, yet how few who take the place of being ministers of Christ fulfill that responsibility!

Paul went on to say, “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” The business of a steward is not to electrify people by his eloquent sermons, not to dazzle them by his wonderful ability, not to please them with his rhetoric, not to speak in words that will simply be to them as a “lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument” (Ezekiel 33:32). The business of a servant of Christ is to open up the truth of God, to unfold, expound, make known these mysteries so that the people of God will appreciate the heritage that He has given them in His Word.

In fulfilling this ministry, the servant of Christ may open himself up to criticism, but that should not deter him. The apostle said to the Corinthians, “With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.” In other words he was saying, “As long as I am faithful in opening up the Word of God, I am not concerned about whether my sermons particularly appeal to you. As long as I know that I am pleasing Him who sent me, I am not greatly disturbed if I displease you.”

The Corinthians appreciated eloquence, oratory, and other special gifts, and they said of the apostle Paul, “His bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Corinthians 10:10). But he could say, “Well, that doesn’t trouble me at all. Did I give you God’s truth? That is what I am concerned about. Your appraisal does not matter to me in the least.” Paul was not bothered by “man’s judgment” (1 Corinthians 4:3). The term translated “judgment” here can also be translated “day,” so the phrase would be “man’s day,” which is the entire period of time lasting from the rejection of Christ until He comes back again. During this period God is letting men try out one scheme after another to see what they can make of a world out of which they have cast the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul did not even attempt to appraise his own service. He felt he had no right to say, “Well, I think I did pretty well today; that was an excellent address.” Self-appraisal can encourage the pride of the natural heart, or it can make a person so depressed that he throws himself down under a juniper tree and says, “It was all a failure; I certainly did make a mess of things.” No servant of God is capable of appraising his own service.

That which he thinks was excellent may have been just so much wasted time. That which he thinks was wasted time may have been just the right message for the moment.

Then we read, “I know nothing by myself.” A more accurate translation is, “I know nothing against myself.” Paul was not conscious of anything of a harmful character in his ministry. “Yet am I not hereby justified,” he said, for he may have been blundering even when he did not realize it. “He that judgeth [appraiseth] me,” the apostle added, “is the Lord.” The Lord appraises everything rightly in accordance with His own holy Word.

Then Paul warned the saints against attempting to get on the judgment seat. It is not our place. “Judge nothing before the time,” he said. What time? He meant the time when the Lord comes back. When He returns He is going to examine carefully all the service of His people. He will distinguish between the precious and the vile; He will separate the gold, silver, and precious stones from the wood, hay, and stubble. He will pronounce correct judgment on the labors of His ministers. You and I cannot do that now, so it is better for us just to wait.

The Lord will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” That is what you and I cannot do; we can hear what comes from the lips or note the actions, but we do not know the hidden springs behind the words and deeds. When the Lord Jesus examines all our labors, He will bring everything to light. If there was envy and jealousy and pride and carnality, he will drag it all out into the light. Many a sermon that sounded very

beautiful, that was almost perfect as a piece of oratory, will be shown to have been utterly spoiled by the pride that was behind it. The Lord will show where there was earnest preaching to glorify Him, even though the speech was faltering and the expressions used were not all they should have been. He looks on the heart, not merely on the outward appearance.

Observe, however, what Paul added: “Then shall every man,” and he is speaking of believers, “have praise of God.” You might say, “Oh dear, I can do so little, for I do not seem to have any gifts. I am afraid there won’t be anything the Lord can reward me for in that day.” But if you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit of God is dwelling in you, and in that coming day it will be revealed that every Christian has accomplished something for God, something for which he can be rewarded.

Once when I preached that every Christian will receive a reward, a brother came up to me at the close of the meeting and said, “Didn’t you go a little strong there?”

I said, “No, I do not think I did.”

“Well,” he said, “think of the dying thief; that man was saved just as he hung by the side of Christ. What opportunity did he have to do anything for which to get a reward?”

“Why, my dear brother,” I said, “think of the dying thief again. There he hung nailed to a cross; he could not move a hand or a foot, but he recognized in the man on the central cross the coming King of the ages and said, ‘Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.’ The thief turned to his fellow and rebuked him and bore witness to the perfection of Christ: ‘We [suffer] justly; for we receive the due reward of our

deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss' (Luke 23:41-42).

At the judgment seat of Christ I think I see that redeemed man coming before his Lord, and saying to himself as he comes, "I was saved only a few minutes before my Savior died, and I had no opportunity to serve Him or to witness for Him. I cannot expect any reward." And then I think I hear my Lord saying, "Every one present who was converted through some sermon you heard about the dying thief, come here." And I imagine I see them coming until there are thousands and thousands of them, and I see my blessed Lord turning to that man and saying, "I want to give you this crown of rejoicing for all these souls that you have helped to win to a knowledge of My salvation."

Do you not see it? "Then shall every man have praise of God."

True Apostolic Succession (1 Corinthian 4:6-16)

A great deal is said in certain circles about a ministry that can date back to the days of the apostles, the first followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to this definition of apostolic succession, the ordination given to the apostles has been passed on through their successors, one clergyman after another down through the centuries without a break to the present time—as though that in itself would confer any particular grace on them! Undoubtedly Charles Spurgeon was right when he said, "When men count on receiving the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands and because of any fancied apostolic succession, you can depend upon it, it is just a case of empty hands laid on empty heads." Even

if we could show an uninterrupted line from apostolic days to the present time, there would be no merit in anything like that. As we read verses 6-16 we will see what true apostolic succession is.

Earlier in the Epistle the apostle warned against making overmuch of the servants of God. He indicated that in Corinth they were divided into sections in the local church because some were saying, “I am of Apollos,” while others were saying, “I am of Paul” or “I am of Cephas,” and some were even making Christ the head of their party and boasting that they were “of Christ,” the implication being that the others were not “of Christ.”

Now he wrote, “These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes.” He meant that it may not actually have been his name or the name of Apollos or that of Cephas that was being used in this sectarian way, but he put himself and Apollos, his fellow laborer who was thoroughly of one mind with him, to the front and used the names Paul and Apollos as illustrations to help reprove the tendency to sectarianism among the people of God.

Paul explained to the Corinthians why he used these names as illustrations: “That ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written.” The words “of men” are italicized because they were added by the translators who thought something was needed to help make the meaning of the Greek text clear. The clause has also been translated like this: “That you might learn in us nothing above that which is written.” In other words, “You are not to put men in such a place of authority that you rally to them and to their instruction, and are carried away with admiration for their abilities,

and forget that they as well as you have to be tested by that which is written."

The basic question is, What is written? The Bible is just as open to you readers as it is to the learned doctors and great commentators; in this respect you "need not that any man teach you," for the Holy Spirit will teach you concerning all things as you ponder over the Word of God (1 John 2:27). The reason that so many people constantly refer to the thoughts of others, men like themselves, is that there is so little real familiarity with the Book. God has given His written Word, and any extraneous thoughts of even the best teachers will be mere speculation. God has given teachers to the church not so that they may supplant the Bible and save His people the trouble of studying the Word for themselves, but so that they may spur the people of God on to more intensive searching of the Scriptures. If men get occupied with teachers, they get puffed up one against another.

First Corinthians 4:6 suggests that for believers to attach themselves to people who have certain gifts and neglect others who may also have special ministries from God, is to become very one-sided. Consider the Christian who says, "I am not interested in teaching; I like the preaching of the gospel. I like to go to evangelistic meetings, but I am not interested in attending Bible studies." Such a person, being only partially developed, is very easily carried away by all kinds of winds of doctrine. Wherever there is plenty of emotional appeal and a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement, he is present; but when thought and meditation will be required, he stays away. Believers like him lose a great deal.

Another type of Christian speaks sneeringly and slightingly of evangelistic efforts, of gospel preaching, and says, “I like to go to a meeting where some able teacher unfolds the Word of God, for that builds me up in Christ, but I am not interested when only the gospel is presented.” Only the gospel? The gospel is the most precious thing that I know about. It is the glad, glorious message of God’s love to a needy world. The preaching of the gospel is a very rare jewel these days. Recently someone came up to me after a meeting and said, “How is it that one can wander about from church to church, and go Sunday after Sunday, month after month, and never hear the gospel? It was such a refreshment to come in today and listen to the gospel.” The people who say “only the gospel” had better try tramping about a bit to find out what is being preached. Perhaps after they have sampled the rubbish that is being proclaimed in place of the gospel, they will have a higher opinion of gospel preaching.

Someone else says, “Well, there is so-and-so; I like to hear him; he is an exhorter and he always stirs me up. I am not interested in dry teaching.” Teaching of course can be dry if the power of the Holy Spirit is lacking. But mere exhortation, if not backed up by the Book, will not accomplish very much. Yet exhortation is a gift given by the risen Christ to the church.

If one has a gift that God has given, he is to use it for the glory of God and not to attract attention to himself. There is no reason for any servant of Christ to exalt himself over another. Paul asked the Corinthians, “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

Then Paul turned his attention to another factor that was contributing to the problems in Corinth. The people were not profiting from the ministry that God had provided for them, and that was an indication of a low spiritual condition. We learn from 4:8 that the Corinthians were settling down to enjoy the gospel's benefits, but ignoring its call for self-denial. They received the good things that God's servants brought to them, they congratulated themselves on the fact that they were saved and going to Heaven, and then they made themselves comfortable in this world. Paul exclaimed in effect, "You are reigning like kings now, before the time. Already, you are full; already you are rich." It is true that we will reign by and by, but the reigning time has not yet come. This is the suffering time. This is the time when we are to show our loyalty to Christ by our identification with Him in His rejection.

Since the apostles shared in that rejection, Paul said, "I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death." In other words, "We are like men who are already under sentence of death and going out to die" (also see 2 Corinthians 1:9). With this sentence hanging over their heads, they went on in their devoted service. "We are made a spectacle," Paul added in 1 Corinthians 4:9. The word translated "spectacle" here is theatron, from which we get our English word "theater." Paul was saying, "We apostles are like performers on a stage. Others look at us and see something of the lowliness, gentleness, and rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The word translated "world" in the last part of 4:9 is kosmos, which refers to the entire universe, so Paul was saying, "We are made a spectacle to the universe, to

both angels and men." From Heaven angels are looking down on the servants of Christ, and here on earth men are looking at them. If Christians are proud, haughty, self-indulgent, and self-seeking, the hearts of angels are grieved and the hearts of men are filled with contempt. If believers are lowly, devoted, Christlike, unworldly Christians, men recognize their reality and angels rejoice.

Years ago when I was a young Salvation Army officer, our old colonel called us in for an officers' council and I will never forget his advice to us on that occasion. He said, "Comrades, remember as you go about your work that men will forgive you if you are not eloquent. They will forgive you if you lack culture, if your educational privileges have been greatly curtailed, if you sometimes murder the king's English as you try to preach the gospel, but they will never forgive you if they find that you are not sincere." Men look for reality, and the Lord looks for reality in His servants. With angels and men watching us, we must be sincere and play our parts well to the glory of God.

Next Paul put the apostles and the Corinthians in vivid contrast. "We are fools for Christ's sake," he said, "but ye are wise in Christ." Everywhere the apostles went, men branded them as fools because they had given up earthly privileges. They had given up the opportunity of settling down comfortably so that they might devote their lives to the gospel of God, and therefore the world said, "They are throwing their lives away!" The Corinthians, on the other hand, were settling down, making money, getting on in the world, and having a comfortable time.

Notice the difference in the prepositions in 4:10: “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ.” Paul did not say “wise for Christ.” The Corinthians, as real Christians, were in Christ. They imagined that they were wise too because they were holding on to a place and position in this world, but the apostles who were counted as fools for Christ were the ones who were really wise for Him.

Paul added, “We are weak, but ye are strong.” Oh, the irony of all this! He was saying, “You think that you are strong and we are weak because we give our lives to propagating the gospel.” Continuing the contrast, the apostle remarked, “Ye are honourable, but we are despised.” In other words, “Men look up to you, for ‘men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself (Psalm 49:18), but we have given up everything for Christ’s sake and of course we are despised.”

In 4:11-13 Paul gave us an outline of what true apostolic testimony and experience really were. “Even unto this present hour,” he began, “we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands.” The apostle was not the kind of man who had such regard for “the cloth” that he would not dirty his fingers in some temporal occupation. When there was not sufficient money to take care of his needs, he got a job making tents. He was simply a humble servant of Christ and was not above anything that the Lord would have him put his hand to.

“Being reviled, we bless,” Paul added. Note that he did not say, “Being reviled, we give them as good as they give us.” He continued, “Being persecuted, we suffer it:

Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." Paul did not look on the service of Christ as something that introduced one into high circles in cultured society. To be a servant of Christ was to be misunderstood, to be rejected; it meant a path of self-denial all along the way.

Why did Paul write to the Corinthians about these trials? He assured them so tenderly, "I write not these things to shame you." Why then? He wrote to exercise them, to stir them up, to get them to realize how selfish their own lives were. "But as my beloved sons I warn you," he explained. He was saying in effect: "You are mine. I brought you to Christ, and I grieve when I see you forfeiting future reward for present ease. [How often the servants of Christ are burdened like that and people do not understand!] You can take your choice. If you want to get a place and a position in the world and be well-thought-of down here, go on with the frivolity. But if you want to be well-thought-of up there, and if you want to be a Christian who will really count for God, then make a clean break with everything that would hinder fellowship with Him. You will get far more pleasure from a prayer meeting than from a frivolous social, once you get better acquainted with the Lord Jesus. You are my sons in the gospel and I love you, and because I love you I warn you. You will lose out by wasting your time in things that just appeal to the flesh instead of using that time for self-denying service for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul added in 4:15, "Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

The word translated “instructors” here does not mean “teachers.” The Corinthians did not have many teachers —there have never been a great many real teachers of the Word of God—and Paul’s intention was not to slur teachers or speak of their gift as a very small thing. The term rendered “instructors” means “child trainers”; it is the root of our word pedagogue. A child may have many trainers, but only one father. Paul was saying as it were, “You Corinthian babies have plenty of child-trainers, but only one father. I brought you to Christ, and I am your father in Christ.”

How can we tell if people are still in spiritual babyhood? One indicator is that they cannot enjoy the deep things of God. “I have fed you with milk,” Paul said to the Corinthians in 3:2, “and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.” I have known Christians who, after being converted a number of years, say, “I am not interested in Bible studies. They are too dry for me; I do not understand them. I like something simple.” They give the impression that they would prefer to lie down on a couch and be given a bottle with a nipple on it so that they can suck a little weak truth from it. They should have been teachers themselves by this time, but they are still babies.

Another indicator is the things with which they play. Paul said in 13:11, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” Many have been converted long enough to put away all childish things and get down to real business with God, but they are still spiritual babies. Some have been saved so long that they ought to have a whole host of spiritual children, but they have never yet led one soul to Christ!

In a wonderful climax to the passage in 4:6-16, Paul said, 'Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me." A man must live wholly for God in order to speak like that, and the apostle did. When he stood before people and said, "I want your lives to glorify God," if they answered, "But we do not know what to do," he could say, "Well then, imitate me. As an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ I have counted everything loss for Him. My one desire is to glorify Him." In 11:1 Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." That is a safe thing. That is true apostolic succession, and if you will follow that line, you will find apostolic blessing in your life and God will use you to win others to Christ.

Discipline in the Church (1 Corinthians 4:17-21)

This first Epistle to the Corinthians is the charter of the church and it brings before us certain divinely-given rules and regulations for the ordering of the local churches of God here on earth. This portion deals with the question of how to discipline an open offender against holiness and righteousness.

The church is the house of God. When I use that word house, I do not mean a building. God's house made of stone and mortar was the temple at Jerusalem and He has never owned another. His present house is made of living stones, men and women "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). This house of God, this assembly of God, is the church of the living God in this present age of grace. Holiness becomes God's house. He dwells in His church—that is, in the assembly of His saints—and therefore it must be a holy assembly. That is why again and again in the New

Testament we are exhorted to absolute separation from the world and its ways.

Sometimes when those who watch for our souls seek to prevent worldliness and carnality and unholy things from cropping up in the church of God, they are looked upon as censorious and harsh and possibly unkind. When they try to deal with matters of this character, people fall back on Scripture verses like Matthew 7:1-2: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” In these particular verses, however, our Lord was speaking of the motives of the heart. You have no right to judge my motives; I have no right to judge your motives. If for example I see someone put a hundred-dollar bill in the offering basket and I say to myself, “He is just trying to be ostentatious; he did not give that out of real love for Christ,” I am wrong, for I am judging his motive, and I have no right to do that.

But the church of God is called on to judge the unrighteous behavior of any of its members. First Corinthians 5:12 says, “What have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?” The world outside goes on its way and the church has no jurisdiction there, but the church is responsible for the character of its fellowship. The church is also responsible as to those who sit down together at the table of the Lord and are involved in Christian service.

Where there is failure, the individual who fails is held responsible by God. It is a serious thing to profess to live the life that should characterize members of the church

of God. Ours is a high and holy calling, and if we lower the standard, we are not only dishonoring Christ individually; we are also giving the wrong testimony to the world.

The story is told of a man who wanted to hire a coachman. The man lived in a mountainous region and the road to his home ran along a precipice. A number of drivers applied for the position. He said to one of them, “Tell me, are you adept at handling fractious horses?”

“Yes, I am,” the applicant replied.

“Can you drive a six-horse team?”

“Yes.”

“How near can you drive to the edge of the cliff without going over?”

“I have a steady hand and my eye is pretty true; I can get within a foot of it and not go over.”

“You step outside,” said the man, and he called another and asked him the same questions.

This applicant answered, “I am an expert in handling horses; I can drive right along the edge and not go over.”

“Step outside,” the man said, and he called another and quizzed him.

“If you want someone to drive on the edge of the precipice,” said this applicant, “you do not want me. When I drive, I keep as far away from the edge as I can.”

“You are the coachman I want,” the man responded. “I will hire you.”

Christian, be careful of the edge of the precipice. Do not get near it, for the first thing you know, you will go over and your testimony will be ruined. And the sad thing is that you are also liable to drag others over with you. Keep away from the edge, and do not resent it if those who “watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Hebrews 13:17) try to impress on you the solemnity of these possibilities.

The apostle Paul had heard negative reports concerning internal conditions in the church at Corinth, but he had been hindered from getting there to deal with them. Certain carnally-minded members of the church who knew that the apostle’s coming would probably mean that they would be rebuked for their worldly behavior were evidently saying, “Paul is really afraid to come to Corinth; he knows he hasn’t the influence he once had.” So Paul, who was not afraid to come, wrote with apostolic authority, “Some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.” In other words, when he came, he was going to look into some things very carefully.

There is a tremendous amount of pretense among professing Christians—they pretend to a piety that they do not possess and a devotedness that is not genuine. So Paul would find out whether the power of God was working in the Corinthians’ lives or whether it was just bravado and conceit that led them to justify themselves. He would inquire not only about the talk of their lips but also about the behavior that characterized them, “for the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” Mere

lip profession is not enough; the power of the Holy Spirit must be demonstrated in the life.

The apostle said in effect, “I want to come to you, but do you want me to come with a rod of discipline?” He could come as the representative of the Lord to chastise the Corinthians for their bad behavior, or he could come in the spirit of meekness so that they and he might sit down together over the Word of God and enjoy the precious things of Christ. If they desired him to come in the latter way, there were some things to be settled first, and in the subsequent chapters he told them what they were.

Chapter Five Maintaining Holiness

The Unrepentant Man (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

As we have previously noted, in the church at Corinth there were some problems that needed to be handled, and Paul confronted them in his letter. Dealing in chapter 5 with a particularly difficult situation, he wrote: “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you.” This was not merely a matter of some individual’s gossip; it was widely known. Getting more specific, the apostle said in effect, “You are tolerating one of the vilest forms of immorality; even the heathen Gentiles would disapprove. One of your members has actually taken his father’s wife [not of course his mother, but his stepmother] as his own wife. This is an abomination in the sight of God, but you have not recognized the wickedness of it. Rather you have prided yourselves on the broad-mindedness that enabled you to function while a thing like that was going on. You are puffed up when you ought to be brokenhearted.”

Even if the Corinthians felt that they did not know how to handle such a situation, they could have been down on their knees, crying to God to intervene, and He would have taken the wicked man out from among them. But they had not mourned, the problem had persisted, and the evil report had reached Paul. Therefore, as the representative of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was going to tell them how to deal with the matter, and in so doing he was giving instruction concerning the handling of similar questions that would come up in the future, down through all the centuries of this dispensation.

“I verily,” wrote Paul, “as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already.” In other words he was saying, “Because we are all one in the Lord, I have looked into this matter already. I have investigated and discerned the facts concerning him who has done this deed, and I have reached a verdict.” Having made a judgment, the apostle gave the Corinthians the following instructions: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power [or authority] of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan.” What does that mean? It means that the man should be put back into the world where Satan rules.

First John 5:19 says, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness [or in the wicked one].” The guilty man in Corinth was in the circle of those who are “of God.” Someone might say, “The way to help such a person is to keep him in the circle. Let him sit down with you at the communion table; do not be hard on him; try to win him back; throw your arms of love about him and sympathize with him.” But an unrepentant man will become more hardened in his iniquity if he is kept in the circle. If he is put outside in the devil’s domain, he will know that he has forfeited all title to a place with the people of God.

Paul said, “Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh.” What had caused all this trouble in Corinth? The activity of the flesh. “Very well then,” Paul said in effect, “put him out in the sphere where he will discover that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord his God” (see Jeremiah 2:19). When such a person finds himself rejected by men and women who love Christ, when he realizes that his sin is a stench

in the nostrils of Christian people, he may break before God. If, in spite of his sin, he has really been born again, he will break. If he has been a false professor, he will plunge deeper and deeper into evil things.

So Paul commanded, “Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” We do not like to carry out extreme commands such as this, but it is the Word of God, and the greatest kindness that the people of God can do to a man who is deliberately going on in willful sin is to refuse him Christian fellowship. As long as we treat him as a brother, he will only be puffed up in his ungodly ways and it will be even harder to reach him. But if we obey the Word, God Himself will work toward his recovery and restoration. The church of God is largely afraid to exercise discipline today, but where discipline is carried out in obedience to the Word of God, the church is kept in a condition where God can work.

A Little Leaven (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

“Your glorying is not good,” Paul pointed out. “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” Housewives know that. If someone takes a large bowl of dough, inserts a little leaven, and lets it work all night, the batch will run over onto the table by morning. Likewise if a church allows one wicked man to go unrebuked and undealt with after the wickedness has been fully revealed, the evil will spread like an infection —working, working, working to the ruin of others and to the harm of the testimony of the entire church.

When the apostle urged the Corinthians to remove the leaven, he was not acting on mere hearsay; there was definite evidence of the guilt of the accused man.

Likewise the church of God today is not to jump to conclusions; we are not to believe every rumor that people try to circulate. There is a specific rule for us to follow:

If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Matthew 18:15-17).

If you know of definite wickedness, you should go first to the guilty person and try to set it right. If you do not succeed, take a witness with you the next time. Then if the guilty one still will not listen, take the matter to the church of God and be prepared to verify all your statements. If the person will not listen to the church, he has to be put under discipline.

Paul continued, “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.” Before God the whole body is looked upon as unleavened, for “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” We are men and women who began with the blood of the cross, and like the Israelites in Egypt who were sheltered by the blood of the Passover, we are to put all leaven away. In the Bible leaven symbolizes wickedness. When Paul said in Galatians 5:9, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” he was speaking of evil and unsound teaching permeating the assembly of God.

If we have been redeemed by the precious blood of "Christ our passover," it is incumbent on us to recognize our responsibility to keep the feast of communion and fellowship with Him, but not with old leaven—that is, not with the corruption of the old nature or with unjudged malice. Our God looks for reality, for "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." It is not enough to say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?.. and in thy name done many wonderful works?" (Matthew 7:22) All who have been redeemed must demonstrate subjection to the Lord in their lives.

Refusing Christian Fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

In the concluding verses of this chapter the apostle stressed the punishment that should be meted out to evildoers who have gotten into the church. Recognizing that we cannot discipline the world, Paul said, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters." If we were to attempt to deal with all the immorality in the world, we would have an impossible job on our hands. The apostle's point was that the rules apply in cases involving a man who calls himself a brother.

Paul said, "If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous…" What was that? Was Paul coupling covetousness with fornication? Yes! "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10), and covetousness—reaching out and grasping for wealth—is just as vile a thing in God's sight as indulgence in unholy lust along other lines.

Reading on, we find other examples of evil: “If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer…” What is a railer? He is a person who has a tongue loose at both ends and on a pivot in the middle; he is a vicious talker, an evil speaker, one who can destroy the reputation of another just as surely as a murderer who drives a dagger into a heart destroys a life. “Oh,” somebody says, “I don’t mean any harm, but I am so careless with my tongue.” What would you think of a man who goes around with a machine gun and keeps firing away on this side and that, and when someone says, “What are you doing?” he replies, “Oh, I don’t mean any harm, but I am so careless with this machine gun.” A character assassin is as wicked in the sight of God as one who takes another’s life.

There is more: “If any man that is called a brother be… a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.” No drunkard will inherit the kingdom of God. I would say to young readers in these permissive days that if you never want to be a drunkard, do not yield to the pressures of a society in which it is fashionable for everybody to drink a little bit. No man ever became a drunkard who was not first a moderate drinker. Someone may say, “I do not believe in total abstinence; I can take a little and it does me no harm.” But it may do your brother harm, and Paul said, “If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth” (8:13).

An extortioner is one who squeezes the poor. Perhaps he tries to cover up his sin in this way: he squeezes the poor, makes an extra thousand dollars, and then on Sunday goes to church and says to the pastor, “I want to donate a hundred dollars for missions.” God would say,

“Keep your dirty money; you got it the wrong way.” God wants holy money to use in holy service. An extortioner is a wicked person and God says we are not to sit down at the table with such an individual. Applying that command would cut down our dinner parties considerably!

I take it that Paul was including the Lord’s table when he said, “With such an one no not to eat.” People should be warned to stay away from the Lord’s table if they are fornicators or covetous or idolaters or railers or drunkards or extortioners.

Outside in the world God judges. He will deal with the unsaved in due time, but He calls on the church of God to maintain careful discipline over its members for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. His own good name is at stake. People on the outside say, “What! Is that one of your Christians? Does he belong to Christ and yet do thus and so?” That is one reason why the church of God is responsible to maintain holiness in this world.

“Therefore,” Paul concluded, “put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” Of course there is a great deal of instruction in other Scripture passages about discipline. For example Galatians 6:1 says, “If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” So every effort should be made to restore the wanderer, but if he will not be restored, if he persists in his sin, if he goes on defying the discipline of the church of God, the time comes when the instruction in 1 Corinthians 5:13 has to be acted on.

Perhaps some of you feel like saying what one of the Hopi Indians said to me after I had tried to teach them the responsibility of a Christian. He said, “Man with the Iron Voice [that was their rather peculiar name for me], you have made the way very hard today. I thought I was saved by grace alone, but now it looks as though I have to walk to Heaven on the edge of a razor.” We are saved by grace alone, but we are called to walk in holiness, and while we have no ability to do this ourselves, the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in every believer and He is the power of the new life. “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25), and we will thus be enabled to honor the Lord Jesus Christ by holy, unworldly, devoted, godly lives.

Chapter Six You Are Not Your Own

In our study of 1 Corinthians we have seen that the apostle Paul was used of God to correct many erroneous concepts and to suggest remedies for many wrong practices in the church of God in his day, but this letter with its varied instructions was never intended to be read only by the early Christians. It is addressed to “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” If the churches of God today would be subject to the teachings of this first Epistle to the Corinthians, we would be delivered from a lot of things that hinder the progress of the gospel and impede the working of the Spirit of God among us.

Resolving Disputes (1 Corinthians 6:1-11)

In this section Paul inveighed against a practice that was growing in Corinth and I am afraid has been in evidence in many other places since: Christians quarrel with other Christians about temporal matters and sometimes even drag one another into the world’s law courts for the adjudication of their difficulties. This is utterly abhorrent to the spirit of Christianity. Going to law puts the Christian in a false position both before the world and before his brothers in Christ. He is saying to the world, “We Christians are just as covetous and just as quarrelsome as you of the world are. We are just as much concerned about having our own way and pleasing ourselves. We recognize your judges as having authority over the church of God.” It is degrading to the Christian thus to act.

The apostle demanded, “Dare any of you?” He was stirred with indignation and his language was very strong. “Dare any of you, having a matter against another [he meant of course another brother] go to law before the unjust and not before the saints?”

Paul was not teaching that a Christian should never go to law. It is quite impossible at times to avoid it and even the apostle himself, when falsely accused before a Roman governor, said, “I appeal to Caesar.” Paul claimed his natural rights as a Roman citizen and insisted that his case be heard in the imperial court. I know some brethren are wiser than the apostle Paul and feel that he made a mistake. They are quite certain that if they had been in his place, they would have acted more wisely. It is a pity that the apostle could not have availed himself of their advice! But he acted quite within his rights as a Christian, for when he appealed to the caesar, he was not taking his brothers in Christ to court “before the unjust.” Rather he was asking for a chance to respond to the complaints of the Jews in a clear, straightforward way before the supreme tribunal of the Roman empire.

When Paul and Silas were arrested in Philippi, the judges would have dismissed them and let them leave the jail covertly without a clear public justification, but Paul said in effect, “No, we have been wrongfully accused and unjustly treated by you magistrates. Admit you have made a mistake; make the admission publicly.” That was all perfectly right and proper.

But in 1 Corinthians Paul was addressing an entirely different situation. If Christians have disagreements that they are not able to iron out between themselves, they should go “before the saints.” The individuals involved

should consult their brothers in Christ, bring together those in whom they have confidence, and agree to abide by these brothers' judgment, just as they would have to abide by the decision of a worldly court.

When Paul asked, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" he was referring to something that many Christians have lost sight of. Our Lord Jesus Christ is coming again to reign for a thousand wonderful years. When He reigns we will reign with Him, for it is prophesied, "Judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (Daniel 7:22). If we are going to reign with Christ, if we are going to sit on thrones of judgment with Him in that coming glorious kingdom age, it is absurd to think that we are not fit to judge "the smallest matters" on earth when our brothers are in difficulty.

After all, temporal things are so trivial; matters of money, matters of property, matters concerning personal reputation are such small things when viewed in the light of eternity. We may make a great deal of them; we may magnify them and give them a place of importance altogether beyond that which they deserve, but the apostle declared that they are relatively insignificant and he strengthened his position by adding, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" What was he saying? Are we going to sit in judgment on angels who are greater in power and might than we are?

Are angels going to be judged? Yes, we read twice in the New Testament of angels coming to judgment. Second Peter 2:4 says, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." And

Jude 6 says, “The angels which kept not their first estate [their own principality], but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”

It is the final judgment that is in view here, and at that last great assize these fallen angels will all be brought before the throne of judgment. And who will sit on that throne? Our Lord Jesus Christ and all the redeemed throughout the ages who will be associated with Him as assessors. If this dignity is to be ours, if we are to judge the world during the kingdom age, if we are to judge angels when eternity begins, how can we be unfit to judge affairs of this life? How much more should we be able to judge between our brothers in Christ!

In 1 Corinthians 6:4 Paul said something that evidently was not very clear, it seems to me, to the minds of those who years ago prepared the wonderful King James version. It says, “Set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.” According to this translation, the thought being expressed was that these matters are so trivial, they are of so little importance, that even those who are least esteemed in the church ought to be fit to adjudicate such cases. I question whether that is what the apostle was really saying, for in the next verse he added, “I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” There he was implying that if the church is to take up matters of this kind, there should be wise men to give decisions; and that thought hardly seems to be in harmony with the King James rendering of 6:4.

Another translation turns the verse into a question: “If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, do you set them to judge who are of no account in the church?” In other words, Paul was saying, “If you drag your Christian brother before one of the judges of this world, you are bringing him before a man who, whatever his place in the world may be, is of no account in the church of God (unless he himself happens also to be a Christian). His dignity and probity do not give him a place in the church. Whether honorable or not, if he has not been born again, if he has not been converted, he is of no account in the church.”

In going to court, the Corinthians were degrading themselves and therefore ought to have bowed their heads in shame. What they were doing was altogether wrong: “Brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.” Paul said, “There is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another.”

Someone might say, “I do not know of any Christian to whom I could submit my case,” but even if that is true, there is another way out. “Why do ye not rather take wrong?” Paul asked. “Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” You do not have to insist on your own rights; it is not necessary that you should always be cleared of charges; it is not necessary that you should always prove that you have been wronged in matters of this kind. You can, if you will, bow your head and say, “I leave all with God. I am not going to say anything about it; if they wrong me, He understands.”

When I was a little fellow I attended a church in Toronto where some difficulty had come up between members

and they did as the apostle suggested. My dear mother took me along to the hearing. Little pitchers have big ears, and I well remember how horrified I was to see men whom I esteemed and had been taught to respect so indignant with each other. One man sprang to his feet and with clenched fists said, “I will put up with a good deal, but one thing I will not put up with. I will not allow you to put anything over on me; I will have my rights!” An old Scottish brother who was rather hard of hearing leaned forward holding his ear and said, “What was that, brother? I did not get that!”

“I say, I will have my rights,” said the man.

“But you did not mean that; did you? Your rights? If you had your rights, you would be in Hell; wouldn’t you? And you are forgetting—aren’t you?—that Jesus did not come to get His rights. He came to get His wrongs, and He got them.”

I can still see that man standing there for a moment like one transfixed, and then with tears in his eyes he said, “Brethren, I have been all wrong. Handle the case as you think best.” He sat down, buried his face in his hands, and sobbed before the Lord, and everything was settled in three minutes. When Christians are in this spirit, it is so easy to clear things up; when we bow before the Lord, He straightens them out.

After reminding the Corinthians “that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” Paul set forth a fearful catalog of sins and transgressions against God, nature, and man. As he recited this awful list, he turned to that redeemed company and said, “And such were some of you.” Paul was saying, “These are the sins from which you have been delivered; these are the

transgressions that have been forgiven; from these unholy, wicked, impure things you have been cleansed. Think of what grace has already done for you. Think of how marvelously God has dealt with you in spite of all the sin and iniquity that you have been guilty of in the past. You were sinners of five hundred pence, but God has forgiven all [see Luke 7:41]. Should you hold your brother accountable because he owes you some small debt when God has so graciously dealt with you?"

"Such were some of you," he said, "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Notice the order: washed, sanctified, justified.

I went into a mission in San Francisco years ago and sat for perhaps half an hour listening to marvelous testimonies of redeeming grace. One after another rose and painted a dreadful picture of his past life and then told how God had saved him. I had come to that meeting with a sermon all made up, but as I sat listening to these testimonies, I thought, O dear, my stupid little sermon! To think I imagined I could go into my study and develop a little discourse that would suit a congregation like this. I had no idea of the kind of people I was going to address. So I just "canned" my sermon; I put it out of my mind, and when I rose to speak, I took this text: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified." It was easy to preach to them then even without a lot of preparation. The sermons that I get up are hard to preach, but those that come down are much easier.

At the close of the meeting a dignified man came up to me and asked, “Do you know that you got your theology terribly mixed up tonight?”

“Did I?” I replied. “Straighten me out.”

“You put sanctification before justification. You have to be justified and then you get the second blessing.”

“Pardon me, but you are mistaken,” I said. “I did not put sanctification before justification.”

“You most certainly did.”

“I most certainly did not; it was the apostle Paul who did.”

“Why, you cannot blame your theology on him.”

“I was simply quoting Scripture.”

“You misquoted it. It reads, ‘Ye are justified, ye are sanctified.’“ And he began to read, “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified,” and then he said, “Why, there is a misprint there. Wait a minute; I will get a revised Bible.” He got it, looked at it, and read, “Washed, sanctified, justified.”

“Why,” he said, “I never saw that before; all I have to say is that the apostle Paul was not clear on the holiness question when he wrote that!”

What was the apostle really saying? “Ye are washed.” What does that mean? Paul was referring to the washing of regeneration. When an individual is first awakened and turned to the Lord and the Word of God is applied to his heart and conscience, he is delivered from the impurity of the old life. We are cleansed by “the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26).

“Ye are sanctified.” What does that mean? To be sanctified is to be set apart to God in Christ, and everyone who turns to the Lord Jesus Christ has been thus set apart. There is a work that begins even before a man is conscious of his justification. Were it not for that, not one of us would ever turn to Christ. The Spirit begins that work which disturbs and convicts and leads us to feel our need, and through the Word we are washed and cleansed; thus Christ is revealed to our souls and, putting our trust in Him, we are justified from all things.

“Washed”—that has to do with the practical cleansing. “Sanctified”—that has to do with being set apart to God in Christ. “Justified”—that has to do with being judicially cleared before the throne of God; He has nothing against the man who stands justified before Him. These are the blessings of every believer. How our hearts ought to thrill with worship and praise as we think how God has dealt with us!

The Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

In this passage Paul considered some of the practical results of the believer’s cleansing, sanctification, and justification. If we have been redeemed to God by the precious blood of His beloved Son, if we have been regenerated by the Word and the Holy Spirit, we are no longer to live to please ourselves. We are to live to please the One who has made us His own at such a cost, and so the apostle particularly stressed the importance of recognizing that our bodies belong to our risen Lord.

The honor of the body was never really revealed until our Lord Jesus Christ came. If you are at all familiar

with the different heathen philosophies and pagan religions, you know that men as a rule distinguish between the inner man and his relation to God and the body and its relation to earth. Many philosophers and teachers would tell you that how you use your body does not make any difference, for it is merely physical and when you die, it is gone; even though your soul may persist after death, your body will never rise again and therefore it is impossible to defile your soul by anything you may do with your body.

That was the essence of the philosophy that was being taught in Corinth, where the apostle had been used of God for the calling out of a company of redeemed ones whom he addressed as “the church of God.” There was grave danger that these converts might retain some of their old pagan concepts and as a result fail to appreciate the holiness, the purity, that should be connected with the physical as well as the spiritual life of the believer.

The apostle showed that the believer has not come into any legal relationship with God; he is not under law. He has marvelous liberty, but not the liberty to do wrong. He must distinguish between license and liberty. An instructed believer will never say, “Oh, I am in Christ, and it does not make much difference what I do.” A man who talks like that shows that he has never comprehended the reality of what “in Christ” means. The very fact that I am in Christ means that God has claims on me that He did not assert when I belonged to the world. Then I was allowed to take my own way, but now I am called on to present my body, not merely my spirit, as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,” which is my intelligent service (Romans 12:1).

And so Paul told us in 1 Corinthians, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient [befitting].” I am “not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14), but there are many things that are utterly unsuited to a Christian, things that would bring my testimony into disrepute. There are a great many things about which there is no direct instruction in the Word of God, and thus some people think they don’t matter. But the question I must ask is, What effect would it have on other people if I as a Christian were to indulge in them? I belong to Christ, and men will form their opinion of Christ as they watch me; my behavior therefore must commend Christ to them.

Paul repeated, “All things are lawful for me,” then added, “but I will not be brought under the power of any.” That is a good answer to those who, excusing their use of intoxicants and tobacco, say, “Well, why shouldn’t a Christian feel perfectly free to indulge himself if he wants to?” It is bad to create habits that are not easily broken, and the apostle said in effect, “I will not allow myself to be a slave to appetite.” There are things with which one cannot tamper without being brought under their power. You lose your liberty when you say, “I have liberty to form habits like this,” for in forming such habits you become a slave.

So Paul said, “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” Applying the same principle in a different way, I could say, “I am the Lord’s free man and I am going to preserve my liberty in Christ. I am free to please Him, not free to please myself, even in the matter of food and drink.”

Proverbs 23:21 says, “The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty.” Notice that it is not only the drunkard but also the glutton. During pagan festivals in Corinth the people gorged themselves in the most disgusting way in honor of their heathen gods, but we as Christians honor the true God by being careful not to overeat.

The saying is true, “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats.” The two are created for each other: food is suited to the digestive tract, and the digestive tract is suited to food. But you are not to live for these things; you are not to live to feed your bodies, for “God shall destroy both it [the belly] and them [meats].” Do not live as though your major business in life is the gratifying of your appetite. Let there be some higher goal before you. As Christians your business is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul also referred to the sex instinct, for there were those who said, “God has implanted certain appetites in the bodies of men and women and it does not make any difference whether people indulge these appetites in or out of the marriage relationship.” To counteract the influence of this kind of philosophy, the apostle wrote, “The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.” The body is not to be used for vile gratification that is contrary to the holiness of God; it is to be kept for the Lord and as it is kept for the Lord, the Lord is for the body.

It is the resurrection of the body of the Lord Jesus that has given dignity to our bodies, for as Paul affirmed, “God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.” Since our bodies too are going to

be resurrected, we must remember that they are not to be used for any degrading purpose here on earth.

The apostle continued, “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?” You know that your spirit is a member of Christ, and you know that your soul belongs to Christ, but do you think as often as you should about the fact that your body is a member of Christ? What a wonderful relationship we have been brought into! It is not merely as an aggregation of redeemed souls that the church is “the body of Christ” (12:27). As men and women having physical constitutions we belong to Christ, and therefore our bodies are to manifest the holiness of Christ. Our bodies are to be used in devotion to Him.

Since our bodies are “the members of Christ,” how can we take the members of Christ, these bodies of ours, and defile them by using them for unholy purposes? How can we who profess to have been bought with the blood of God’s dear Son do that? Paul asked, “Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.”

The apostle continued, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” What a mystic union this is! The same Holy Spirit who dwells without measure in the Head now dwells in every member of Christ’s body here on earth. Thus the body is “for the Lord.” This truth can solve every problem in regard to sensual pleasure and worldly folly. For example if you are invited to go to a place where you are not quite sure you can glorify God, you can stop a moment and say, “My body is a member

of Christ; is it consistent for me as a member of Christ to go where He will be dishonored?" You must not go where you cannot glorify Christ. That is the Christian standard.

Because of our union with Christ, we must flee everything that is of a carnal, corrupt nature. "Flee fornication," Paul wrote. "Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body." Many other sins do not affect the body, but this sin is ruinous to body and soul alike, and so Paul said in effect, "Run from anything that would tend to stir the body to unholy lust."

In his Confessions St. Augustine related how in his unconverted days he had allowed himself to become the willing victim of vile and fleshly lusts. He lived carelessly like the pagans of that day and associated with the corrupt and wicked members of society. When he was converted, the great question on his mind was, "Will I ever be able to live according to the Christian standard of holiness? Will I ever be able to keep myself from the vile, sensuous life in which I have lived so long?" When he first yielded himself to Christ, he took as his life-text Romans 13:13-14, in which the apostle exhorted the believer to "put… on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

For a long time after his conversion Augustine did not dare go near the part of the city where his godless companions of former days lived. But one day a matter of business called him there, and as he was walking along the street he suddenly saw one of the beautiful yet wicked companions of his folly. The moment her eyes lit on him, her face was illuminated with delight and she

came running with outstretched arms and crying, “Austin! Where have you been for so long? We have missed you so.” He turned and gathered up his long philosopher’s gown and started to run. It was not a very dignified proceeding for a doctor, a professor of rhetoric, to run up the street with a godless girl running after him. She called to him, “Austin, Austin, why do you run? It is only I!” He looked back and exclaimed, “I run because it is not I.” And he was off again.

“The life which I now live in the flesh,” Paul said, “I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). That is our standard and so in all our behavior, in the use of our bodies, we are to glorify Him.

Paul came to the crux of the whole matter when he asked: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple [the sanctuary] of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” Note how the Holy Spirit links us again with Christ. When Christ was here on earth, He said to the Jews of His day, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” They, misunderstanding, looked at the great temple on mount Moriah and said, “Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?” But we are told, “He spake of the temple of his body.” (John 2:19-21). He, the holy One, had a real human body and that body was the sanctuary of deity. Now He has gone back to Heaven, saved our souls, claimed our bodies, and sent His Holy Spirit down to dwell in the body of each believer.

So we read, “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.” Do we think about this as much as we should? If we

were constantly meditating on that statement, would we allow many things about which we are careless? We regard a church building as a sanctuary set apart for the work of the Lord. We step in from the outside and immediately our hats come off. We teach our boys and girls not to be boisterous or frivolous in the church building, for it is the house where we meet God and we realize that reverent behavior should characterize us there. But do we remember that each of our bodies is a sanctuary? It is the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells, and how careful you and I ought to be that we do not grieve the blessed One who dwells within! How careful we ought to be that we do not bring dishonor on the name of the Savior who has sent His Spirit to live in our bodies!

Say these words over and over again to yourself until they get such a grip on you that you will never forget them: “My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God dwells in me.” Then you will realize the dignity of the body and the responsibility that attaches to it.

Paul said, “Ye are not your own”—does your heart respond to that?—“for ye are bought with a price.” And what was the price? The precious blood of God’s dear Son. At Calvary He purchased us to be His own. An old Puritan writer remarked, “Calvary was the marketplace where the Saviour bought us with His blood, but He never got His money’s worth.” We have been such poor servants; we have responded so poorly to His love. We should be able to sing with sincerity:

Not my own, but saved by Jesus,

Who redeemed me by His Blood;

Gladly I accept the message,

I belong to Christ the Lord.

Not my own; to Christ my Saviour

I, believing, trust my soul,

Everything to Him committed,

While eternal ages roll.

Not my own; my time, my talents,

Freely all to Christ I bring,

To be used in joyful service

For the glory of my King.

Not my own; the Lord accepts me,

One among the ransomed throng

Who in Heaven shall see His glory,

And to Jesus Christ belong.

(Daniel W. Whittle)

It will be wonderful to be His own up there. I would not want to miss it then, but it is a great privilege now to be His own as we walk the streets of this world.

Paul concluded, “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” In another translation the text stops here, but our King James version adds the words “and in your spirit, which are God’s.” I think that someone making a copy of the original Greek manuscript did not understand the thought at all, felt that there was something left out, and added those words in the margin; and later a translator incorporated the marginal words into the verse itself. But “Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit” is the very thing the apostle was not saying here. What he was saying is, “Be

guided by this thought: your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; if you glorify Him in your body, you will glorify Him in your spirit." In other words, "Glorify God in your body, and the spiritual side will take care of itself."

Chapter Seven Celibacy, Marriage, And Divorce

This seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians deals with a subject that has caused a great deal of confusion down through the centuries. The marriage relationship occupies a large place in the Word of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New. The teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and the direct ministry of the Holy Spirit after our Lord's ascension put this whole matter on a very high plane, so that marriage for a Christian is God's own wonderful picture of the mystic union—as is often said in wedding ceremonies—that subsists between Christ and the church.

We can understand that in the early church there were a great many irregularities to be corrected in regard to this entire subject. The Jews under the law permitted a certain laxity that our Lord Jesus Christ forbade in the dispensation of grace. Then again in the heathen world of Paul's day, conditions were such that it was probably difficult to find people whose attitude in regard to marriage was at all like that of the New Testament church. Therefore Paul found it necessary to do some very plain speaking.

The Christian Standard (1 Corinthians 7:1-17)

In the first part of this chapter the apostle was evidently dealing with questions that had been sent to him, so he said, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman." People have inferred from this statement that the apostle was an advocate of celibacy. The Roman church is very fond

of pointing to this verse as though it teaches that the unmarried monk or priest or the unwed nun is a holier person than the Christian husband or wife, father or mother. The apostle did not say that, though later in this chapter he did speak of serving the Lord without distraction, particularly in a time of persecution; he supposed that celibacy was “good for the present distress” (7:26).

Paul wrote in a day when to become a Christian, to be publicly baptized as confessing Christ, was to put one’s life in jeopardy. Under such conditions it might really be best for a man not to be married at all. Yet certain inherited tendencies of human nature might make celibacy a dangerous option, one that could work against purity, against the highest type of morality, instead of working for greater holiness. So Paul said, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.”

The husband is to “render unto the wife due benevolence,” or as the apostle Peter very beautifully put it, the husband is to give “honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7). “And the wife,” Paul said in Ephesians 5:33, is to “see that she reverence her husband.” Both husband and wife are to remember that having entered into this mutual relationship, neither is any longer his or her own master; they have agreed to subject themselves to one another and there can be no happy Christian home unless they do so.

“The wife,” Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7, “hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the

husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." They are to be sure that they pay due regard to one another's conjugal rights. There may be circumstances in which they draw apart for a while; they might separate for a limited time, but they should be careful not to do so except by mutual agreement. Paul said, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

All down through the centuries of the Christian dispensation there have been strange sects who have advocated the celibate condition even for persons already entered into the marriage relationship, and teachers who have said that to serve the Lord better, husbands and wives should live entirely apart from one other. But the apostle said that to attempt such a life is to place yourself in a position of great temptation, and therefore to do so is not only unwise but also thoroughly opposed to the divine institution of marriage.

It is all right for a husband and wife to say, "We think it would be best for us to live apart from each other for a little while so that we may be more entirely devoted to the Lord and so that we might wait on Him in fasting and prayer in order to be more fully conformed to His image. Then we will come together again." But if they attempt this, they should be careful that they do not run off into some strange inconsistency.

"I speak this by permission," Paul added in 7:6, "and not of commandment." Some people point to this verse and say, "You see, the apostle himself did not always claim to be inspired. In this portion he declared that he was

speaking only by permission and not by commandment, and therefore he was not inspired of God." And I respond, "Oh no, he was just as truly inspired to give this permission as he was a little further on to give a direct command."

What may be permitted in one family might throw another family into hopeless confusion. Take for an example a family with a number of little children. The wife gets a high notion of the demands of personal holiness and comes to her husband and says, "My dear, I want to be altogether for God, and so I am going to request that I separate entirely from you for a time. I am going to a spiritual retreat. You get along with the children as best you can." Going to that retreat would disrupt her entire family. She would glorify the Lord better by looking after the children than by spending the time on her knees in some retreat. Many a Christian today would glorify God far better by caring for her youngsters at home than by going to a church meeting every night.

Let us not forget that God established the home before He created the church and when people are married they have a tremendous responsibility resting on their shoulders. No one feels that more keenly than men like me who are called to preach the gospel. I do not know how often I have felt like crying out with the bride in the Canticles, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Song of Solomon 1:6). A servant of Christ who is called to travel through the world with the gospel message finds it difficult to give enough time to training his own children in the fear of God. People who do not have such a calling should give priority to their responsibility in the home.

I think God must have a special place in Heaven for preachers' wives. They have had so much more to contend with than the average woman. If the children go wrong, folks wag their heads and blame their mother. Probably the trouble was that the father was not able to cooperate with her more. Yet how God honors preachers' wives! Someone said that preachers' children are always the worst. I cannot boast of my own, though I do thank God that they are all saved, but you will find that some of the greatest names on the pages of history are preachers' children. When 2 Chronicles states that a king of Israel or Judah was especially willful or especially good, it also mentions his mother's name. It is tragic when a child has an evil mother, for we can scarcely expect much good from him.

Turning our thoughts back to 1 Corinthians 7:5, we have to admit that while some households might be thrown into hopeless confusion if husband and wife were to separate for a while, other households might be able to continue functioning if such times of seclusion were arranged. And so the apostle did not mean that he was not inspired when he said, "I speak this by permission, and not of commandment"; he meant that the Spirit of God allowed him to give husbands and wives this permission, but did not allow him to command them to separate for prayer and fasting. It is nowhere commanded that husband and wife should for any time separate from each other.

Paul went on to say, "I would that all men were even as I myself." For the gospel's sake he had chosen to remain unmarried, and in circumstances such as many were passing through at the time, the single state was to be preferred, other things being equal.

Having once entered into the marriage relationship, however, husbands and wives should remain married. Paul said, “Unto the married I command”—not merely permit but command—”yet not I, but the Lord.” What did he mean by “not I, but the Lord”? Simply this: he was merely repeating something that the Lord had already said. Paul was reminding them that the Lord had declared: “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matthew 5:31-32). Those are the solemn words of the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 19:9 He reiterated the one exception that permits the innocent party in a divorce to marry again according to Scripture.

In Matthew 19:5-6 the Lord said: “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” I have heard people try to get around that command by subterfuge, saying, “I don’t believe the Lord joined us together; I think the devil did it and therefore I think I am free to get a divorce and marry somebody else.” But it was God who pronounced those words in the garden of Eden: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). It is He who joins people together in the marriage relationship and once joined in that relationship, they should never break it.

The Pharisees asked the Lord, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” In a hard, rough age when men were often very uncouth and cruel, God commanded that instead of holding a wife who was hated as a kind of slave or chattel, a man should give her legal divorce papers and permit her to go home to her people. But now under the dispensation of grace when men are born again and transformed by the Spirit of God, no such thing is tolerated. “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts,” the Lord said, “suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife”—again observe the exception—“except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committed! adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:7-9).

Notice, there is a sin that dissolves the marriage relationship and if one partner is guilty of that sin, he or she may be put away and the other party is free; and if that innocent party marries again, the new marriage is not called adultery. There are those who are so legalistic that they refuse to take note of that “except,” but the Son of God has put it there so that the innocent party may not have the onus of immorality attached to him or her. There you have the New Testament standard given by the Lord Himself.

So Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband.” Then the apostle immediately added, “But and if she depart.” He was implying that there may be circumstances in which no self-respecting woman could continue in a marriage relationship; a man

may be so absolutely brutal or so vile and filthy and perverted in his whole character that no decent, good woman could live with him. In such a case, Paul implied, she is free to leave him but not free to be divorced and remarried unless she has definite New Testament grounds. “If she depart,” he said, “let her remain unmarried.” Although it may be necessary for her to leave, she can at least continue to remember her husband before God in prayer, and perhaps through her prayers the day will come when he will be broken down by divine grace and saved. If that day does come and he begs her to return to him, she can go back and, finding him a new man, make a home for him once more. But if she has already entered into another relationship, she is in a pitiable condition.

“Let not the husband put away his wife,” Paul continued, “but to the rest speak I, not the Lord.” Was he not speaking by inspiration? Keep in mind the whole argument. When he said, “I command, yet not I, but the Lord,” he meant that the Lord had already spoken on the subject. Here when he said, “To the rest speak I, not the Lord,” he meant that by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost he was laying down a divine principle in regard to a matter about which the Lord had not already spoken.

So by divine inspiration Paul wrote, “If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.” This legislation was not needed during the Lord’s time on earth, for He came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but now Paul was reaching out to the Gentiles, and it was a common thing for one member of a Gentile family to be converted and the others not. Think of a case of a man in Corinth who has been saved, but his wife is a devotee of the heathen

cults; she is indignant that he no longer burns incense to idols, yet she is willing to live with him. “Let him not put her away,” Paul said. The husband is not to be self-righteous and say, “I am a Christian and cannot acknowledge you as my wife any longer.”

In Israel if a Jew were married to a pagan, he had to put her away, for she was unclean in the sight of God. But under grace, if a pagan wife is pleased to dwell with her Christian husband, he is to show her kindness and consideration and seek to be a blessing to her. If it is the woman who has been converted, the rule is similar: “The woman which hath an husband that believeth not…if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.”

The book of Ezra tells us that in Israel many Jews had entered into alliances with heathen women, and Nehemiah 13:24 says that “their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language.” Likewise when a husband is a Christian and his wife is not (or vice versa), their children will generally speak half in the language of Heaven and half in the language of earth. It is a difficult thing to bring them up for God in a mixed home like that. Ezra told Israel in effect, “You will have to put all these wives and children away as unclean.”

But notice the difference under grace: “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.” The unbelieving husband may be hard, he may be wicked, and he may hate the very name of Jesus, but he has been brought outwardly into a new relationship with God through the conversion of his wife. There is now

someone in that home to pray, someone who loves the Word of God, someone to live the Christian life and let the others see what it means to be regenerated. Perhaps some of you readers are wives who are breaking your hearts over unsaved husbands. Will you not take comfort from this verse? Perhaps some of you readers are husbands who are grieved because the wives whom you love are still outside of Christ. You too may be comforted. Keep on praying; keep on bearing them up before God; keep on believing that He has saved you out of an unconverted family because He wants the whole household for Himself.

When the pagan jailer cried, “What must I do to be saved?” the answer rang clear, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30-31). God was saying, “Jailer, I not only want you; I not only want to cleanse your heart; I also want to make your household a Christian one, a testimony to My grace right here in Philippi.” And so it came to pass.

Wives with unsaved husbands, and husbands with unsaved wives, keep on praying. Your children are sanctified because they have a father or a mother, as the case may be, to take them to God in prayer and to teach them the Word of God. You can count on Him to bless that ministry to them by bringing them eventually to Christ.

Next Paul dealt with a case in which the unsaved partner will not remain in the marriage. He said, “If the unbelieving depart, let him depart.” The believer cannot do anything about it and thus “is not under bondage in such cases,” but then she is to live her own life as a

single person to the glory of the Lord Jesus. Rather than looking around for another mate, she should devote herself to Christ and keep on praying for the wandering one, for “God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?” Even though the husband is gone, even though he has left the home, the wife should keep on praying for him, for God may intervene and bring him back penitent and broken-hearted to try to make up for the willfulness of the past by living a peaceful life with her.

To the husband whose wife has left because he loves Jesus and she does not, Paul said, “How knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” The man should not be too hard in his thoughts. He should pray and ask himself, “Was there something in me that turned her away? If I had had a little more grace and Christlikeness, might she have remained?” He should bear her up before God and if some day she should be ready to return, he should receive her as God receives His erring ones when they come back to Him.

Closing this section of the chapter, Paul wrote, “As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.” In other words, the issues that Paul had been dealing with are not matters with which we may play fast and loose. He had been stating principles that are divine requirements concerning the marriage relationship and they apply to all Christians and all the churches of God.

Why is God so insistent about these principles? The reason is that from the beginning it was His intention that the marriage relationship would portray the eternal

union between Christ and His redeemed. When people marry they take each other for life. Many of you men remember when you stood before the minister and he said, “Do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife? Will you love, honor, and cherish her so long as you both shall live?” and you said, “I will.” Have you lived up to your vow? And many of you women remember when the minister said, “Do you take this man to be your lawful wedded husband? Will you love, honor, and obey him so long as you both shall live?” and you answered, “I will.” Does your conscience tell you that you have been true to that vow? When you made that vow, you entered into a relationship that pictures the relationship between the soul and the Savior.

Way back in the Old Testament Abraham wanted to find a partner for his son, so he sent out his messenger with an offer of marriage. When the servant found Rebecca and she became the affianced wife of Isaac, her family thought she should not leave home immediately but decided to find out what her wishes were. Referring to Abraham’s servant, they asked, “Wilt thou go with this man?” and without a moment’s hesitation she answered, “I will go,” and she went out across the desert to be united to Isaac (Genesis 24:58). In a similar manner the Lord sends His message of love and kindness to the unsaved and invites them to enter a union with Himself by accepting the offer of the man Christ Jesus.

The Time Is Short (1 Corinthians 7:18-40)

In the previous section the apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, laid down for us the Christian standard of marriage. With a single exception, which the Lord Himself indicated, marriage is indissoluble. The

marriage relationship once entered into cannot be broken with impunity, and if anyone attempts to break it and marries another, he is guilty of the sin of adultery.

That at once raises a question, for there are many people who have had rather unhappy marital experiences before their conversions. After having been separated, divorced, and remarried, the grace of God has found them and they have been saved. What about them? The apostle made the answer to that question clear when he added, “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.”

Paul illustrated his point by referring to circumcision. In effect he said, “If God saved you as Jew, do not try to Gentilize yourself; just remain a Jew. Although you are now a member of the body of Christ, you cannot undo what you are by nature, and you cannot undo what has taken place before you were converted. On the other hand, if you were a Gentile before you were converted and now find yourself in a community of Jewish believers, do not attempt to make a Hebrew of yourself, for that is impossible. You were saved as a Gentile; God opened the door of faith to you as a Gentile. He took you in as you were; therefore “therein abide with God.” To be either Jew or Gentile means nothing now. The great thing for the future is obedience to the Word of God.”

Once a person becomes a Christian, he has a new standard by which to live, for God has given His Word to him. When he was converted, all the past was wiped out by the precious blood of Christ. God called him and He saved him in the condition in which He found him. That applies even where people have had rather mixed experiences along the line of marriage and divorce. God

did not ask, for instance, that the husband and wife who had been married contrary to Christian principles separate in order to be saved. He took them as they were and made them members of Christ. Now He recognizes them as His own who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit and cleansed by the blood of Christ. They should remain in the marriage relationship that they were in when His grace found them and by living faithfully as husband and wife adorn the doctrine of Christ.

The apostle continued, “Art thou called being a servant?” The word translated “servant” means “bondman” or “slave.” When this Epistle was written, slavery extended over the entire world and many of the early Christians were slaves, but Paul said to them, “Care not for it.” In other words, “Do not get restless because of that, but if you are set free, use your liberty for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul explained, “For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman.” He is no longer a slave in God’s eyes; he is free to serve Christ. As the Christian slave serves his earthly master, he is also serving the Lord Christ. What a wonderful thing for him to realize! He can glorify the Lord even in the circumstances in which he was saved.

He that is free is not to say, “Well, I have no master; I am free; I am not a slave; I can do as I please.” Paul said, “He that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant,” and here again he used the word meaning “bondsman.” The freeman has been bought, so instead of seeking to have his own way, he is now to take the way of the Lord who purchased him.

Paul reminded the Corinthians, “Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men,” and then he reiterated, “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God” (italics added). That suggests a restriction, for one might, after all, be saved in circumstances in which he could not “abide with God.”

Reverting to the subject of the first section of chapter 7, Paul wrote, “Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.” Some say, “Well, the apostle recognized that he was not inspired when he wrote this,” but they are again mistaken. Paul was simply telling us that the Lord had given him no commandment to say that a virgin must marry or must not marry, but that he by inspiration was passing on his judgment in the matter. As a wise pastor who recognized the conditions prevailing at that time, he said, “I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress.” The days in which this letter was written were days of great persecution, of fearful suffering, when one might have to flee at a moment’s notice and leave home and loved ones for Christ’s sake. And so Paul was saying, “I will tell you what is the best thing under these circumstances.”

“Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed.” Those who were already married should not of course seek to break the tie. “Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.” However, if a man said, “Yes, but I have found one who appeals very much to my heart and I would like to make her my wife,” Paul would tell him to go ahead if she is willing to share the risk and danger. “If thou marry, thou hast not sinned,” the apostle said,

“and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned.” Paul was not suggesting that the Corinthians take vows either to marry or not to marry; he was simply telling them to be guided by the Lord under existing circumstances.

Emphasizing that “the time is short,” the apostle said in effect, “Whatever you do, keep in mind that you are here for only a little while. You are here to glorify God and that is far more important than seeking your own happiness. You are living in difficult times, in perplexing days, but your hope is the Lord’s near return.” This is always the blessed hope for the Christian, and Paul was urging the Corinthians to live with that in view. We are not to allow any temporal relationship or any human occupation to hinder our fellowship with God or our obedience to His will. When the apostle said, “It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none,” he did not mean that married men were to disown their wives, or be cold and indifferent toward them. Nothing like that was intended, for he had already emphasized the very opposite principle. He meant that the one thing Christians should live for is not their own happiness as husband and wife. If they are united in the Lord, their goal should be to live for Him.

A dear friend of mine spent a great deal of his time traveling around the world to preach the gospel while his precious wife remained at home perhaps two-thirds of the year to care for their little family. I once remarked to her, “It must get awfully lonely for you. You hardly have any married life living like this.”

Her eyes filled with tears and she said, “The day my husband and I were married, we promised each other that we would never let our personal comfort interfere

with our devotion to the work of the Lord. I believe He called my husband for this great evangelistic ministry and therefore I am glad to keep the house while he goes out to his work."

I said, "I have a choice tidbit for you. Have you noticed what David said concerning those that abide by the stuff while the others go out to war? He said, 'As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff (1 Samuel 30:24). And so if you carry out your part, when the judgment seat of Christ is set up and you and your husband stand there before God, if he is to be rewarded in that day for winning thousands of precious souls, you will get half of the reward even though you could not go out and do the preaching."

The principle is that everyone is to act in view of the fact that time indeed is fleeting. The Lord's return is nearing and no consideration of personal comfort is to be allowed to hinder devotion to the will of God.

So "they that have wives be as though they had none" and, Paul added, "they that weep, as though they wept not." The apostle did not mean that you must not weep; he meant that if you do weep now, you can be joyful even in the midst of your sorrow if you are looking on to the glad day of the Lord's return. The causes of weeping will soon be over and God will wipe away all tears from your eyes.

And since "the time is short… they that buy [should be] as though they possessed not." You cannot get through this world without buying; it is impossible to live on this earth without spending something for physical comfort as you go along. But do not set your heart upon such

possessions; do not let your affections be entwined about earthly things. It is perfectly right and proper to enjoy many privileges here—God “giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17)—but do not let the spirit of the world get hold of you. While enjoying the good things that God in His grace lavishes on you, do not set your heart on them, for they are all fleeting; they will be gone some day. If your treasure is all here, when everything here has disappeared, what will you have left? If you have Christ, you have that which satisfies the soul even when everything else is gone. Remember that the “fashion of this world passeth away.”

The apostle was careful to explain that he did not intend to put people under legal restriction when he said that under certain circumstances the single life was preferable and possibly the wiser choice. Evidently the explanation was necessary because within a century and a half after these words were written, monasticism had come into the church. Some people lived in deserts and caves as hermits and took vows never to marry, and communities of monks and nuns were supposed to be holier than other people because they were dedicated to a virgin life. So Paul said in effect, “I am not urging anything like that on you when I speak, but I want to point out that in these troubled times those who remain single may have less anxiety than those who marry.” He told the Corinthians, “I would have you without carefulness.”

What a crushing burden must have rested on the heart of a husband and father who had to go away on a mission at a time when his family was exposed to persecution and perhaps a cruel and awful death! He would not have been able to get his loved ones out of his

mind and thus he would have found it difficult to serve the Lord without distraction. So Paul said, “He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord.” An unmarried man may have said, “I have only one life anyway, and if I am called to lay it down for the Lord, very well.” It would have been a great deal harder for him to say that if he had had to think of a wife and children in grave danger because of affliction and persecution.

“He that is married,” Paul said, “careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.” This was not meant as a slur, as though it were wrong to be occupied with temporal things. A married man has to think of the provision for and the safety of his loved ones. It is very right and proper that he should.

There is the same difference “between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman [if dedicated to the work of the Lord] careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.” Some of the most wonderful Christians who have ever lived have been women who for Christ’s sake chose never to marry so that they could devote their lives to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I never quite understand why married people who have the comforts of home often speak in a disparaging and unkind way of unmarried people. I should think, if marriage is so delightful, that married people would talk in a very tender and sympathetic way of people who have not married, but instead of that they speak sometimes in a contemptuous way. I never like to hear people say, “Oh, she is just an old maid,” or “He is just an old bachelor.” To them I say, “Wait a moment! That

bachelor may be glorifying the Lord in a way he could not have if he were the head of a household. That maiden lady may be rendering wonderful service to God and humanity." I repeat, some of the most devoted Christians I have ever known have been unmarried men and women who gave themselves wholly to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. All honor to them!

Paul wrote, "I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you." Continuing the theme, he said in effect, "You are perfectly free to choose in the Lord which life you want to lead. I am simply exhorting you concerning that which seems appropriate so that you can serve the Lord without any conflicting interests. If you have lived up to the present time unmarried, but after thinking it all over you still think it might be better for you to marry, do what you want; you do not sin in being married. On the other hand, if you can stand steadfast against temptation, if you do not feel any particular yearning for the marriage relationship and have resolved in your heart to live singly, do that. Whether you keep your virginity or you do not keep it, you are doing well as long as you live unto the Lord. Under the present circumstances, however, he who does not marry does better."

Laying down a more definite principle, Paul said, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth." Mark this; do not let anyone miss this. Paul did not say, "As long as the man liveth"; he said, "As long as her husband liveth." Our Lord Jesus showed that there is one sin that dissolves the marriage relationship, so if he who was her husband became an adulterer, he ended the marriage, although he may be forgiven.

“If her husband be dead,” Paul continued, “she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” What does “only in the Lord” mean? It means that a Christian must do a great deal more than just follow his or her own fancy. We are distinctly told in 2 Corinthians 6:14 that we are not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” If you are a Christian and unmarried and you have never thought this through, take this principle to heart. If you ever contemplate marriage, put it out of your mind at once that you might possibly marry somebody who is unsaved. That would be positive disobedience to the Word of God. Of course if you are saved while married to an unsaved person, remember the instruction in 1 Corinthians 7 not to leave him or her; pray that he or she may be brought to Christ. But if you are not married, settle it in your mind that you will never permit your affections to be entwined around an unsaved person.

An old Puritan said, “If you are a child of God and you marry a child of the devil, you will be sure to have trouble with your father-in-law.” Do not forget it. For a child of God to take the devil for his father-in-law is a fearful mistake; nothing but problems will follow, for God has said so in His Word.

You may say, “Well, I am thinking of being married, so I must marry a Christian person.” That is good but something even more than that is meant by the phrase “in the Lord.” One is to be led by the Lord in this important matter as truly as in anything else, so marriage “in the Lord” is marriage in subjection to Him whom we own as Lord and Christ.

“Oh,” you may then say, “if I marry in the Lord, I will always be happy and never have any troubles!” That is not necessarily true, but when the troubles come you can affirm, “The Lord gave me this husband, or wife, and the Lord will give me grace to get along with him, or her.” When your marriage is of the Lord, the Lord will enable you to get through any problems to His honor and glory.

Finally, speaking of the widow who “is at liberty to be married,” the apostle said, “She is happier if she so abide, after my judgment.” Again he was giving inspired judgment, but not a command. It is good sound judgment, for a second marriage is often a mistake, though of course sometimes it is a blessing.

I think there might be a little irony in the last part of 7:40. There were some people questioning Paul’s apostleship and judgment, so he added, “I think also that I have the Spirit of God.” In other words, “Some say I haven’t, but I think I have.” He wrote these words as truly by inspiration as when he penned that matchless eighth chapter of Romans.

Let me bring you back to 1 Corinthians 7:29: “This I say, brethren, the time is short.” We have only a little while to testify for God. As Christians we should seek to use every moment for His glory. Whatever our circumstances are, we should earnestly seek to be used in blessing for a lost world. We should put out of our lives anything that hinders fellowship with God and usefulness in testimony.

If you are unsaved, take Paul’s warning especially to heart. The time when mercy is being offered is quickly slipping by.

Life at best is very brief,

Like the falling of a leaf,

Like the binding of a sheaf:

Be in time!

Fairest flowers soon decay,

Youth and beauty pass away,

Oh, you have not long to stay:

Be in time!

Our Lord's return draws near; death too is ever following on your track, and if you are unsaved, you are still outside of Christ. In grace He "came from Godhead's fullest glory down to Calvary's depth of woe" for your redemption. Does He not deserve to have you trust Him and confess Him openly as your Savior? "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Chapter Eight Christian Liberty

In the eighth chapter of 1 Corinthians the Spirit of God deals in a very remarkable way with the great theme of Christian liberty and brotherly concern. It is almost impossible for us, in a land like ours, to comprehend the customs of the society in which the early Christians lived, but missionaries who have labored for any length of time among heathen people will understand the problem that the apostle was dealing with here. It was the question of whether a Christian was at liberty to eat the meat of animals that at the time of their killing had been dedicated to idols. This was a common practice; in fact practically all the meat that was sold in the markets had been so dedicated.

One can understand that many of the early Christians feared that if they ate such meat, they would dishonor the name of the Lord and possibly appear to tolerate idol worship. I have noticed a similar concern among the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona and among Navajo and other Indians when they become Christians. They are concerned about doing anything that looks like participation in or recognition of heathen ceremonies, because they want everyone to understand that they have made a clean break with the old life. In Corinth eating meat offered to idols was quite a problem and it is evident that the believers there had written to the apostle Paul for guidance.

We read in 7:1, “Concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me,” and this expression introduces the rest of the Epistle. From that point on the apostle dealt with matters that had been submitted to him so that he might

give his inspired judgment for the guidance of the church. One of these matters was “things offered unto idols.”

Knowledge Puffs Up (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

“As touching things offered unto idols,” Paul said, “we know that we all have knowledge.” He was indicating that “we all”—that is, we Christians—know the one true and living God and we know the folly of idolatry. However, the apostle went on to stress the importance of not being proud of our attainments in grace and our knowledge of the truth. Since we know certain things that others do not, we might act on our knowledge in such a way as to put a stumblingblock in the path of someone else, so the knowledge that God has given us should be held in the spirit of humility.

We understand that there are no such beings in the world as those represented by the idols, but that does not do away with the fact that Satanic power is behind idolatry. “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God” (10:20) and therefore there must be no compromise whatever between Christianity and pagan religions. We know that those who are in the darkness of heathenism are in the bondage of Satan, and therefore our missionaries are not to take the good from the pagan religions and then share what we have with the pagans. Not at all. Our missionaries are to turn lost people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. This was what the apostles and their fellow workers set out to do, and their methods should be our methods. We need nothing new. The gospel is still “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). Where the

gospel is preached in dependence on the Holy Spirit, miracles will happen in the hearts and lives of heathen men just as truly today as in Paul's day and the centuries that followed.

"We know that an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Corinthians 8:4), but everybody does not have this knowledge; therefore it may not be wise to claim, "It does not make any difference to me whether these meats were offered to idols, so I am at liberty to eat." Yes, as far as your own conscience is concerned, you are at liberty to eat, but you should stop to consider the effect on others.

"But," you say, "I know that idols are nothing." Yes, but "knowledge [mere knowledge] puffeth up." It is quite possible for you to be conceited and proud over the fact that you have a little knowledge that someone else does not have, but "what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (4:7) There is a tendency to pride in all our hearts even in the things of God. We get a smattering of His Word that some others do not have and instantly we are lifted up in our own conceit.

"Knowledge [if it is only that] puffeth up, but charity edifieth." Do you see the difference? Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Some of us get to be like a great swollen frog, puffed up with wind and sitting on a log. We imagine that we have advanced wonderfully over other folk. But if you throw a stone at that frog, he will suddenly shrink to about one-fifth of the size he seemed to be. Yes, knowledge puffs up, but love encourages real solid growth.

We need to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). If we put

knowledge before grace, it will work harm to ourselves as well as to others. Paul said, “If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” Although God has given me a little light on His Word, I still know very little compared with the many things I do not yet know, and so let me thank Him for what He has imparted, hold it in all humility, and walk carefully before Him.

Paul continued, “If any man love God, the same is known of him.” We might have expected the apostle to say, “If a man loves God, he knows God.” That is true, but the other side is the wonderful part of it. If a man loves God, God knows him, and it is that in which we can rejoice. I like the way the apostle John spoke of himself so often as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” If you or I had been writing, we probably would have said “the disciple who loved Jesus.” And I do not know if we would even have stopped there; we might have said “the disciple who loved Jesus and whose name is so-and-so.” That is what most of us do. Naturally we all like to get our own names to the front, so we need to be brought low to the feet of our blessed Savior. John gloried in the fact that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and we should rejoice in the fact that we are known and loved of God.

Only One God (1 Corinthians 8:4-6)

There is a science, one of relatively recent vintage, known as the science of comparative religions. I think it had its origin largely in the world’s fair held in Chicago in 1893, when there was a great congress of religion, and teachers came from all parts of the world to exchange thoughts on religious concepts. From that time on men began comparing one religion with another.

So there is a science of comparative religions, but Christianity is not one of them. Christianity is not a religion; it is a revelation.

Christianity is not something that men have thought out; it is not a system of philosophy or ethics. It is something revealed from Heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit. Idolatrous systems, on the other hand, are the works of men energized by the enemy. These systems are hollow and empty, as Paul showed in 8:4-6.

“We know,” the apostle said, “that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.” That God is the God who has been revealed as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul continued, “For though [in the world around and in the pagan nations] there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us [to those of us who have accepted the revelation that has been given in this holy Word] there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” Observe, the apostle was not speaking here of the doctrine of the trinity; neither was he intimating that it might be a mistake to put our Lord Jesus Christ, the divine eternal Son, on the same level with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Paul was saying that there is one God, and that God is the One who has revealed Himself in the Word as the Creator of all men and the Father of all who believe.

He is the Father of the universe because it was through Him that it came into existence; it came out of Him and therefore there is a sense in which it is perfectly right to speak of the universal fatherhood of God and the

brotherhood of man. He is the God of the spirits of all flesh; all men came into existence through Him. But man is a fallen creature; he has turned away from God. Man is dead spiritually and therefore needs to be quickened into newness of life, and it is only when he is regenerated, when he is born again, that he comes into the family of God through redemption. Then he can look up into the face of God and say “our Father,” which is something that he could not do in his unconverted state.

The apostle said, “There is but one God,” and that is perfectly true. Elsewhere in Scripture we find that He subsists in three persons: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That comes out very clearly in the baptismal formula: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). How incongruous it would be to insert the name of a mere created being in there! We revere the one who was blessed and favored above all women because she was chosen to be the mother of the Son of God, but suppose that we said “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the blessed virgin Mary.” How instinctively every Christian heart would shrink from that!

We must never put a creature in the place of deity, but we can say “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” for the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit is God. The Father without the Son and the Holy Spirit would not be God. The Son with the Father and the Holy Spirit is God; the Son without the Father and Holy Spirit would not be God. The Spirit with the Father and the Son is God; but the Spirit without the Father and the Son would not be God. That is a definition that was coined some years ago by the

venerable Joseph Cook of England, and it sets forth the truth as it is in Scripture.

When we speak of Christ in His mediatorial position, we bring Him down to the place He took in grace as a man without denying His deity. Someone asked me this question: “Is there any sense in which God the Father is greater than Jesus Christ?” When we think of the Lord Jesus as the eternal only-begotten Son, He is coequal with the Father. When He speaks of Himself as the Son, He says, “All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him… I and my Father are one” (John 5:23; 10:30). But having stooped in grace to become man, the man Christ Jesus voluntarily took a place of subjection to the Father and therefore, as the Son born on earth of a virgin mother, He was the same person, but the same person in different circumstances. He voluntarily assumed humiliation and said, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). There is no difficulty about this if we remember that He is Son of God in two senses: God the Son from eternity; and the Son of God born of a virgin mother here on earth, with no human father.

“There is but one God, the Father,… and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” We recognize that the Lord Jesus, the One to whom we yield the allegiance of our hearts, is our Savior and the originator of both creations. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1-3). The entire creation came into existence through the word of His power. “He

spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:9). He who is God is the Son from all eternity.

But this creation fell and a mediator was needed, so He came into the world in lowly grace; He assumed a servant's form and became man without ceasing for one moment to be God. As man He went to Calvary's cross to settle the sin question. He was buried, but He rose again in triumph and as the risen One He is Head of the new creation. "By whom are all things"—that is the old creation. "And we by him"—that is the new creation. God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6).

We who were dead in sins have been quickened together with Christ (see Ephesians 2:5) and it is because we know this, because we know that God has thus revealed Himself, that we are through forever with idols. There are those who speak slightingly of the work of missionaries, as though it yields very poor returns. But we only have to go back a few centuries to find that our own ancestors were idolaters. The gospel came to them with the knowledge of God; faith in the Lord Jesus Christ delivered them from their idolatry; and thus we are what we are today. Should we think for one moment of refusing to share the gospel with those still sitting in the darkness in which our forefathers once sat?

Brotherly Care (1 Corinthians 8:7-13)

In this passage the apostle dwelled especially on the importance of concern for the consciences of others. We may not face exactly the same problems that the Corinthians did, but we need to have the same care for the consciences of other people. As a Christian you may

say, “I am quite sure that this thing is right; I have perfect liberty and I am not going to let somebody else dictate to me what I should or should not do.” But stop for a moment. Suppose someone who does not have as much light as you have is quite convinced that you are deliberately and willfully disobeying the Word of God. If by and by that person comes to the conclusion that since you, a stronger Christian, feel free to do that thing, he is free to do it too, what then? Do you not see that his conscience might be dulled and his testimony eventually ruined?

So the apostle said, “There is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol”—that is, they believe that an idol is a reality and they believe that they are committing an idolatrous act. Under such circumstances we can deny ourselves of that which might injure and hurt others if they were to persist in the activity.

“But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.” Why do I need to be concerned about nonessentials like these? If such a matter will trouble someone else, I will put it out of my life. I will not use my liberty to gratify my own desires if doing so will cause another to stumble.

“Take heed,” Paul said to the Corinthians, “lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols?” Let us suppose

that you exercise your liberty in some way and another individual observes your behavior. Perhaps he is just a young convert, or simply an inquirer, or maybe someone not at all established, or perhaps a person not yet truly regenerated. If he sees you do something that hurts his conscience and he does the same thing, he defiles his conscience, and thus your lack of concern may lead to the shipwreck of his faith. Because you insist on your liberty, "shall the weak brother perish?" When Paul made that appeal, he was not affirming that any true child of God will ever be lost; the apostle was just raising a question. He was asking, "Would you be willing so to behave that it would cause another's shipwreck?"

Some years ago when I was preaching in a gospel hall in Detroit, I met a former Muslim from India who had been brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Sunday school had its annual outing, we all went over to a beautiful spot, and spent the day together. I was chatting with this brother, Mr. Ali by name, when a young girl came by passing out sandwiches. She said, "Won't you have a sandwich?"

"Thank you," I said. "What kind have you?"

"I have several different kinds."

"I will help myself to several of them."

And then she turned to Mr. Ali and said, "Will you have one?"

"What kind are they?" he asked.

"There is fresh pork and there is ham."

"Have you any beef?"

"No, I do not."

“Have you any lamb?”

“No.”

“Fish?”

“No.”

“Thank you, my dear young lady, but I won’t take any.”

Laughingly she said, “Why, Mr. Ali, you surprise me. Are you so under law that you cannot eat pork? Don’t you know that a Christian is at liberty to eat any kind of meat?”

“I am at liberty to eat it,” he answered, “but I am also at liberty to let it alone. You know I was brought up a strict Muslim. My old father, nearly eighty years of age now, is still a Muslim. Every three years I go back to India to render an account of my tea business, of which my father is really the head, and to visit with the folks at home. Always when I get home I know how I will be greeted. The friends will be sitting inside and my father will come to the door when the servant announces that I am there. My father will ask, ‘Son, have those infidels taught you to eat their filthy hog meat yet?’ ‘No, Father,’ I will say. ‘Pork has never passed my lips.’ Then I can go in and have the opportunity to preach Christ to them. If I took one of your sandwiches, the next time I go home I would have to answer my father’s question honestly and as a result I would not be able to go in and preach the gospel.”

Of course the young lady understood. He was acting exactly as the apostle was suggesting here. We have liberty to refrain from doing certain things if they will trouble other people. Love is to be the dominating motive. Paul wrote, “When ye sin so against the

brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ."

The chapter comes to this striking conclusion: "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." This is true Christian liberty coupled with brotherly care.

Chapter Nine Rewards For Service

Muzzling the Ox (1 Corinthians 9:1-23)

Everywhere the apostle went, his steps were dogged by legalistic men who hated the doctrine of grace and who sought in every way possible to shake the confidence of his converts. They questioned his commission and denied that he was a true apostle. In order to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ in an official sense, it was necessary that one should have seen the Lord and been commissioned by Him. Moreover the signs of an apostle—that is, the working of wonders—should be in evidence. Paul's enemies intimated that he could not be a true apostle, for he was not one of the Lord's witnesses when He was here on earth. They said he had never seen the Lord, had no true commission from Him, and was not able to work the wonders that were the signs of an apostle. Paul answered his detractors in this way: "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"

Certainly Paul had seen the Lord. He saw the risen Savior when he was thrown to the ground on the Damascus turnpike. That day the Lord said to him:

I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive

forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:16-18).

Thus Paul received his commission. And had he not performed the signs of an apostle? Although he did not even deign to speak of the miracles to the Corinthians, he had indeed wrought wonders, as had the twelve. But there was a far greater sign that always accompanied his ministry, and so he said to those who had been turned to the Lord through his preaching of the Word: "If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord."

The evidence that Paul was truly a God-sent servant was found in this fact: wherever he went, the Spirit of God confirmed the message that he carried, convicted men of their sin, led them to definite faith in Christ, and gave them the assurance of forgiveness and justification. Afterward they demonstrated by their new life the reality of the work that had taken place in their souls. And so Paul said in effect, "Do you listen to men who impugn my apostleship? Are you prepared to believe that possibly the signs of an apostle are not found in me? What about yourselves? Who brought you to Christ? To whom are you indebted under God for the knowledge of His grace?"

Others were saying, "Well, you can see he is not as confident in his own leadership abilities as the other apostles are. He does not even have a wife; he goes about alone." There are people who tell us that Paul was a bachelor and that this possibly accounts for some things that he said in this letter and elsewhere in regard to the place and ministry of women. But many believe that this view is mistaken because when the blood of the

martyr Stephen was shed, Paul gave his voice (or literally, his vote) against him. That seems to imply that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, the high council of the Jews, and that he voted for the death of Stephen. Paul could not have been a member of the Sanhedrin if he had not attained the age of thirty years and if he had not been a married man. So it may be that he had been married in his earlier life, but now was a widower and he chose to devote the rest of his life to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His reason for remaining single was not that he thought it was wrong for a minister of Christ to have a wife. The idea that those who preach the gospel should live the celibate life was unknown in apostolic days; as already noted, that was a superstitious fiction of later years when men came to believe that the unmarried monk and the childless nun were holier than the Christian father or mother.

Paul said in effect, “I have full authority to lead about a sister in Christ as a wife. I have full authority to marry a sister in Christ if I desire to do so. The other apostles did.” This of course proves that the celibacy of the clergy, so-called, was unknown in those days. Paul specifically asked, “Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?” That means James, Jude, and Cephas (Simon Peter) were married men (see Matthew 8:14). Some people tell us that Peter was the first pope. Well then, he was a married pope! Paul and Barnabas chose the celibate life so that they might be untrammeled in their missionary work as they traveled from land to land and endured hardships one should not expect a wife to share.

Others objected to Paul's apostleship on this ground: he knows he is not a true apostle, for he does not depend on his ministry for his temporal support. I suppose if he were living today, there would be those who would say, "He degrades the cloth by working for a living." Paul was a tentmaker and some were saying, "He would never soil his hands making tents if he knew that he was a genuinely appointed apostle; he would never stoop to anything like that." But he himself said in effect, "Oh no, I have a perfect right to be supported in the same way as others, but I have reasons for refusing to permit you to support me."

Paul came to the Corinthians when they were heathens, when they were pagans living vile ungodly lives, and he did not intend to pass the collection plate then and ask them to contribute toward his support. He preferred to go among them and labor, working with his own hands to support himself and his companions in order to keep the gospel absolutely "without charge." I wish the church of God had never given up that position. It is a great reproach on the church of God when its representatives turn to a Christless world and beg and wheedle money out of ungodly men to support the work of the Lord. The divine method is that the work of spreading the gospel of God should be supported by the people of God who give out of love for Christ, and when a servant of Christ under certain circumstances is not thus properly supported, he should not be above working with his own hands while he continues to minister the gospel as opportunities present themselves.

To demonstrate that it is quite right and proper for the Lord's servants to be supported by the church of God, the apostle asked some pertinent questions. "Who goeth

a warfare any time at his own charges?" If a man is a soldier, he is not expected to support himself; the country for which he is fighting takes care of him. "Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?"

Then Paul used an apt illustration from the law of Moses. It is written in Deuteronomy 25:4: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." The reference is to the old-fashioned way of threshing corn or wheat: the ox went around and around and trod on it. How inhuman it would have been if the ox when becoming hungry had not been permitted to munch a little of the grain as he was treading! The law permitted him to have some for himself. "Doth God take care for oxen?" Paul asked the Corinthians. "Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written." There is an admonition here, something for the people of God to take note of: "That he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope."

And so Paul laid this down as a principle: "If we have sown unto you spiritual things"—that is, if the servant of Christ gives his whole time and energy to the study of the Word of God so that he might better minister to the spiritual needs of his flock, if he turns from what people call secular life—"is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" Just as the ox finds its food in the work it is doing, so the Lord has appointed that His servants should be cared for by those who receive the benefit of the ministry that they give. "If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather?" Paul asked.

“Nevertheless we have not used this power…lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.” In other words, “We prefer to forego our own rights in order that you may see that our service is an unselfish one and in order that the heathen may not say that we are in the ministry for what we can get out of it.”

Paul then asked, “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things should live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?” These words refer to the priests in Judaism, for they were sustained by tithes and offerings. In our dispensation there is no distinct priesthood and all believers are priests, yet those who give themselves completely to ministering the Word are to be sustained by the people of God. Thus we read, “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” But if a servant of Christ declares, “I choose to forego that privilege; I am able to support myself and still carry on the work of the Lord,” he is free to do it. Paul chose that path; he did not want even one person to say that a selfish motive prompted him.

The apostle said, as it were, “I preach the gospel because I am a servant and my Master sent me to preach it. He gave me a compulsion to preach; yes, I find myself in trouble if I do not preach.” To the Corinthians he wrote, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” I wonder if that word has been forgotten by many who once gave themselves to the ministry of the gospel, but today seldom mention the great truths whereby men and women are saved. Is it not a sad fact that many today who are looked on as evangelistic preachers never tell sinners that Christ died for the ungodly, never proclaim

the saving power of the Lord Jesus, never exalt the cross as the only means of redemption? What an accounting they will have to give the Lord when they face Him some day! I wish that ministers of Christ who devote themselves to what they call a social program and merely ethical preaching would be awakened through these words of the apostle: “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” Our responsibility is to make Christ known as the only Savior of sinners.

If I do this willingly, if I gladly go forward preaching the gospel for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus, by and by when I stand at the judgment seat, I will be rewarded. Never mind whether people appreciate me now; never mind whether I get any reward down here. I can wait until that day when the Lord will evaluate everything fairly. But even if I do not preach the gospel willingly, the message is still going out and God will bless the message, but I myself will lose the reward.

“A dispensation [a stewardship] of the gospel is committed unto me,” Paul said, and he felt compelled to fulfill it. What was his present reward? Did he say, “The money that I make from preaching it”? No! He said, “What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.” Paul meant, “I will not go to dying men and say, ‘Give me your money and if you do, I will preach to you,’ but I will go and preach the Word freely whether I ever receive a penny for it or not. After they become converted, the question of financial support remains between them and the Lord. It is my business to give out the message.” The apostle took a very high and noble position.

It must be a most obnoxious thing to God when those of us who profess to be ministers of the Word commercialize His truth by setting a price on our service: only so much preaching for so much money. Paul was saying, “It is my joy to preach whether supported by men or not.”

He was not concerned about what men thought of him, but he had deliberately and of his own volition made himself to be the servant of men. “Though I be free from all men,” Paul said, “yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.” What did he mean by that? Simply this: “I am the servant of Christ, but Christ has sent me to minister His Word and I seek to do so in the way that is best for reaching men in their need; and in this sense I put myself under bondage to men in order that I may make the gospel clear to all.”

Paul continued, “Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews.” When he preached to the Jews, he referred to the Old Testament and to their Jewish ceremonies and laws (you will find instance after instance in the book of Acts), based everything on the Jews’ hope of the Messiah, and showed how all prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ.

On the other hand, when speaking to the Gentiles, who were not familiar with the law of Moses, Paul put himself on their level. He talked of God as the Creator of all things, who gives us “rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Paul argued that the God who does all this cannot be an image, an idol made with man’s hands; He created the heavens and the earth. And then he showed how God sent His Son to save men who have sinned

against Him. Paul preached the gospel in terms that the Gentiles could understand.

“To them that are under the law,” Paul said, “[I became] as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law.” This is very interesting and should be a help to many who may not quite understand the Christian’s relation to the law. Here we have two classes of men. First there are those who are “under the law”; they are the Jews or, in our day, any to whom the law of God has been revealed. Second there are those who are “without law”; they are the Gentile nations, the pagan nations who have never heard the law of God. If Paul himself were still under the law, as some Christians think a believer is, he would not have said, “I became as under the law.” Paul was neither under the law, nor without law. Then where was he? He was not subject to legal ritual, nor was he lawless. Where then did he stand? Between the two, “being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ.” He said, as it were, “I am not under the law of Moses; neither am I lawless. I am under law to God since I am legitimately subject to Christ.”

Do you see the place of the believer? It is neither under law nor without law, but in legitimate subjection to Christ. And where has Christ revealed His will for me? In the four Gospels and in the Epistles. I know some will protest, “You must not mean the four Gospels! Don’t you know that they are altogether Jewish?” But they should remember that the Spirit of God has said something very serious about those who object: “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing

nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings" (1 Timothy 6:3-4). Let us be very careful that we do not teach anything that is not in accordance with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The words of our Lord are found in the four Gospels (and nowhere else except in the first part of the book of Revelation and in one or two sentences in the book of Acts) and in these the Lord shows us the manner of life Christians should live. The Lord has further revealed His will in what we call the Epistles. Through the Holy Spirit He has shown us the heavenly calling and the kind of lives that would correspond to it. We should be very careful if we say we are not under the law—which is true—lest we be found to be lawless; that is antinomianism and repugnant to God. We are to be legitimately subject to Christ.

"To the weak became I as weak," Paul added, "that I might gain the weak." He meant that in ministering the Word of God he delighted to enter into the circumstances of the people to whom he spoke. Suppose a preacher makes up a sermon in the quiet of his study, works it all out carefully—his introduction, his firstly, secondly, thirdly, and as many other numbers as he likes, and then his conclusion—and says, "There, I have a sermon on such and such a text." And then he goes to the pulpit without taking the needs of the people into consideration, and he pours out the sermon that he has made up for them in the study. That was not Paul's way; he had the needs of his audience in mind when he preached the Word.

A minister told me about a difficult position in which he found himself one time. He had been asked to preach to a certain congregation and since he always read his sermons, he looked through the barrel, selected one, and shoved it into his briefcase with his Bible. When he got on the platform, he pulled the sermon out, spread it before him, and discovered that he had brought a different sermon from the one he had intended to bring. So he had to confess, “I am very sorry, dear friends. I have made a mistake. It is autumn but I am going to give you a sermon I preached on Memorial Day and I can only hope you will get something out of it.” Is it any wonder that people get so little edification when they listen to messages as inappropriate as that?

As a true minister of Christ, Paul’s great object was to get to the hearts of men and give them the Word that they needed. “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak.” He did not try to astonish people with his eloquence; he gave them the Word to convict and help and bless and cheer and make things plain to them. In fact he said, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” This should be the object of any gospel testimony. We have been commissioned to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Striving for a Crown (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Two lines of truth that run parallel through the Word of God are salvation, which is by grace alone; and reward, which is earned by devoted service. Salvation is not a reward for anything that you or I may do, nor is Heaven a reward for a life of faithfulness here on earth. Salvation is a free gift; eternal life is a free gift; Heaven,

the home of all the redeemed, is open to everyone who puts his or her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot pay for a place in Heaven; we cannot earn it by tears, by sacrifices, by our gifts, or by anything that we can do.

Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears forever flow,

All for sin could not atone;

Thou must save and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to Thy cross I cling;

Naked, come to Thee for dress,

Helpless, look to Thee for grace.

(Augustus M. Toplady)

That must ever be the confession of each saved soul, for Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Salvation, eternal life, a place in Heaven—these are all set before us as God’s free gifts to believing sinners; but the Word of God also has a great deal to say about the importance of service and about rewards for faithfulness. “Behold, I come quickly,” said our blessed Lord, “and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12). Obviously this reward is not a place with the Lord in Heaven, but a special expression of His satisfaction with the believer because of his devoted-ness and faithfulness in life. The importance of this is brought out in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

In this passage the apostle Paul had the race course in mind. There is a great deal in the Bible about athletics. One can scarcely help coming to the conclusion that Saul of Tarsus was a thoroughly red-blooded man, interested in games, sports, and everything else that would challenge a normal decent young fellow, such as he evidently was even before he was converted. What Saul saw in the games made a deep impression on his mind, and the Holy Spirit used all this in later years to give us some very striking and remarkable illustrations, one of which we have here: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?”

What is the prize at the end of the race? For a young Greek it would not be citizenship, for it was a law among the Greeks that no one could contend in the games unless he could first prove that he was of pure Greek parentage; that had to be settled before he became a contestant. As the people watched the races they knew that the runners were already Greeks by birth. For what then were those Greek citizens running a race? To obtain honor, to obtain glory, to obtain a prize.

And so the apostle pictured those who are saved as running a race. We are already heavenly citizens. Of every Christian it is written, “Our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change [transform] our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20-21). Our citizenship is settled if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not born Christians, but we are born-again Christians. The Lord Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the

Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:6-7).

It is a great moment in a soul's history when he awakes to the realization that by nature and practice he is an alien, "alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works" (Colossians 1:21); that he does not belong to the family of God; that before he can belong to the family of God a change must take place, a change that he himself cannot effect, but which God brings about by His sovereign power. "Of his own will," said James, "begat he us with the word of truth" (James 1:18). Notice, it is through the Word that we are begotten of God. Peter said:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word [not the whole Bible as such] which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Peter 1:23-25).

Believing the gospel, we were born into the family of God, and now, as already in the family of God, we are running a race. We are not running in order to get to Heaven, for as far as that is concerned, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Romans 9:16); we are running a race for a reward for Christian service, for Christian responsibility. If we run our race well, there is a reward at the end, but if we fail in the race, we fail in the reward. We do not, however, fail to reach Heaven because our work is not all it ought to be or all we would

like it to be. “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15), provided he is a Christian.

So the apostle said, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.” If I am going to run in order to obtain a prize, I must do it in obedience to the Word of God. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:5, “If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” Another translation reads, “If a man contend in the games, yet is he not crowned if he hath not observed the rules.” God has given us instruction in the Word concerning how we are to serve, how we are to run, and what we are to do, and we will be rewarded if we live in accordance with the Book.

An incident struck me forcibly some years ago when I was working among the Indians in New Mexico during the time of the Olympic games in Stockholm, Sweden. One Saturday night I went to the store of the trader, who was my interpreter and a very intelligent Christian Indian. Entering the store, I found him standing on a chair with perhaps forty or fifty Indians crowded around him. He was reading from a newspaper and interpreting it for his audience. I stepped up behind him and as I looked over his shoulder, I saw that he had a metropolitan newspaper containing an account of the games in Stockholm. The article recounted the triumphs of the well-known Indian athlete, James Thorpe, whom many of these Indians knew well. How proud they were to think that he had gone to the Olympics, contended with numerous athletes, and carried away many of the prizes. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds when the interpreter translated the words of the king of Sweden

as he took Thorpe by the hand and said, “You, sir, are the greatest amateur athlete in the world today.”

A few weeks later I went into the store again. Once more the trader was reading from a newspaper, but this time the atmosphere was tense. I could feel that something was wrong. The Indians were scowling and grunting and I wondered what it was all about, so I stepped behind the interpreter again, looked over his shoulder, and read that a certain man, being indignant that one athlete should have carried off so many prizes, made an investigation of Thorpe’s past life and found that some years before the Stockholm games Jim had received five dollars a week during the summer months for playing on a village baseball team. The man sent the evidence to the king of Sweden and proved to him that Thorpe had no right to participate in the games at all because they were entirely for amateurs. He had taken money for playing ball and that put him out of the amateur class. The king wrote to Thorpe and asked him to send back all the certificates and medals. Jimmie’s heart was nearly broken, but he sent them all back with his apologies and wrote to the king, “I hope your majesty will not think too hard of me. I did not know that taking five dollars a week for playing on the village baseball team made me a professional. I never meant to deceive.”

The sequel to the story is that the athlete who came in second in the contests was given the awards, but he sent them all back to Jim. “I won’t keep them,” the runner-up said. “You did better than I, and you deserve them.” James Thorpe did his work well, but he had not observed the rules and he lost out accordingly.

I am afraid there are many who do a great deal of what we call Christian work, who work early and late and hard and often, yet will fail to be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ because instead of going by the Word of God they have simply been following their own ideas and inclinations. “So run, that ye may obtain,” warned Paul. How important it is, fellow Christians, that we study the Bible and learn what God’s mind is, and then work accordingly!

Now notice the importance of self-control: “Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” One cannot help but admire splendid young athletes as they look forward to a contest. How self-denying they can be as they train! They tell themselves, “I must enter the field weighing just so many pounds, for I must be at my very best.” Friends say, “Come on, let’s go out and indulge in this and that.” But the athletes who intend to succeed reply, “I cannot do that. I must be at my best when I go into the arena. I cannot, I dare not, dissipate.” As Paul said, “They do it to obtain a corruptible crown.” In the case of the Corinthians it was a wreath of laurel, which would fade away in a few hours. Yet how much young men were willing to endure to win that crown, to have it placed on their brow by the judge among the plaudits of the people!

“They do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.” Should we who have an incorruptible crown in view be less consistent, less self-denying, less self-controlled than they? For us there stands in the distance the blessed Lord Himself waiting to place on our brow that incorruptible crown, yet many of us are in danger of losing it because we are so self-indulgent, so careless, so carnal, and so worldly-minded. Let us take a

lesson from the athletes and be willing to give up present pleasures for future glory.

The crown, you see, is the symbol of reward. It is presented in different ways in Scripture. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19 the apostle said to his own converts, “What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” What is the “crown of rejoicing”? It is the soul-winner’s crown. Oh, to get home to Heaven and, standing at the judgment seat of Christ, see there a great throng whom one has had the privilege of leading to Christ! What a crown, what a reward that will be! Think what it will mean for the apostle Paul when, surrounded by all his converts, he comes before the Lord and says, “Behold I and the children whom Thou hast given me.” Are you striving for a crown of rejoicing? It is your privilege if you know Christ.

In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 the apostle said, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” The gift of righteousness is ours by faith. Every believer has been made the righteousness of God in Christ, but the “crown of righteousness” is the reward given to those who behave themselves in the light of the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you love His appearing? How do you show it? You can show it by ordering your behavior now in view of His close return. “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3).

In James and Revelation we find a third term: the "crown of life." In Revelation 2:10 we read, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." And in James 1:12 we read, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Eternal life is ours by faith. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). But the "crown of life" is earned by suffering patiently, even unto death if need be, rather than to deny the name of Jesus. The crown of life is earned by enduring trials and temptations and taking it all as from the hand of God Himself.

In 1 Peter 5:1-4 we read of still another crown:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed [not fleece!] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

I like that: a "crown of glory"! Every believer will be glorified— "Whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:30)—but the crown of glory is the reward for feeding the sheep and the lambs. The earliest Chinese translations of Scripture used different terms for some of the idioms in the original. A translation of 1 Peter 5:4 from Chinese to English would read, "When

the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive a bright hat that will never wear out." The reward, however it is termed, is to be given by the blessed Lord Himself. We must not allow the things of time and sense to so absorb us that we will lose out in that day. Rather may we gladly say:

Take the world, but give me Jesus,

All its joys are but a name;

But His love abideth ever,

Through eternal years the same.

(Fanny J. Crosby)

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

This was Paul's determination: "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." Some people imagine that Paul was not quite sure that he would get to Heaven, that he feared that something might happen that would turn him aside. But when he wrote these words, he was thinking of the reward at the end and he was not afraid of losing this, for he was determined to go through life with God. He said that he was not uncertain.

Paul was not engaged in a sham battle: "So fight I," he said, "not as one that beateth the air: But [and how important this is!] I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have

preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." What did he mean? Did he have a haunting fear that he might backslide and be lost after all? No.

Keep in mind what he was speaking of here. He was speaking of reward for service, and he was saying, "I want to serve so that I can have the Lord's approval in that day. I must not be careless or self-indulgent. I must not let my passions master me, but I must master them and keep my body under control. My body is not to be the lord of me; I am to be the lord of my body. Sustained by divine grace I will keep every physical appetite in its place so that I will not bring dishonor on the name of the Lord and become a castaway."

What did Paul mean by "a castaway"? The word translated "castaway" is adokimos, which means "disapproved." The apostle wanted to avoid being disapproved. He did not want the Lord to have to say to him some day, "Paul, I had a crown for you; I was counting on you, and for a while you ran well. What hindered you? You became self-indulgent and careless and you broke down and brought dishonor on My name. I cannot crown you, Paul. You will have to stand to one side and let someone else have the crown." God grant that you and I may not have to endure the disappointment of being set to one side when the Lord is giving out the crowns!

Have you not known of those who ran well for years and then little by little began to let down? They were not as prayerful as they used to be; they did not give as much time to the careful study of the Word as they did in the early days; they gave freer rein to the natural appetites; they thought more of their own pleasure and of taking

their ease. Then one day the whole Christian community in which they were involved was startled to hear of a terrible failure. With hearts breaking and tears streaming from their eyes, the backsliders confessed their sin. They had judged it all and turned from it, yet people never trusted them again as they had before, and they were never able to go on with their ministry. No matter how freely and fully God had forgiven them, never again could they be what once they were.

So to those who preach and to everyone else who attempts to help others in spiritual matters, the word is, Be careful of yourselves. “Take heed unto thyself,” said the apostle writing to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:16). Paul meant, “Keep your physical appetites in subjection; keep your body in its place. If you do not allow any appetite to master you, you will be able to serve to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you become careless, He may have to put you to one side, and He who once used you will not be able to use you in the future the way He did in the past.”

The word translated “castaway” here is used elsewhere in Scripture to denote complete disapproval. You may be a church member taking part in so-called Christian work, but see to it that there is a real work of grace in your own soul. Otherwise the day may come when you will be utterly disapproved and you will find yourself outside the number of those who enter into the Father’s house—not because you lost your salvation, but because your life has proved that you were never truly born of God.

Chapter Ten The Cup Of Blessing

Old Testament Types (1 Corinthians 10:1-14)

If I were to choose one verse out of these fourteen as a text, it would be verse 11: “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [types]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

I learn a number of things, two in particular, from this verse. In the first place I learn that all that is recorded concerning the nation of Israel in the Old Testament is sober, reliable history. The Word says, “All these things happened.” This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit and therefore I believe it without a question. I believe the Genesis account of the origin of mankind because the account was given by the only One who was there, and that is God Himself. The history of mankind as further unfolded in that early book is all true. “All these things happened.” After the calling of Abraham and the separation of the Hebrew people from the Gentile world, the story of God’s dealings with these people, as related in the rest of the books of the Old Testament, is true history and there is nothing imaginary or legendary about it. “These things happened.”

The second thing I learn from this verse is that in the preparation of the Holy Scriptures, the Spirit of God guided and directed the human writers to eliminate anything extraneous, anything not particularly helpful to us, and therefore the incidents recorded are there for a definite purpose. These incidents took place literally just as we are told they did, but their significance was

something beyond their place in history. The nation of Israel is a typical (that is, pre-figurative) nation; the redemption of Israel is atypical redemption; the sacrifices offered under the law were typical sacrifices; the sanctuary of the Hebrew people was a typical sanctuary. And so we may profitably read all of the Old Testament with the light of the New Testament shining on it, revealing marvelous pictures, wonderful types, of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the people of God today. There are both encouragements and warnings for us in the history of Israel.

Before writing verse 11, the apostle referred to some of the Old Testament narratives. He reminded us how a great multitude went out of Egypt and headed for the land of Canaan, the land of promise, but many of them failed to reach that land because of unbelief, which led to other kinds of sin. “Moreover, brethren,” Paul began, “I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” As that great company of hundreds of thousands of Israelites left the land of Egypt, it would have been impossible for anyone to have drawn any distinction between those who were genuinely faithful and those who because of sin and unbelief would have to be destroyed.

And so the warning comes home to us: It is one thing to profess to be a Christian—to participate in the ordinances of Christianity, to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, to take

part in the Lord's supper, to receive the consecrated elements that speak of the precious body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who was given up to death for us, to associate outwardly with the people of God. It is quite another thing to prove oneself to be genuine by living for God and by bearing a faithful testimony right on to the end. Of course where there is a real work of the Spirit of God in a man's soul, that work will be continuous, but alas there are many of whom it can be said, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Revelation 3:1).

A number of years ago I was invited by a very godly minister to address his congregation on a certain Lord's day. Never having preached from his pulpit before, and not knowing what kind of congregation I might be expected to face and therefore being rather at sea as to the nature of the message that would be most suitable, I said to him, "Doctor, when I come to speak to your people, what kind of an audience will I address? Will they be mainly your own members, all Christian people, or many strangers and possibly unconverted people?" I can still see the look of sadness that came over his face and the tears that came into his eyes as he answered, "Well, my brother, I think that most of them will be our own people; we do not get a great many strangers in our place. But I am afraid that very few of our own members are Christians. After having been with them for a number of years, I greatly regret to say that I fear that the majority of them are like the foolish virgins. They have no oil in their lamps and therefore I hope you will come to us with a clear, definite gospel message. I shall be praying that God may use it for the awakening and the salvation of many of our people."

What a solemn thing to have to make a confession like that! Yet is that not the case in many places today? We take too much for granted when we suppose that membership in a Christian church and participation in Christian ordinances and outward fellowship mean that one is really a child of God. Often there has been no second birth; there is no personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Israel there were two groups: those who had true faith in God and those who simply had an outward relationship to the people of the covenant. Those who had that outward relationship went with the rest through the Red Sea—and the apostle likened that to baptism. They were all sheltered by the pillar of cloud and fire—and Paul compared that to the gift of the Holy Spirit. They all ate of the manna that came from Heaven—and that speaks of participation in Christian fellowship at the Lord's table. They all drank the water that came from the smitten rock—and that was a picture of those who drink today of the water of life that flows from the side of the wounded Christ.

Some of the Israelites who drank from the rock had no true faith in God; there was no reality in their hearts, no genuine work in their souls. Those who were real "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." In other words, it was not enough to drink of the water that came from the smitten rock. Those whose relationship was not just outward drank of the stream that flowed from the "Rock that followed them," or as another translation reads, the "attendant Rock"—and "that Rock was Christ."

It was Christ who led the people of Israel across the desert into the land of Canaan as the Angel of the Lord. Jehovah said, “My name is in him” (Exodus 23:21). And in every dispensation all who have been saved have been saved through the Lord Jesus Christ. All who have been genuine in their profession at any time and at any age have been saved because they have put their trust in the revelation that God gave concerning the Seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent.

Some of that company of Israelites were genuine believers, but with the others “God was not well pleased” and these were overthrown. Why? Because of sin. And so the warning comes home to us now to learn from God’s dealings with this typical people the importance of being right with God today. Turn from everything unholy; judge every tendency to impurity and uncleanness in yourself so that God may be glorified in you.

There are five more warnings in 10:6-10. Introducing the first of the five, Paul wrote, “Now these things were our examples [types], to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” Christ is the portion that satisfies the heart. The only way that one can be delivered from “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4) is by finding satisfaction in the Savior.

O Christ, in Thee my soul hath found,

And found in Thee alone,

The peace, the joy I sought so long,

The bliss till now unknown.

I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,

But, ah! the waters failed;

E’en as I stooped to drink they fled,

And mocked me as I wailed.

The pleasures lost I sadly mourned,

But never wept for Thee,

Till grace my sightless eyes received,

Thy loveliness to see.

Now none but Christ can satisfy,

None other name for me;

There’s love and life and lasting joy,

Lord Jesus, found in Thee.

When people claim to be Christians, when they openly declare that they belong to the church of the living God yet give every evidence that their hearts are still in the world, one may doubt their professions of faith. When people give no evidence of separation from the world, when they do not break away from the things that dishonor our blessed God, when they are still taken up with “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16), one may stand in grave doubt as to whether they have ever really drunk of that spiritual “attendant Rock,” which is Christ.

In his second warning Paul cautioned us against putting anything in the place of God. “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” The apostle was referring to the making of the golden calf that the Israelites set up in the wilderness when Moses was up on the mountain. Their leader who had brought them

out of Egypt was no longer visible, just as our blessed Lord is at the Father's right hand in Heaven and our eyes do not now see Him. Therefore the people turned to Aaron and said in effect, "We cannot see this man Moses; he has disappeared from us. Make us gods that will go before us, tangible gods that we can see and worship." And so Aaron told them to bring all their gold ornaments, and he would make a god out of them. And the people brought their earrings and he melted down all the gold, poured the metal into a mold, made a calf, set it on a pedestal, and even gave it Jehovah's name; he said, "To morrow is a feast to the Lord" (Exodus 32:5). Then the people danced around the golden calf and sat down to eat a sacramental meal in the presence of the image.

Because of this the judgment of God burned fiercely against them, and you remember the dreadful results. Many of them died under the hand of God and those who were spared had to drink the golden calf! Moses took the calf, ground it into fine dust, and poured the dust into the water that the people drank. That was the "gold cure" to show them the folly of worshiping any other than the one true and living God. The lesson for us is that if we dare to put anything else in the place of God, no matter how precious it may seem to be, the time will come when we will rue it.

Yet the golden calf is still worshiped. Many worship money, wealth, or pleasure though they claim to be followers of the lowly Savior, "who though in the form of God, thought equality with God not something to be grasped after: but emptied Himself, and became obedient unto death, and such a death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:6-8, literal rendering). How can

I be a consistent follower of Him if I put self or anything that this poor heart of mine can crave on earth in the place of the true and living God? “Little children,” warned John, “keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

The third solemn warning is against every kind of uncleanness: “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.” We are living in a day when uncleanness is everywhere. Our modern novels are reeking with it, our newspaper stands are filled with vile pornographic literature that comes from Hell, and men are enriching themselves by poisoning the minds of our young people. Many of the pictures they see and the songs they hear are filled with suggestions of impurity. How sternly the Christian church needs to set its face against everything of this kind!

We should not compromise. Pictures, books, and songs all have their effect on the flesh, and before people know it, they are drifting off into unholy things because of the constant incitement in the music and literature of the day. Let us give everything like that a wide berth. As Paul wrote in another Epistle, “Ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh” (Galatians 5:13).

I am reminded that 1 Corinthians 10:8 is a verse that unbelievers and modernists like to point to as an evidence that the Bible cannot be fully inspired. We read there that there “fell in one day three and twenty thousand,” and in Numbers 25:9 we read that “twenty and four thousand” were destroyed because of the sin of fornication. Therefore the objectors say, “There is a contradiction in your Bible; in one place it says twenty-

four thousand were destroyed and in another place it says twenty-three thousand." But it is not difficult to harmonize the two accounts. In Numbers the complete account is given: there were twenty-four thousand destroyed during that particular period in which God was dealing with His people. In 1 Corinthians the Holy Spirit was stressing the fact that twenty-three thousand died on the very first day of that period of judgment; the other thousand of course died later on. Paul was inspired to emphasize how indignant God was when His people fell into the sin of uncleanness; He was so indignant that in one day He destroyed twenty-three thousand.

Notice the fourth warning: "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents." How did they tempt Him? They limited the Holy One of Israel when they said, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" (Psalm 78:19). We too limit God if we say, "Can God take care of me? I am in very difficult circumstances. Is God able to see me through?" When we doubt, we limit the God of all grace who gave His Son for us. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32) Faith never tempts God; it believes God and goes forward in obedience to His Word.

The fifth warning reads, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." The reference here is to the destruction of Koran, Dathan, and Abiram in the wilderness when they murmured against God, against His servant Moses, and against the high priest Aaron. Those rebels said to Moses and Aaron, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing

all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (Numbers 16:3) They were practically saying, "We do not need a mediator; we do not need a high priest. We are good enough for God as we are." They found fault with God's provision for them and destruction was the result.

Let us heed the warning and be grateful to God for the provision He has given through His Word and the Holy Spirit for the salvation of our souls and the building up of our lives in Christ. Let us never allow ourselves to become self-confident and imagine that we can get along without the daily ministry of our risen and glorified Lord, who is our High Priest in Heaven.

In view of all these types and the accompanying admonitions, let us walk carefully and "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Let him test his foundation, make sure that he is taking the Word of God as his guide, and be certain that he is resting on the testimony that God has given so that when the hour of trial comes, he will be confident that there is abundant grace to sustain him.

Having warned the Corinthians, Paul offered these words of assurance: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." God did this for Israel in Old Testament times. As we read the story of His dealings with them, we find instance after instance of His wonderful intervention when they were at their

wits' end. The God who sustained His people in the wilderness, fed them on manna from Heaven, quenched their thirst with water from the rock, and drove out their enemies from the land of Canaan is living still. In the measure in which we learn to depend on Him, to count on Him, we too will find deliverance in the hour of difficulty and trial.

The passage closes with another reference to idolatry. Solemnly emphasizing his earlier warning, Paul wrote, "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." This and all the other admonitions are serious, so let us take them to heart, remembering that it is one thing to have made a profession, but it is another thing to prove that profession to be real by backing it up with a godly life.

Undivided Devotion (1 Corinthians 10:15-30)

This passage contains very important and solemn teaching regarding the celebration of the Lord's supper, which has been maintained in the Christian church throughout the centuries. Earlier Paul warned us against compromising with the world and here Paul continued that warning, particularly in reference to idolatry and the Lord's supper.

In civilized lands we do not come in contact with idolatry in the sense that the apostle primarily referred to here. We are more concerned about the pleasure-seeking, godless world around us. Second Corinthians 6:17 seems more relevant to us today. There we read the challenge of the Spirit of God: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." If we are wise, however, we will apply the principles of both passages to the conditions under which we live.

Idolatry is still a very live issue in pagan lands. There it is necessary to separate converts from absolutely everything of a heathenish or idolatrous character, because if there is any compromise, any fellowship with pagan practices, these things tend to drag the converts back to the old way of life.

Since as Christians we are associated with the table of the Lord, let us see to it that we “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11). Paul asked the Corinthians, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” With these questions the apostle showed us that the Lord’s supper, as we commonly call it, proclaims the foundation principles of Christianity. It is a rallying point, as it were, where God’s people come together to confess openly their adherence to great fundamental truths.

Notice the order here: the cup is mentioned first, the bread second. When we participate in communion, we follow the order instituted by our Lord: we thank for the bread first, and then for the cup. But the apostle mentioned the cup first because it represents the precious poured-out blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and there can be no relationship with God for those who by nature and practice are lost sinners, until they have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. Every time the communion feast is celebrated, the great fact is emphasized that it is the blood, the blood of Jesus alone, that cleanses from sin and gives access to the presence of God. That is the reason for Satan’s antagonism against this ordinance.

The ordinance of the Lord's supper has suffered in two ways. Some people have added to it many unscriptural, superstitious practices, making it such a strange and weird mystery that many Christians are almost afraid to approach the table of the Lord. On the other hand there are those who, pretending to have a deeper spirituality and a greater Bible knowledge than ordinary Christians, have put the Lord's supper to one side; they claim that we have no need of ordinances of any kind in the Christian era since it is a spiritual dispensation.

We need to remember that baptism and the Lord's supper were given not so much to be helpful to Christians—though both ordinances are helpful to them—as to be a testimony to the world outside and to form as it were a line of demarcation between the church and the world. We have already seen how baptism does that: I trust the Lord Jesus Christ in my heart, I accept Him as my Savior, and by my baptism I say to the world, "I have identified myself with the Christ that you have rejected; henceforward I am dead to the world."

Dead to the world and all its toys,

Its idle pomp and fading joys;

Jesus, my glory be!

If baptism does not mean that to me, it is really nothing more than a mere empty form; but if I see that by my baptism I am confessing my identification with the rejected Christ, it becomes a sweet and precious ordinance and is a testimony to the world outside.

The Lord's supper is also a testimony. While baptism speaks of my death with Christ, the Lord's supper speaks of Christ's death for me and the fact that it is

only because of Christ's death that I can approach God and have fellowship with Him. Paul told the Corinthians, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (11:26). The word translated "shew" here is exactly the same word that is translated "preach" in many places in the book of Acts and the Epistles. So the verse could be rendered, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do preach [or proclaim] the Lord's death till he come." By participation in the Lord's supper today we are preaching to the world around us the fact that Christ has died and that His blood alone can cleanse from sin. That is why Paul put the emphasis on the cup.

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" Communion is the expression of fellowship that is based on the blood of Christ. Therefore you can readily see that no one ought ever to participate who does not put his or her trust in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. I cannot understand how anyone who denies the atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus would even desire to take part in the celebration of the Lord's supper, and yet I am told that in places where men ridicule the thought of salvation by His blood, the ordinance of the Lord's supper is still observed in a formal way. It seems to me that such a hypocritical observance is an insult to God, an insult to the blessed Savior whose death is being commemorated. Christ died for sinners; He poured out His blood to redeem us to God and therefore from time to time we come together to remember Him as we drink the cup.

The bread used in the Lord's supper has, if I may say so, a double significance. It speaks of the literal body of our

Savior, which was offered for us on the cross, and in another and wider sense it speaks of the mystical body of Christ to which all believers belong. “The bread which we break, is it not,” Paul asked, “the communion of the body of Christ?” The breaking of bread expresses our fellowship with the church as the body of Christ.

Using the bread as a symbol of His literal body, Christ said, “This is my body which is given for you” (Luke 22:19). That precious body came into being in a unique way. It was the direct creation of the Holy Spirit of God in the womb of the virgin Mary. When Christ came into the world, He said, “A body hast thou prepared me” (Hebrews 10:5). It was a human body, a body in every respect like ours except that it had no sinful tendencies whatever. Our Lord Jesus Christ was from the moment of His birth, as He had been in all eternity, the Holy One of God.

In that prepared body Christ went to the cross and died for our sins; in fact He assumed that body so that He might die. Deity as such cannot die. God, no matter how much He loved us, could not die, but God becoming man, God taking humanity into relationship with deity could die, as Christ died on Calvary’s tree. Every time we participate in the Lord’s supper we are again announcing the fact that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). The communion service preaches—preaches loudly—salvation only through that vicarious sacrifice offered on the cross.

The wider meaning attached to the use of the bread in the communion service is evident in these words, which the Spirit of God inspired Paul to write: “We being many

are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." Of course "we" means "Christians." The apostle was speaking of believers, not mankind in general. Let us never make the mistake of thinking that all men are included in this "we," or that all believers in all ages have been included in the body of Christ. If I read my Bible correctly, the church came into existence on the day of Pentecost. There were believers in the world before that. One hundred twenty of them were gathered together that very morning, but they were one hundred twenty individuals, separate units. Then the Holy Spirit came according to the Savior's promise and in a moment baptized those one hundred twenty individuals and made of them one body of which the risen and glorified Christ is the Head. That body exists in the world today and includes all who through the years since Pentecost have put their trust in Christ.

The body as presented in Ephesians takes in all saints, living and dead, from Pentecost to the rapture. The body as presented in 1 Corinthians takes in all saints on the earth at a given moment of time. They are all members of the body of Christ. The body of Christ on earth is in the place of responsibility; the body of Christ in Heaven of course is in the place where praise and thanksgiving alone prevail. In Heaven there is no longer the need of prayer because saints have passed beyond the bounds of responsibility. But while we are in the world, how blessed it is to realize that when we partake of the Lord's supper, we are recognizing our unity with every fellow believer on the face of the earth!

There is only one Lord's table in all the world. Wherever bread and the fruit of the vine are placed on a table in commemoration of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ,

that is the Lord's table, and Christians are responsible to behave themselves accordingly. The apostle emphasized that when he pointed out that there are only two other tables: the table of Judaism, which is the fellowship of Israel; and the table of demons, which is the fellowship of idols. A person can only feast at one of these three tables.

Paul had the table of Judaism in mind when he wrote, "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" He was referring to the peace offering. All in Israel were entitled to participate when the peace offering was offered; that identified them as a special communion.

The fellowship of Gentiles, on the other hand, was at the table of demons. The apostle wrote, "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils." Idolatrous feasts and heathen festivals were all expressions of fellowship, just as the Lord's table is an expression of fellowship and the peace offering in Israel was an expression of fellowship. But those idolatrous festivals expressed fellowship with demons, whether the participants realized it or not.

Some people say that we make a great mistake in sending missionaries to heathen lands. As previously noted, they contend that instead of drawing a line of demarcation between heathenism and Christianity, we should get all the good we can out of pagan religions and then share what we have with the heathen. These critics may not realize it, but behind the heathen idols and images are demon powers controlling the hearts

and minds of the worshipers. Christians are to be separated from everything like that.

Paul said, “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils.” And let me say, you cannot be living for the world, the flesh, and the devil and be a partaker at the table of the Lord. You can sit in a church pew and when the bread and wine are passed you can eat and drink of them, but you have not partaken of the fellowship, for that you cannot do. You can in an outward sense take your place with Christians, but there is no real fellowship if you still love the world and its ways. It is the heart that is occupied with Christ that enjoys the sweetness and preciousness of fellowship at His table. To attempt to partake of both tables is to “provoke the Lord to jealousy.”

Consider the case of a young man who is engaged to a beautiful young woman who does not yet know that his ways are very careless. By and by she learns that although he comes to visit her on some nights and treats her with kindness and affection, on other nights he is out with other women and is just as affectionate with them, and then he comes back to her as though nothing has happened. After she makes this discovery, do you think she will still accept him on the same good terms? No. She will say, “You cannot go out with others if you expect me to be devoted to you alone.” Likewise our Lord has called us to proclaim our wholehearted devotion to Himself and thus our separation from the world that has rejected our Savior. When we look at the Lord’s supper from this standpoint, how important its frequent celebration becomes!

The early Christians used to call communion “the sacrament.” Where did that term come from? The word translated “sacrament” referred to the oath of allegiance that emperors required soldiers of the Roman legions to take. By using the term, the Christians were saying, “In a similar way, every time we gather at the table of the Lord we are renewing our allegiance to our Lord; we are confessing our devotion to Him who in grace gave Himself for us.” That is what makes this ordinance so precious in His eyes.

The believer, remembering that he is always associated with the Lord’s table and that his behavior is to be in accordance with that communion, should be careful about his participation in things that worldlings think nothing of. “All things are lawful for me,” Paul wrote, “but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” In other words, although the believer is not bound by rules and regulations, although he is at liberty to do whatever he believes is right, he should stop and ask himself some questions about any activity: Will it edify? Will it bless? Will it help me to love Christ more? Is there a possibility that it may cause anyone else to stumble? If an activity will not edify, he should turn away from it, for he is not bound to do it. He is here to seek the blessing of others, not to do his own will.

So the apostle, writing to the Corinthians of his day, said, as it were, “When you go to the market, purchase whatever meat you want and take it home and eat it. If you are invited to a meal, feel perfectly free to accept the invitation and eat what is placed before you. But if when you go to the market and are about to purchase your meat, the butcher says, ‘This has been dedicated to

idols,' you should refuse it. If you go out to dinner and your host says, 'We are eating this meat today in recognition of such and such a god,' you must say, 'I cannot eat this meat with you because I am a partaker at the table of the Lord.'"

We are not to make objections unnecessarily, but we are to be very careful of the consciences of other people. For instance Paul did not want the butcher in Corinth to be able to say, "I had some meat dedicated to Apollo and I sold it to that Christian, so he evidently recognizes that there are other gods." Paul did not want a host to be able to say, "We used to think that Christian was very narrow. We used to think he recognized only Christ as God, but he took part in the recognition of our god. He has so much more liberty than we thought." The apostle said in effect, "Flee all that kind of liberty; be out-and-out for Christ; do not give anyone the wrong impression."

Paul continued, "If I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?" In other words, although a Christian may feel perfectly free to partake of something, he should not allow himself to partake of it if doing so would mislead those who are weak in the faith. He should use his liberty responsibly "for conscience sake."

The conscience of a young person may be more active than some of us older folks think. Often we get in the habit of speaking disparagingly of the young and forget to give them time to grow in grace. We should not expect too much of new believers. We had to grow; we had to learn little by little what a poor wretched thing this world is. We had to learn how Christ could more

than make up for everything else, and they have to learn it too. We should give them credit for being just as honest as we were when they say they want to live for God.

Young people come to me and say, “What do you think of thus and so?” It is generally some kind of amusement. They ask, “Do you think that it is all right for a Christian?” And I always say, “My dear young brother, or my dear young sister, don’t you think that you are turning that around? Instead of asking, ‘Is there any harm in it?’ you should ask, ‘Is there any profit in it? Will it really do me good? Would it be a blessing to me physically, spiritually, and in other ways? Will it help me to be a better testimony for Christ?’ If it will help you, do not be afraid of it. But beware if your conscience says, ‘It would not be profitable and it would not be a good testimony to others. It may mislead the weak and it will not lead you toward a deeper knowledge of Christ.’ In such a case you should decide, on the basis of the principle that the apostle laid down in 1 Corinthians 10, to avoid the amusement. The guiding principle is to let Christ be the one supreme object of the devotion of your heart.”

Consistent Living (1 Corinthians 10:31-33)

The words of this passage form a fitting conclusion to the previous portion in which Paul emphasized the behavior that should characterize those who are linked with the table of the Lord. A table is an expression of fellowship; there is no place where we enjoy one another’s companionship so much as there. As we sit down to partake of the good things provided, there is a

feast of reason and a flow of soul, and we find ourselves enjoying fellowship together.

As we have seen, in the spiritual sense there are three tables, representing three fellowships in this world. First, there is the table of the Lord, and that represents Christian fellowship. The loaf and the cup on that table speak of the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus. All who have been redeemed to God by the blood of our Savior are members of one body and so partake together of that one communion feast.

Second, there is the table of demons, as the apostle solemnly designated it. He was referring to heathen festivals, the kind of feasts that were held in his day and are still being held in pagan lands today. Devotees of idolatry gather together for fellowship in their mysterious and unspeakably evil rites and ceremonies. Behind all this is the power of Satan. “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice,” Paul said, “they sacrifice to devils, and not to God” (10:20).

Third, there is what might be called the table of Israel. “Are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” Paul asked (10:18). That used to be the table of the Lord, but when the Lord Jesus was rejected, those Jewish forms and ceremonies became void and empty. Yet today we recognize that there is that fellowship in the world, a fellowship which is neither Christian on the one hand nor pagan on the other—the fellowship of the house of Israel.

Now verses 31-33 show us that as Christians we are to be aware of the different fellowships and seek to be a blessing to everyone in each of those circles. First, however, we have our individual responsibility to order

our own lives for the glory of God. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do,” Paul said, “do all to the glory of God.” How far-reaching is this commandment! I wonder whether we always keep it in mind as we should. I am quite certain that many of us would live very different lives if we always remembered it.

That admonition takes in my entire life. A great many people try to live their lives in sealed compartments, as it were—one compartment for the church, another for the family, another for business, and another for pleasure and recreation—and the same man may seem to be an altogether different person in each one. When he comes to church he is the essence of sanctimoniousness, for he has a long face and reverent mien as he sits in his pew. We might think that an unholy thought never passed through his mind. His eyes are either uplifted to Heaven or closed as if in rapt meditation. But when that same man goes out into the business world, his eyes are never closed and certainly never lifted heavenward. He looks about him furtively in a most anxious way and is always interested in how he may make a dollar—honestly or dishonestly. In fact he sometimes does not make the dollars at all; he simply gets them.

There is a great deal of difference between making money and getting money. We make money when we give a legitimate return for it; we get money without giving a legitimate return for it. In their efforts to get money, even professing Christians often engage in nefarious schemes that would not stand the test of the Word of God or even a close application of the law of the land. When they are questioned they answer, “Well, you

know what the Bible says: 'Not slothful in business.'" That Scriptural saying (Romans 12:11) has made quite an impression on many minds.

When the same man goes home, he is another altogether different person. In business he is so affable, at church so reverent and solemn, but in his home he is sometimes anything but affable and solemn. There, where he feels he is best known, he is a boor; he shows a miserably bad temper and makes everyone around him uncomfortable. You may have heard the story of the wife who said of her husband who was a preacher, "When I see him in the pulpit, I think he never ought to come out of it, and when I see his behavior at home, I think he never ought to go into it." There are many people like that; they live one way at home and an altogether different way outside. They are like the man John Bunyan spoke of as a "devil at home and an angel abroad."

It is amazing to see how the compartmentalized person who looks so serious on a Sunday morning acts during his leisure time. On a weeknight he may make his way into some unholy place of amusement. I wonder how people can attempt to combine the two, how they can show any respect whatever for the things of God if they indulge in the vile, wicked pleasures that so many are running after today.

We are not to live our lives in these air-tight compartments; we are to do everything "to the glory of God." If we gather with the people of God in church services, we should do it so that He may be glorified; if we go out to take our place in the business world, we should do it so that we may bring glory to His name. A straightforward, upright, godly businessman may be a

far better testimony for God than a preacher. Men expect the preacher to unfold the Word of God, but they are pleasantly surprised when they see a businessman living out the Word of God. Such a testimony appeals to them and proves to them that what the preacher declares is true.

The home is the place, perhaps above every other, where a man may show what a Christian really should be, as in the presence of his wife and his children he demonstrates the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and seeks to lead those who are young in His ways.

And how can a Christian glorify God in his leisure? A Christian needs recreation; he has a body and a mind to take care of and he needs to get out in the open and give a certain amount of time to that which is not so serious. But in his recreation he will say to himself, “I am still to have this in view, that I am to live to the glory of God. Whatever I do, I must be careful that I do not allow myself to participate in anything that would not have the approval of the Lord Jesus Christ.” We can easily test our plans by asking ourselves, “If I do thus and so, would it disconcert me in the least if the Lord Jesus would suddenly appear, if He would look down on me and say, ‘What are you doing?’”

I had never been in a theater before I was converted, but seven years after my conversion I fell into a backslidden state and I said, “I am going to find out what the theater is like.” I felt like Moses when he looked this way and that way to see if anyone was watching before he killed the Egyptian. I looked to the right and to the left, but I forgot to look up, for there was One watching me from above, the blessed Lord

Jesus Himself. I paid for my ticket and went in and the miserable movie began. I had not been sitting there long when I seemed to hear a voice say, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” and I thought, Where does that come from? Oh yes, I remember. That is in the Bible. I was so stirred that I got up and ran from the place.

If you want to be the kind of Christian who grows “in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), you must order your life according to His Word. You must heed 1 Corinthians 10:31 and the similar admonition in Colossians 3:17: “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” If you call yourself a Christian, the next time you think of going to some ungodly place of worldly amusement, get down on your knees first and say, “Blessed God, in the name of the Lord Jesus I am going to the theater [or whatever other place it may be] to see some of those Hollywood stars cavorting on the screen and I pray that the movie may be for my spiritual blessing and that I may be enabled to glorify God at the theater.” If you can pray that way without biting your tongue for being a hypocrite, you may go; but if you find that you cannot pray like that, you had better give the place a wide berth. If you do not sense the Lord’s approval of an activity, you should avoid it.

Before World War I, Pastor D. H. Dolman was giving some addresses in a palace in Russia. He had been invited to come from Germany by a Russian princess who was an earnest evangelical Christian. She had gathered together many of the old Russian nobility and it was to them Pastor Dolman was speaking. At one of his meetings he was talking of the Christian’s attitude

toward the world. A grand duchess was there and she was a professed Christian. Being a strong-minded lady, she spoke up at the close of the meeting and said, “I do not at all agree with some things that Pastor Dolman has said today.”

He turned to her and said, “Your Imperial Highness, what have I said with which you disagree?”

“You said a Christian should not go to the theater, and I do not agree with you. I go to the theater, and I never go without first getting down on my knees and saying, ‘I am going to the theater today, and I want Thee to go with me and protect me from all evil,’ and He always does.”

“Your Imperial Highness, may I ask you a question? Where did you get the authority to decide what you were going to do and then ask the Lord to go with you? Why do you not wait until the Lord says to you, ‘Grand Duchess, I am going to the theater tonight and I want you to come with Me’? Then you could follow Him to the theater.”

She threw up her hands and said, “Pastor Dolman has spoiled the theater for me, for if I wait for the Lord to bid me go, that time will never come!”

That is true of a great many other worldly places. Give the Lord the opportunity to guide you and He will lead your steps in the right way. You may say, “Oh well, whose business is it how I behave?” That is something like the question Cain asked: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” If you profess to be a Christian, there are a great many eyes fixed on you. People are watching you to see what a Christian should be and they are judging your Master by your life. If your life is worldly, mean, and ungodly, they decide that your Master is not the

blessed, glorious, holy Christ that your lips tell them He is.

Reminding us that there are three classes of people looking on, the apostle said, “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.” Paul did not mean that we are not to offend anyone, for it is impossible to keep from offending somebody. For instance, if I preach the Lord Jesus Christ, I offend my unbelieving neighbor. If I try to live for God, I offend people who do not want to live for God. If I stand against the liquor traffic, I offend all those who are engaged in that abominable business and are interested in it from the standpoint of revenue. It is impossible for a Christian to live as he should without offending somebody.

The English word “offence” had an altogether different meaning in King James’ day. In more modern terms, Paul was saying, “Give no occasion to stumble.” We should not allow ourselves to do anything that would seem inconsistent to other people and thus cause them to stumble.

Christians should live consistently before the Jews, God’s covenant people. They are the people to whom He gave the revelation of His Word, which they preserved for us down through the centuries. They are the people to whom the Savior came; in fact He was one of them. Romans 9:5 speaks of the Israelites as those “of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came.” But the Jews fulfilled their own Scriptures when they condemned and rejected the Savior, and because they condemned and rejected Him, God has set them to one side. Christ went out to die, sadly saying to Israel, “Your house is left unto

you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:38-39).

Because of their awful sin in rejecting their promised Messiah, the Jews are scattered everywhere among the Gentiles today. With yearning and longing for the salvation of the Jews, every honest Christian heart goes out in tender sympathy toward Israel. We realize that as a result of Israel's having been set aside, great blessing has come to the Gentile nations to which we belong, but we desire that God's ancient people may share this blessing with us.

A Jewish lady once said to me, "If Jesus is the Messiah, the One predicted by our prophets, why is it that it is you Gentiles who enjoy the blessings that Jesus brings while we are bereft of them?" I answered, "My dear friend, the Lord came and spread a table laden with all good things and said, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' And He invited the people of Israel to come and partake of those good things, but they turned away and did not come; they rejected the Savior and the blessings He brought. It was then that He threw open wide the door to the Gentiles and told them to come in and partake of the good things that Israel had refused, and that is why we have come in. But we still recognize Israel as God's ancient covenant people and know from the Word of God that the day is coming when their eyes will be opened and 'they shall look upon [him] whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.' In the meantime 'blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be

come in.’” (See Matthew 15:24; Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:25.)

We as Christians are to live carefully before the Jews. We are to be considerate, remembering that judicial blindness has come upon them, and we are to commend our Christ to Israel by our godly lives. I am afraid that some Jews might well be excused for rejecting Christ Jesus because of the behavior of those who profess to belong to Christ. It is a shame it ever should be so.

Perhaps there never was a day when it was more important for real Christians to confirm their love toward Israel, for at the time I am writing there seems to be a rising tide of antisemitism sweeping all over the civilized world. Some writers give the impression that the Jew is responsible for all our national and political ills. But we know who is responsible. Professing Christian people have turned away from the living God, spurned His Word, rejected His Son, and dishonored His Holy Spirit, so God is teaching the Christian nations of the world that it is an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord their God.

But Israel is blinded and many of them have turned away from the God of their fathers, and instead of being a blessing to the world, they are a curse. However, the great majority of Jews today are simple, kind, earnest people. How dare we try to blame on them the ills of the nations? We as Christians should show that our hearts are compassionate toward them and that we desire to have them share with us the blessings which we have found through the One who came from them, Jesus of Nazareth, the rightful King of the Jews.

Christians should also live consistently before the Gentiles, the Christless nations all about us. Most of us are Gentiles by birth and at one time we were outside "the covenants of promise" and "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Ephesians 2:12). Today the greater part of the Gentile world still remains in its ignorance, darkness, and sin although centuries have elapsed since the Lord Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). At the time I am writing, there are over a billion people in this world who are still without God and without hope. What a tremendous responsibility rests on us to proclaim the gospel to them! We do not need to go across the sea to find Gentiles, for we work with them day by day. How careful we should be not to cause them to stumble!

I have said to some Gentiles, "Are you a Christian?" When they have answered, "No," I have asked, "Wouldn't you like to be?" To that they have replied, "Well, I have sometimes thought so, but I have seen so many hypocrites among people professing to be Christians that I do not have much interest."

That of course is a very foolish rationalization. It is like the response of a man who, when offered a ten-dollar bill, said, 'Thank you, but I have seen so many counterfeit bills that I don't like to touch it." I do not excuse anyone for such foolish reasoning, for no one will talk that way on the day of judgment. When the Lord says, "Why didn't you trust Me?" no one will dare to look up and say, "I would have, but I saw so many hypocrites among those professing to be Christians." On the other hand, you and I are to behave so carefully that it will be impossible for people to get a wrong conception of

Christianity because our lives are not what they should be.

Christians should also live consistently before the church of God. What is the church of God? There was a time when the church of God had no existence. After Peter made his confession, our Lord Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). There was no church of God existing on the earth during the period covered by the four Gospels, but the book of Acts records that after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, a new company, the church, came into existence. Paul’s Epistles also refer to it. For instance the apostle, speaking of what he was in his unconverted days, said, “I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it” (Galatians 1:13). Speaking to the Ephesian elders, he said, “Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Writing to Timothy long years afterward, Paul told him how he ought to behave “in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

What is the church of God? It is not the building in which we meet. When we speak of a church in that sense, we use the word colloquially. The church is the company of people who have been redeemed to God by the precious blood of His Son. In the beginning the great majority of these people were Jews and then God began to work in power among the Gentiles, and the two together constituted the church of God. Ephesians 3:6 speaks of the mystery “that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” It was the Jew first and

then the Gentile, and now all who believe form this wonderful company called the church of God.

Let me ever remember as I walk down the street that I am a member of the church of God. As I meet with fellow Christians, let me remember that I am a member of the church of God. In my home life and in my business life, let me ever be mindful of the fact that I am a member of the church of God. I cannot get out of the church, so I always have to behave as one who is in the church. Some people behave one way when they are in what they call a church building and another way when they are outside of it. Parents say to their children, “You must be good in church,” and let me say to every Christian that you and I must always be good, for we are always in church! We are members of the church of God and we are to behave ourselves accordingly.

The apostle said, “Give none offence,” and then added, as it were, “I am not asking you to do something that I do not ask myself to do.” That is what he meant when he said, “Even as I please all men in all things.” Of course he used the word “please” in the sense of seeking to profit all men. You cannot please people in the sense of doing what each of them wants you to do. If you did, you would not please God, but we are to behave ourselves properly toward others.

Why is it so important that I should behave myself properly as a Christian? “That they may be saved.” Others who are not saved are watching me, and if I am not careful, my behavior will perhaps turn them away from the Lord. They will say, “I have no use for God or Christianity or the Bible. I have been watching that man who professes to love God, to love Christ, and to honor

the Bible, and I do not see anything in his life to commend either God or Christ or the Bible." We Christians have a responsibility to behave ourselves so that people looking at us will see Christ.

Paul was seeking "the profit of many, that they may be saved." Those words indicate that there are many people who are not saved. Scripture divides all mankind into two classes: the lost and the saved. Who are the lost? Second Corinthians 4:3-4 explains, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." The lost are those who reject the gospel, who live on in their sins, who do not come to Christ. Who are the saved? They are those who put their trust in Jesus, who believe the gospel, who come to Christ.

I would ask each reader, Are you lost or are you saved? If you have not trusted Christ as Savior, you are not merely in danger of being lost; you "are lost" now. But if you are lost, you may be saved, and you may be saved now.

Chapter Eleven Coming Together For The Better

In our study of this Epistle we have noticed that in the first six chapters the apostle wrote to the Corinthian church about certain matters that required correction and instruction. We can be very thankful that God providentially permitted so many things to come up in the early church in order that they might be corrected by apostolic authority during that first century of the Christian era, because similar things have continually come up in the churches of God down through the years. The remarkable fact is that no circumstance can arise, no sin can cause trouble and distress, no irregularity may appear that has not already been provided for in the Epistles of the New Testament. Problems such as ours were rife in the beginning of the church's history, and because they were addressed by the Holy Spirit through inspired men, all we need to do today is walk in obedience to the Word.

In the first six chapters of 1 Corinthians the apostle dealt with such issues as divisions among Christians, schisms of various kinds, immorality in the church of God, Christians going to court against one another, and other lapses that disturb the peace of the church. As already noted, beginning with chapter 7 and going right on to the end of the Epistle, Paul dealt with subjects concerning which the Corinthian church had written for instruction and help. He said, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me," and then proceeded to respond. In chapter 7 he addressed the questions of marriage and divorce, and the relationship of a Christian

wife and a heathen husband, or a Christian husband and a heathen wife; in chapters 8-9 the apostle wrote about meat offered to idols and the Christian's relationship to idol temples; in chapter 10 Paul showed how carefully the Christian ought to walk apart from everything that savors of idolatry. Continuing his response, in chapter 11 Paul touched on more problems that were disturbing the early church.

Head Coverings (1 Corinthians 11:1-16)

In order to understand this portion properly we need to try to visualize conditions existing in those distant days. Corinth was a loose, dissolute city. I question if any of the other great cities in which the apostle preached the gospel were worse in character. We are rapidly getting into the same condition, for we are living in a day when everything like purity and chastity is looked on as a joke, and people are utterly cynical and indifferent in regard to personal morality. The literature of our day reeks with filth, pictures are vile and lewd, and plays and movies are just as bad. Low standards of behavior are prevalent. But Corinth was even worse.

Therefore the apostle desired that Christian women especially not do anything that would cast the least cloud on their reputation for purity. Loose women in those days went about bareheaded and were found in the streets unblushingly seeking those who might be companions with them in their sin and wickedness. Women who sought to live in chastity and purity were very particular never to appear in public unveiled. The unveiled woman was the careless woman, the immoral woman; the veiled woman was the careful wife or

mother who was concerned about her character and her reputation.

It seems that after Christianity came to Corinth and converted women rejoiced in a liberty they had never known in the old pagan days, some of them were inclined to be rather careless and indifferent about the customs of the day. They perhaps were saying, “We are all one in Christ; Paul himself has taught us that in the new creation there is neither male nor female, and so there is no reason now why Christian women should be subject to any of the conventionalities of the day. We can go unveiled and bareheaded in public places, and we need not be concerned about it.”

The Corinthians wrote to Paul to get his judgment in this matter and he introduced his answer with this comment: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” In other words, “I am about to give you instruction, instruction that I have a right to give as a divinely appointed apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. I seek in all things to be subject to Christ. When He speaks, I endeavor to obey. Now I trust that you will have the same spirit in regard to the guidance I am about to give you, that you will seek to follow me, to be led by me just as I seek to be led by the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Then Paul praised the Corinthians for their obedience to instructions he had given them in the past. “I praise you, brethren,” he said, “that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” He was the one who under God had founded the church at Corinth, and before leaving them he had taught them what they needed to know to carry on. Now he had to approach a rather delicate subject and give them

directions that some might resent, but first he gave them credit for all their past cooperation.

When Paul used the word “ordinances,” he was not referring simply to the two Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper, though these would certainly be included. It is unthinkable that any Christian should ever set them to one side, but the word here has a much wider meaning. It refers to the instruction given to the Corinthians regarding a great many things that have to do with the happy fellowship of saints. A little while ago these people had been idolaters, led by Satan, captive at his will; now they were redeemed and seeking to walk together as Christians. They needed to subject themselves to the revealed will of God if they were to have joyful fellowship in the church.

As we study Paul’s teaching here about woman’s place in nature and in the church, I wish you would bear in mind that he was not speaking, as he does elsewhere, of woman’s place in the new creation. In the new creation, as already intimated, there are no distinctions. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). We were all sinners alike; we have all been redeemed alike; we are all indwelt by the Holy Ghost alike; we have all been baptized into one body alike. All distinctions vanish as we think of one another as members of Christ. We are all one in Christ.

But this does not alter the fact that we still have our natural place, which we must maintain. The Christian is not to be careless as to his responsibilities and you will see how important this is if I illustrate it as follows:

According to the Word of God I am a heavenly citizen, but if I say, “Since I am a heavenly citizen, I have no responsibilities to any country here on earth,” I will soon have to reckon with the tax collector and other authorities. The governors of this world will soon teach me that I have earthly relationships that must be maintained. Likewise, although there is neither male nor female in the new creation, we have our distinct places to fill in nature and in the church.

“I would have you know,” Paul wrote, “that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” Someone may ask, “But is not Christ the Head of every woman?” Yes, in the new creation Christ is the Head, and men and women are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, but here Paul was speaking of creation, not the new creation.

In creation the Head of every man is Christ. When God said, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26), He had Christ in view, and when the first man came into the world, he came as the type of Him who was to come. And so the Head of every man is Christ, and man is to be subject to Christ and to represent Christ. But God did not leave man alone in the world. He said, “I will make him an help meet for him” (2:18), and He created woman. “Thy desire,” He said to the woman, “shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (3:16). When God gave Eve to Adam, she saw Adam as her head, and that relationship still exists: “The head of the woman is the man.”

I suspect there are some modern women who resent that; they would like to make the woman the head of the

man. They resent the thought that God has given to woman anything that looks like an inferior place, but let us put aside any suggestion of inferiority. The point is that it is the responsibility of the husband to care for and to protect the wife—the husband "giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7).

When a woman marries and agrees to take her husband's name, she tacitly consents to Paul's teaching. Some women do refuse to take their husbands' names. They say, "We will not subject ourselves in any way, and in taking our husbands' names, we would be subjecting ourselves." I believe that a woman should not marry a man until she is willing to accept him as her head and assume his name. If she is not willing, it would be far better for her to remain single so she can run things to suit herself.

If a woman had said to Paul, "I refuse to take that place of subjection," he would have replied, "The Head of Christ is God." In other words, "Remember, the Lord Jesus took the place of subjection. He humbled Himself, but it is His glory to be in that place. When the Son of God became man, He assumed that position and He will keep it for all eternity."

Paul continued, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoured! his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoured! her head." If a man should stand up in public to pray or to preach (the word translated "prophesieth" here really means "preach") wearing a covering on his head, he would be dishonoring his Head—not that which is above his neck, but his Head who is Christ. If I stood in this pulpit

preaching with my hat on, every one of you would rightfully say, “Has he no respect for the Master whom he professes to serve?” When I come into the presence of God and Christ and the angels who are learning the wisdom of God in the church, I remove my hat.

For the same reason when a woman comes into the church, she keeps her hat (or head covering) on to honor her head. Who is her head? The man. To uncover her head would be to show that she wants to be like the man. She dishonors her head if she says, “I am not going to be subject to such a rule; I have as much right to have my head uncovered in a public meeting as a man has.” Paul did not say that she dishonors the Lord Jesus Christ. She may be quite unconscious of dishonoring anyone, but I am telling you what the Word of God says.

Concerning this and other matters it has well been said, “Some things are commanded because they are right; other things are right because they are commanded.” “Thou shalt not steal” is an example of the former. The commandment did not make it wrong to steal; it was always wrong to steal. “Let her be covered,” on the other hand, is right because it is commanded. God has spoken and it is often in little things like this that our state of mind is revealed—either our self-will is still at work or we are ready to be subject to the Word of God.

In that pagan city of Corinth it would have been a great shame and disgrace for a woman to appear in public with her head uncovered; it would have marked her out as an immoral person. Of course we must recognize that customs change, but the principle of this chapter remains the same. God is calling Christian women to

modesty of deportment so that they may be distinguished from worldly women.

Paul emphasized his point by saying, “If the woman be not covered [veiled], let her also be shorn.” In other words, “If she does not have a covering over her hair, let her really be like a man. Let her go to a barbershop and have her beautiful locks cut off.” I do not understand why a woman would want to be so manlike anyway; a womanly woman is one of the sweetest creatures God ever made. I like a womanly woman and a manly man, and I wonder if anyone really admires a manly woman or a womanly man. Let each one keep his proper place in God’s creation.

The apostle went on to explain: “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.” She is superior to the man in so many ways that she lowers herself when she gets out of her own sphere and tries to take the place of the man. I wonder sometimes whether women have any idea how even worldly men express their disgust at the manlike behavior of women in public places these days. When a woman takes out a cigarette and begins to smoke, I hear even unsaved men say, “What are we coming to? I am glad I did not have a mother like that.” Men hate to see women aping men, and Christian women should be absolutely above reproach.

The woman was taken from man—“The man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.” An old writer said, “When God created man, He made him of the dust of the ground; when He created woman, he took her from the man. He did not take her from his head in order that she

might lord it over him; He did not take her from his feet that he might trample on her; He took her from his side, close to his heart, in order that she might be his companion and that he might love and care for her." And so we read, "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man… Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man [through creation], even so is the man also by the woman [through birth]; but all things of God." So everyone has his place to fill in creation and none can take the place of the other.

We have skipped over 11:10, which comes in parenthetically: "For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels." Admittedly this is a somewhat difficult verse. A marginal note in some Bibles reads, "Power—in sign that she is under the power or authority of her husband." I think that marginal note was probably inserted by some worthy brother in years gone by who may have had a little difficulty in maintaining his position as head of the house! I question that this is what "power" means here. You see, if a woman in a city like Corinth appeared in a public place with her head uncovered, she would at once be exposed to insults. But if when going shopping or visiting friends or going to the Christian services, she put a veil over her head, she walked down the street unmolested. Her covering was her power.

I spent the first six years of my Christian experience as an officer in The Salvation Army. In those days I often had occasion to see how that beautiful little blue bonnet was the power of the Salvation Army lassie. One day when I was seeking the lost in a saloon on the Barbary

Coast in San Francisco, two of our Salvation Army lassies appeared and I noticed that everyone treated them respectfully except for one man, a half-drunken sailor. When the Salvation Army girl approached him with a tract, he turned toward her and made a movement as though he would have kissed her. As she drew back, five of those ungodly men immediately sprang to their feet, knocked the sailor down, thrashed him within an inch of his life, and threw him out into the gutter for the police to pick up. Her bonnet was “power on her head.”

Lots of other girls were in that saloon—God help them—whom nobody would have fought for or protected. There they were with their brazen faces and uncovered heads, lacking the lassie’s power, and proving the apostle right. So Paul was saying, “Women, you are not belittling yourselves when you show proper respect by appearing in public places with your heads covered. You are simply availing yourself of that which is your protection against insult.”

But what does the expression “because of the angels” mean? It is a little difficult to know nineteen centuries later just what was in the mind of the apostle. Many think he meant that whenever Christians are gathered together, God’s holy angels in Heaven are looking down with delight on the scene; that the angels note with approval everything that savors of subjection and obedience to the Word of God; and that they also observe with disapproval everything that savors of self-will and insubordination.

However, since we are told that angels are learning the wisdom of God in the church, the apostle may have been

saying, “Let the angel hosts see in Christian women a reverence, a modesty, and a respect for holy things that are not found in the women of the world.” If that is the meaning of Paul’s words, it is very beautiful.

Isaiah 6:2 refers to a class of holy angels called the seraphim, each of which “had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.” The apostle may have been picturing these angels, who cover their faces in the presence of God, looking down to see the covered women sitting in reverence and modesty in the presence of God. That may be the meaning of “because of the angels.”

William Thompson had another suggestion. In his work The Land and the Book he pointed out that from the days of the apostle John the word “angel” was used for the minister in a church. Dr. Thompson said that no one who has not seen for himself the conditions under which the ministers in eastern churches worked can understand why the apostle told Christian women that they should keep their faces veiled “because of the angels.” Until recent times in oriental lands the women and men were segregated as they gathered together so that there would be nothing to disturb the equanimity of the men, but the “angel” or minister stood on a platform and saw both groups. Probably he had never looked at the uncovered face of a woman other than his mother or sister or other near relative, and therefore if the women were not veiled, he would be so disconcerted by looking into all those unveiled faces that he might not be able to keep his mind on his message!

Moving on in the passage we read, “Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?” Paul was saying, “Should she not take a reverent attitude? It is perfectly right for me to pray with my head uncovered, but a woman is to cover her head as a sign of reverent subjection.”

Going back to nature the apostle said, “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.” Someone may say, “That settles the question. Her hair is her covering.” But the apostle said earlier that if she does not cover her hair, she is to let it be cut short. She has that natural covering which distinguishes her from man and over that she is to put a veil. Why? Because a woman’s hair is her glory. Is not that most striking? In the presence of God she is to cover her chief beauty so that no mind may be turned from Christ to her beautiful hair. It is precious to think of Mary of Bethany and of the poor woman in Luke 7 who anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with their hair. They cast their glory at His feet.

Closing this passage, Paul wrote, “If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” He was saying, “If people are going to make a fuss about a matter of this kind, all I have to say is that we have no such custom. If women will persist in being disorderly in this way, you cannot discipline them; you cannot put them out of the church. I have laid down God’s Word. Now let the women settle it themselves; let them decide how far they will subject themselves to the Word of the living God.”

What is the real importance of head coverings? It is the test of whether our wills are subject to God or whether we are going to be subject to the fashions and customs of the day in which we live. The Christian is one who has forsaken the world for Christ's sake; he has turned his back on "the fashion of this world [that] passeth away" (7:31) so that he may subject himself to another, even the Lord from Heaven. I beg of you, my brother and sister, remember Romans 14:22: "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." Settle with God just how far a passage like this, having to do with customs of long ago, has authority over your conscience at the present time, but do not go beyond conscience. In all things seek to be obedient to the Word of the living God, for this is the path of blessing.

The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-26)

This passage contains perhaps the fullest instruction in Scripture concerning the correct observance of the Lord's supper. It is evident that communion should have a large place in the hearts and minds of Christians during the dispensation in which our blessed Lord is absent in body, but sitting "on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1). The Lord's supper was intended to call Him so vividly to mind that His people might be occupied with Him and that Christ Himself might be the joy of their hearts as they go out afterward in service.

Apparently at a very early date Christians began to misunderstand the Lord's supper. It is rather a sad commentary on our fallen human nature that everything God has given us has been abused by man. The physical

appetites He has given have been abused, and the privileges He has given have often been misused. Under the law, God gave Israel the sabbath, and you would think that men would have recognized it as a part of His gracious provision for the comfort of His creatures (Exodus 20:9-10). But many people learned to loathe the sabbath because they connected it with all kinds of laws and prohibitions that God Himself had not added to it. Our Lord Jesus had to reprove the men of His day by saying, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Other observances in Old Testament times were also misrepresented and the same is true of the two ordinances of the Christian church.

The Lord’s supper and baptism were designed to continue to be observed in the church until the end of the present age—until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him—but in the meantime people have misunderstood their significance. Some folks go to the extreme of making these ordinances saving sacraments, and other people become very careless about them. The fact is that neither baptism nor the Lord’s supper has anything to do with the salvation of our souls, except that they picture the way in which we are saved through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet these ordinances are of great importance because they help to draw our hearts to Him and give us a more vivid realization of our identification with Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

In the early church the Lord’s supper was observed very frequently; for a time at least it was observed every day. The opening chapters of Acts indicate that Christians participated in the breaking of bread daily. Afterward it

was observed on the first day of the week, as Acts 20:7 seems to show. I am sure that the more often we gather together to “shew the Lord’s death till he come,” the greater will be the blessing that we receive and the greater will be the glory that is given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In spite of frequent observance in the early church, the believers fell into ways that abused the ordinance. The apostle said that he could not praise them for the way they attempted to celebrate the Lord’s supper: “I praise you not,” he wrote to the Corinthians, “that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.” So it is possible to assemble to celebrate the Lord’s supper, yet go away harmed rather than benefited.

How was it that these believers were celebrating it “for the worse” rather than “for the better”? In the first place there was a divisive spirit working among them. Instead of recognizing that the Lord’s supper speaks of the unity of the whole church of God and that all alike partake of that one loaf and one cup that represent the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Corinthians were grouping together under various leaders. They were under one roof, it is true, but some were saying, “I am of Paul the teacher”; some, “I am of Apollos the preacher”; some, “I am of Cephas the exhorter”; and others, “We do not recognize any of these leaders, for we are of Christ.” It was just as bad to make Christ’s name the head of a party as any other name; Christ is the Head of all believers and not merely of some little group.

So instead of praising the Corinthians, Paul had to write, “When ye come together in the church, I hear that there

be divisions among you: and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved [of yourselves] may be made manifest among you." The people were focusing on leaders instead of being occupied with Jesus Christ.

Another abuse of the Lord's supper was that the people were linking it with the agape meal, the love feast of which Jude wrote. Many of the early Christians were slaves and could not get away from their duties very often, but when they could come to gatherings, they wanted to stay at the meeting place as long as possible, so they brought their food with them. Between services they would spread it out and partake of it together. In time the believers fell into the habit of tying the Lord's supper into this fellowship.

At these meals some people had a great deal to eat, while others had nothing; some drank until they were inebriated, while others did not have enough to quench their thirst. The rich banqueted while the poor remained hungry and so Paul said in effect, "It is far better to do your eating at home." He was not insisting that it is wrong for Christians to come together for love feasts, which are Scriptural. He was just saying that if the effect of these meals was to separate believer from believer, it was far better for them to eat at home.

Having reproved the Corinthians for their misbehavior at the table, Paul spoke clearly of the revelation that the risen Christ had given him from Heaven concerning the proper observance of the communion service. The apostle never knew the Lord here on earth; he was not with the twelve in the upper room when Jesus instituted the ordinance; therefore he must have received his

knowledge of it as a direct revelation from Heaven. “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,” he wrote. That is very significant; there must be something extremely precious to our risen Savior about the frequent observance of the Lord’s supper if from the glory He, the glorified One, gave to His apostle a special declaration regarding the ordinance. And this is what He told him: “That the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread.”

Why did the apostle slip in the expression “in which he was betrayed” if not for us to realize that the Lord’s supper was meant to appeal to the hearts of His people? The expression reminds us that on the same night when our Savior was to know to the fullest extent the untrustworthiness, wickedness, treachery, and perfidy of the human heart, He instituted this feast so that His people might continually be made aware of His loving heart in giving Himself for them.

There is something very tender in the thought that Judas evidently was not present when Jesus “took bread.” Some people disagree, but if you carefully follow Judas through the accounts in the different Gospels, I think you will see that he was present at the Passover feast, but when that was concluded, the Savior said, “That thou doest, do quickly…[and Judas] went immediately out: and it was night” (John 13:27-30). Judas went out and in his absence the Savior gave the memorial feast to His own. That suggests that the Lord’s supper is only for those who have been redeemed by His precious blood. It is not for the unsaved or those who are hoping to be saved; it is for those who know Christ as Savior. It was to them the Lord spoke when He took that bread and

gave thanks and said, “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”

Some people tell us that the Lord meant that the bread and the wine are changed into the actual body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ when we give thanks to God for it. Others say that this is not true, but that when we receive the bread, in some special sense we are actually receiving the body of Christ. I do not think it is necessary to consider these various views, for the Lord sat at that table in His complete human body and did not divide it among the disciples. When He took the loaf and said, “This is my body,” His own hands held that loaf, so it seems to me the simple and clear meaning is that the bread on the Lord’s table is just a symbol of the precious, holy body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But it certainly is true that as we receive that bread with honest and sincere hearts, with minds occupied with Christ, we do receive our Lord in faith in a sense in which we do not receive Him at other times. Thus far I am willing to go with sacramentalists. The Lord’s supper is a memorial, and it is one that makes Christ very real to us and gives us a definite sense of His presence.

A member of a large church in Christendom once said to me, “We believe in the real presence of the Savior in the sacrament, and you believe in His real absence.” I said, “Oh no, you are mistaken. We do not believe that the bread and the wine are actually changed into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ, but we do believe in the real presence in Spirit of our blessed Lord, for He said, ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matthew 18:20)”.

There is no time when Christ's presence is so definitely realized and so distinctly felt as when we are remembering Him in the breaking of bread. Since His body was broken for us, the Lord's supper is a continual reminder of the vicarious character of His death, and that is one reason our Lord desires communion to be celebrated frequently.

After breaking the bread, Christ took the cup and said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." That cup of wine (I do not speak now of whether the fruit of the vine partaken of by the people of God be fermented or unfermented) is a continuing testimony to the fact that redemption is only through His precious atoning blood.

I cannot understand how people who deny the vicarious character of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ can with consistency participate in the celebration of the Lord's supper, for Paul said, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew [proclaim] the Lord's death till he come." (As noted before, the word translated "shew" here is translated "preach" elsewhere in the New Testament.) Whenever Christians eat this bread and drink this cup, they preach a sermon. By participating in the Lord's supper they declare that His death was not merely that of a martyr for righteousness's sake; He died as a sacrifice for sinners. Christ shed His blood for them.

A dear Japanese man who attended some meetings in Sacramento, California, was troubled about his soul, but would not come to Christ because of his love for money. He would say, "If I accept this Jesus as my Savior, I do not see how I can make money." So we told him he

would have to make a choice between two alternatives: being rich on earth but poor in eternity, or being poor on earth but rich in eternity. When I use the pronoun we, I am referring to myself and a Japanese evangelist who was associated with me at the time, and through whom I met this man.

A year went by and I returned to the city of Sacramento for more meetings. One night when I was preaching the gospel on the street corner, I saw this little Japanese man in the audience. There was an expression of concern on his face that stirred my heart. At the close of the meeting he stepped up and shook my hand and said, “I so glad to see you again.”

I said, “And so am I glad to see you. Have you accepted Christ as your Savior yet?”

Tears filled his eyes as he said, “No, I fight against Him. I cannot give up. If I accept Him, I cannot make money. Do you have some meetings here where you are speaking?”

I said, “Yes,” and told him where the meetings were being held.

He said, “On Sunday do you have a meeting in which you eat the bread and drink the wine showing how Jesus died?”

I said, “Yes, next Sunday morning.”

“I come,” he said.

So on Sunday morning we gathered together to participate in the Lord’s supper and as the meeting commenced, the Japanese man came in and sat up front. I was praying that God might speak to him and as the meeting went on it was evident that he was greatly

perturbed. Finally the people of God partook of the bread and the fruit of the vine while this heathen man looked on. Just as the elements were replaced on the table, he rose and said, “I like to pray.”

I thought, My! I wish I had told him that he would not be expected to take part in the meeting!

But he prayed like this: “O God, I all broke up. For one whole year I fight You. I fight You hard. Your Spirit break me all to pieces. O God, today I see Your people eating the bread, drinking the wine, and telling how Jesus died for sinners like me. O God, You love me so You give Your Son to die for me. I cannot fight You any more. I give up. I take Him as my Savior.”

It did not spoil our meeting at all to have him take part with such a prayer. We realized that this simple ordinance had preached to him, for Scripture tells us, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do [preach] the Lord’s death till he come.” At the close of the meeting we gathered about him to rejoice with him and then he turned to me and said, “Jesus say before He go away, when you believe Him, you bury in water, show old life gone, new life begin. I like bury.”

“You want to be baptized?” I asked. “I will see you during the week and perhaps we can do it next Sunday.”

Referring to the Japanese evangelist, he said, “A year ago he tell me Jesus Christ coming back again, so?”

“Yes,” I said, “that is true.”

“He coming soon?”

“He may.”

“He not come before next Sunday?”

“Well, I can’t say; He might come before then.”

“Then I no like to wait till next Sunday. I like show I no fight any more. I like be buried today.”

I said, “Forgive me for trying to put it off; we will go down to the river this afternoon.”

And so in the afternoon, dressed in his best, he came with the Japanese mayor (we called the richest man in the Japanese settlement “mayor”) and forty other Japanese merchants behind him. We preached the Word and he gave his testimony, and then he was buried in the waters of baptism.

The Lord’s supper, if given the place our Savior intended it to have, will constantly preach to the world and will say more than any words of ours can say.

You may have known the Lord Jesus Christ for years, but I wonder whether this ordinance is precious to you. I am afraid that to some it is just an obligation; they feel that they ought to come and partake of the Lord’s supper because He commanded it. Let me suggest that the Lord’s words were not so much a command as a request. When our Savior said, “This do in remembrance of me,” He did not mean, “You must do this.” He meant, “I would like to have you do this.”

It was as though a loved one was dying and before slipping away he called the children around the bed and handing each one of them a photograph of himself, he said, “Here are pictures of myself. I am going to leave you, and you won’t see me again for a little while. But I would like each of you to cherish your picture and from time to time take it out, and as you look at it, remember me.” Would it be a difficult task to do something like

that in response to the request of a loving mother or father or possibly a darling child? Surely not. If you loved that one, you would be delighted again and again to take down that picture and look at it. You would say, "There is the one who loved me and is now gone from me, but I am so glad that in this way I can remind myself of my dear one."

There is no legalistic requirement about observing the Lord's supper. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. You can go to Heaven by trusting the Savior even if you have never once partaken of the cup that speaks of His suffering and death, but if your heart is filled with love for Him, you will be glad to gather with His people from time to time to remember Him.

If you are unsaved, you may have thought of the Lord's supper as a means whereby you might obtain salvation. Perhaps you have come to the communion table hoping that thereby you might obtain the assurance that your sins are forgiven. But my dear friend, the message of the Lord's supper is this: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;… was buried, and… rose again" (15:3-4). What you need is not an ordinance, for the sacrament cannot save you; you need the blessed Savior Himself. You need to trust the One whose death is pictured in the Lord's supper, the Savior who gave Himself for you.

Judging Ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-34)

This passage deals with the state and condition of believers as they approach the table of the Lord. Paul wrote, "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." These are very solemn words,

which should surely hold the carelessness and levity of our hearts in check. How often some of us have been guilty of approaching the table of the Lord casually, forgetting that in the eyes of God communion is a sacred ordinance.

What does it mean to eat the bread and to drink the cup unworthily? A misunderstanding of the term “unworthily” has kept some conscientious people from ever approaching the table. They reason like this: I never can be sure that I am worthy. I know that my Savior is worthy, that all holiness, purity, and goodness are His, but I am so conscious of the impurities that surge up from my own evil heart. I am so conscious of my frequent failure in thought, word, and deed, that I dare not come to the table of the Lord. I dare not receive those sacred elements, for I am very far from being worthy.

Let me say to such conscientious friends that the word is not “unworthy,” but “unworthily.” It refers not to the person, but to the state of mind in which he comes to the table of the Lord. Of course in ourselves we are all altogether unworthy, but we have found acceptance in the worthy One, and in Christ every believer is worthy to approach the table.

I remember reading of an aged saint who was oppressed by a sense of his unworthiness. He bowed weeping as the sacred emblems were being passed around and refused to touch the bread. When the deacon offered it, he sobbed, “I am too great a sinner to receive that which is so holy.” His Highland minister exclaimed, “Take it, mon; take it. It is for sinners and for none else that Jesus died.”

My acknowledgment of my sinnership is that which gives me the right to come to the table, for 1 Timothy 1:15 says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” If I truly feel my sinfulness, confess it, and put my trust in the Savior of sinners, I find in Him my worthiness.

But in 1 Corinthians 11:27 Paul did not use a noun or an adjective. He used an adverb: “unworthily.” It describes, as we have noted, how I come to the Lord’s table. If I come in a light, frivolous, careless way; if as the bread and the wine are being prayed over, I am thinking of a thousand and one other things; if I am occupied with the business of the week; if I am recalling the latest foolish story I have heard; if when the bread and the cup are actually passed to me, I am not thinking of the Savior of whom they speak; if I am perfunctorily participating in communion as a religious ordinance—then I am taking the loaf and the cup unworthily. Or perhaps I come altogether unprepared, having spent no time with God in the morning. Perhaps I have not meditated on the solemnity of all this and, rushing into His presence, I bring strange fire, as it were, and fail to recognize that the loaf and the cup represent the precious body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. To partake in any such spirit is to do so unworthily.

Those who partake unworthily, Paul said, “shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” It is as though “they crucify… the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:6). They forget that it was their sins that caused His death on the cross, they act as though He did not even die, and they fail to realize what the symbols represent.

To avoid partaking unworthily, am I to remain away from the table? Not if I am a Christian. Instead “let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” Observe, Paul did not say, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him refrain from participating.” He said, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat.” No matter what evil he sees in himself, if he judges himself before God and confesses his own unholiness, he is free to participate in this sacred service. In other words, he is to come into the presence of God with self-judgment. He who does not do this “eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” If he does not judge himself, he only exposes himself to divine judgment because of his frivolous behavior.

In what sense does he fail to discern the Lord’s body? Let me answer with an illustration: We have all gone to a funeral service and seen the casket containing all that was mortal of some loved one. What a solemn time it was! What would you have thought if some shallow, flippant person had come to such a service and had hardly sat down before he leaned over to the person next to him and said, “By the way, I heard a most amusing story; let me tell it to you while we are waiting for the minister to begin.” Every respectable person would have looked at him with indignation and said, “What is the matter with the foolish man? Does he fail to discern the body of our dear one lying there?”

Likewise the bread and wine on the Lord’s table represent the precious body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and anyone coming carelessly to the table fails to discern the Lord’s body. He does not recognize that

communion is a memorial of death, a remembrance of the One who died for our sins.

Because the Corinthians had allowed themselves to become very casual in the way they partook of the Lord's supper, the apostle said to them, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Just what did he mean? What does the word "sleep" mean? If you read through the Epistles of Paul, you will see that it is a term used over and over again for the death of the believer. It is not the sleep of the soul, but the sleep of the body. When the believer dies, the spirit is "absent from the body, and…present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Let me direct your attention to that lovely sentence in Ephesians 3:14-15: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named." When Paul used the phrase "the whole family," he was referring to all of God's children, the entire redeemed family. Part of them he located "in heaven" and part "on earth." If the apostle believed in soul sleep, he would have said, "Of whom the whole family in the grave and on earth is named." But he did not think of our departed loved ones in Christ as being in the grave. He thought of them as being in Heaven. Philippians 1:23 indicates that death for the believer is "to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."

The word "sleep" is used many times in Scripture, but only in reference to the body. The weary bodies of believers are put to sleep to rest until they are awakened on the resurrection morning. It is a blessed thing to sleep in Christ, and yet there is such a thing as

a believer being put to sleep before his due time. We read in Psalm 55:23 that the ungodly “shall not live out half their days,” and it is quite true that even a godly person may fall so far into sin that God may not permit him to live on to a ripe old age. He may take him home in youth or midlife.

I would not say that when a young believer dies it is always an act of discipline, for many a young saint has in grace been taken away from the evil to come. Then too, some ripen earlier than others. Some of us develop so slowly that it will take fifty or sixty or seventy years to bring us to spiritual maturity, but there are others like Borden of Yale who ripen so young that the Lord can say, “I am going to pluck that fruit now and take it home to Heaven; it is ready early.”

But early death can be an evidence of the Lord’s discipline. In effect Paul was saying to the Corinthians, “You have been dishonoring the Lord at His table by approaching it in a light and trifling manner. You have been given to levity and misused this sacred ordinance by combining it with a feast for yourselves. Therefore, many of you are weak, many of you are sickly, and many of you are even dying early.”

Sickness is one tool the Lord often uses to chasten His people. Chastening is not necessarily punishment, but it is educational, and the Lord uses sickness to make us realize our littleness, our insufficiency, and the importance of living only for eternity. Many a young or middle-aged Christian has gone on perhaps for years without giving much recognition to the Lord’s authority over his life, and then sickness has come and for long weary weeks or months and sometimes years that dear

one has been laid aside. At first he has asked restlessly, “O God, why do I have to suffer? Why cannot I go out to enjoy things with others?” But little by little a change has come and after a while the sick one has been able to say with a chastened spirit, “Lord, perhaps You have lessons to teach me that I would not learn if I were healthy and strong; make me a willing pupil in Your school.” God uses such chastening to lead that believer into deeper fellowship with Himself.

It is a very serious thing to be under the hand of God in chastening. I am afraid that some of us are more or less under it almost all our days because we are so slow to learn our lessons, so self-willed. It takes us a long time to get to the place where we judge ourselves in the presence of God so that His hand may be lifted.

Paul called us to self-judgment: “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.” But how am I to judge myself? By bringing my inmost thoughts and my outward behavior into the light of the Word of God and asking myself, “Are these thoughts of mine, is this behavior of mine in accordance with what is written here?” If I find that I am cherishing certain ambitions that are contrary to the Word, if I find that this Word has something to say to me personally about my thoughts and ways, I am to turn to God and confess my failure, acknowledge my sin, and seek by His grace to walk in obedience to His Word. As I thus judge myself, I come out from under the hand of discipline.

God’s Word should always be the standard of judgment when I examine myself. When I see something in the Bible, I may say, “Certainly this has no application to me,” though it is God’s direct word to my soul. If I

ignore it, I am putting aside my good conscience, and I need not expect to hear Him speak to me again until I am ready to listen. Why should He reveal other things to me when I refuse to bow to Him in this matter? When you read the Bible, do you read it only to become acquainted with it as literature, to become familiar with its history and philosophy, and to derive help from its comforting passages, or do you also read it so that you can obey it and make it your counselor?

Let me give you a word of personal testimony. For the first six years of my Christian life I was largely dependent on what I called the Spirit's guidance. I knew very little of the guidance of the Word. When perplexed I would say, "I will ask the Lord what His will is," and as I felt impressed I would act. But I found as I read my Bible that I was often acting contrary to the written Word.

I will never forget the night when I knelt before God and opened my Bible to a passage about baptism, which I had been avoiding for years. During those years I would say, "I am going to ask the Lord about it," and then I would have an inward feeling that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was all I needed. Every time I read a portion of Scripture about baptism, I would dodge it. I had a lot of dodging to do, for there were a great many Scripture passages that had to do with that subject. Finally that night before the open Word I said, "Blessed God, by Thy grace from today on I will never try to dodge one thing that is written in Thy Word for Thy people in this age. If Thou wilt make it clear to me, by Thy grace I will walk in obedience to it."

From that time I had blessing I had never experienced before. Two weeks after that I went down to the seaside and was buried with Him in baptism and a week later I sat at the table of the Lord. Previously I had said, “All you need is to feed mentally on the body and blood of Christ; you do not need the outward symbols.” One by one many things came to my attention that I had tried to make myself believe were all right, but I found they were actually contrary to His Word.

I have sought conscientiously now for many years to yield obedience when God speaks. I do not always understand why He tells me to do certain things, but it is not necessary for me to understand. What is necessary for me is to obey, to do what God has asked me to do. ft is as we obey the Word that we are kept clean. Ephesians 5:25-26 tells us that Christ “loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” If we judge ourselves, obey the Word, and confess our failures, we will not have to be judged by the Lord.

“But when we are judged”—when we become the objects of divine discipline, when God has to deal with us because we will not judge ourselves—”we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” The unsaved man is going to be dealt with in the day of judgment; the child of God is judged by the Father during his lifetime. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6). Every bit of pleasure that the worldling has is in this life. Sometimes people say, “I do not understand it. I am a Christian and yet it seems to me that I have nothing but trouble. I look at the people of the world and they seem to take things so easily.” You

do not need to be surprised at that, for the worldling gets all his heaven right here. Christians get all the sorrow, all the trouble, all the tears they will ever have right here. Here they are chastened of the Lord; they come under the rod and are disciplined for their naughtiness, but when they get to Heaven there will be no more punishment. They will be forever with the Lord and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Until we get to Heaven, let us remember that we are here to glorify our Lord. That is the only thing worth living for; nothing else matters. We have only a little while to live for Jesus and glorify Him. I do not want any thought of ease or pleasure in this world to keep me from being the kind of person God can use until He calls me to Himself.

"My brethren," continued the apostle, "when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another." That is very sweet, for the Lord's supper is a matter of fellowship; that is why we observe it together and why we read, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). And so we tarry and together proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. The Lord's supper is not something to gratify one's appetite. "If any man hunger," Paul said, "let him eat at home." Just a morsel of bread, just a sip of wine will do. It is only a reminder. We "come not together unto condemnation," but in a serious manner, so truly occupied with Christ that we will have the Lord's approval.

I like to think of the last words of chapter 11 as not merely the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, but as the words of our Master to the whole church:

“The rest will I set in order when I come.” There is so much that we can never regulate, so much that will never be right in this world. There are so many things that are out of gear in our individual lives, in our families, and in the church of God. We may try to set them in order, but we readily blunder. The Master says, as it were, “Walk in obedience to My Word and I will straighten out the rest when I come. I will be back soon, and what a day it will be!”

I have searched this Bible for a great many years and have never found in it one portion that would intimate that I must put one moment between this present hour and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He may come today. I rejoice to know that all who have put their trust in Him are ready to meet Him when He returns.

Chapter Twelve Christ's Gracious Provision

Beginning with chapter 12 and continuing through chapter 14, Paul's subject is the gifts of the Spirit and the exercise of those gifts in the church. The apostle's instructions regarding behavior in the church apply to all who have been redeemed and have grouped themselves into local assemblies of believers.

Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

In the churches of God spiritual gifts are given to individuals for the blessing of all. In Ephesians 4:8 we read, "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." The Lord desires that His gospel should be preached, that His Word should be expounded, and that His people should be built up in their most holy faith, and it is to these ends that He has imparted certain spiritual gifts. He has not given the same gifts to everyone, but to everyone He has given some gift for the benefit of the whole company.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I would not have you ignorant." Notice that the word "gifts" is in italics here, indicating that it was supplied by the editors of the King James version; perhaps they were justified, for the word appears farther on in 12:4. However, if it were proper to speak of "spirituals" in English, that would seem to be a more literal translation of what Paul wrote in 12:1. In proper English, the meaning of the Greek is "spiritual manifestations." There are various ways in which the Spirit of God is manifested and we should not be

ignorant of them. These manifestations are called gifts because they are bestowed freely by the ascended Christ for the edification of the church and the proclamation of the gospel.

The Corinthians in their unconverted days knew nothing of this gospel. “Ye were Gentiles,” Paul said, “carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.” The phrase “carried away” suggests Satanic power, and there is Satanic power behind all idolatry. “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God” (10:20). There is a terrible demonic power working in every idolatrous system, and nothing can deliver a man from this power but the gospel of the grace of God.

Our mission is to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). We are not to go to antagonize people; we are not to go to find fault with their religions; we are to go to preach Christ and Him crucified. And as the gospel is preached, it delivers people from the Satanic power that is working in their false religious systems. There is something that absolutely distinguishes all those systems from Christianity: They have no place for Jesus Christ. They all unite in calling Him anathema, “accursed.”

“I give you to understand,” Paul wrote, “that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed.” Thus the apostle marked the clear dividing line between Christianity and every system of man’s devising. Christianity exalts Jesus Christ as Lord; the other religions deny His lordship and think of Him as accursed. Even Muhammad-anism, which recognizes Jesus Christ to a certain extent as a prophet of God, sees

Him as the accursed one. Judaism and paganism have also counted Jesus Christ as an accursed one. Therefore people must be delivered from those systems if they would know the truth.

Paul added, “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” It is by the Holy Spirit that we recognize His lordship. The apostle applied the title “Lord” to our Savior numerous times in 1 Corinthians. This is the Epistle of the lordship of Christ and in it we are called on always to recognize His lordship—that is, His absolute authority over our hearts and lives. When He speaks, we can only obey. It is not our place to question Him, reason with Him, or ask why. Our part is to do what we are commanded to do, for we are His servants and He is our Lord.

We read of the entire trinity in connection with the giving and using of gifts: the Holy Spirit in 12:4, the Lord Jesus Christ in 12:5, and God the Father in 12:6. Verse 4 says, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.” The one Holy Spirit manifests Himself through the church of God in different ways. We do not all have the same gift; we are not all constituted alike even from the human and intellectual standpoint, and when it comes to spiritual matters, we do not all have the same ministry committed to us. A great many people in our day would be saved from the wildest fanaticism if they realized this. Fanatics urge everyone to seek certain gifts and they say that if a person does not possess these gifts, he does not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in him at all. But there is a diversity of gifts, though the one Spirit operates in every case.

Referring to God the Son, Paul said, “There are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.” The gifts of the Spirit of God within the believer are to be used in subjection to the lordship of Christ. If God has given me a particular gift, I am not to use that gift whenever and in whatever way I think fit; I am to use it as the Lord Jesus Christ thinks it should be used.

Some time ago I officiated at the funeral of the mother of one of our state senators in California. The mother had been a devoted Christian woman, but I did not know whether her son was a Christian or not. Many of his friends were present—perhaps seventy-five or more men from the legislature—and naturally I was anxious to use that opportunity to the best of my ability in subjection to God. I wanted not only to comfort those who were bereaved, but also to present clearly and definitely the precious gospel message, which had been the joy of the one who had gone home to be with the Lord, for I did not know if those politicians had ever heard the gospel.

I was told that the dear lady who had passed away had a number of friends given to the use of a gift that they called “speaking in tongues,” though it certainly was not that which the Bible refers to as the gift of tongues. They had a habit of going off into a semitrance condition and uttering strange sounds. Someone forewarned me, “Just as you stand up to preach, these women will immediately begin to exercise this weird gift of theirs. Their jaws will work in a peculiar way for a few minutes and after that they will start to babble.” I was concerned about the effect of this on the unsaved, so I said to the undertaker, “There are four women back there by the door. I wish you would keep an eye on them. If you see their jaws begin to work in an unusual way, you might

suggest that they go outside and not remain for the funeral service."

I began to preach and, sure enough, in a minute or two I saw the jaws begin to work. But the undertaker was on the job and immediately suggested to the four ladies that they leave. In a moment they straightened up, but answered with indignation, "This is a gift of God and we are free to use it where we will." The undertaker replied, "Not here in my undertaking parlor," and so they were quiet.

One might have a genuine gift of God, but that does not mean that he is at liberty to use it wherever he will. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets," Paul said in 14:32. If anyone is gifted by God, he is to use his gift in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ and not make a spiritual nuisance of himself. Our Lord's authority must always be recognized in the use of gifts.

Referring to God the Father, Paul wrote, "There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." There are different ways in which the Word of God is given out, but it is the same God who is at work. He may have given you a very modest gift. Your voice may never be heard in public, but you are to use your gift, in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ, if only in the quiet place of your home, just as faithfully as you would if you were called to preach or to teach in an assembly.

Paul continued, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." In other words, a spiritual gift is not given for show; it is not given so that a man may attract attention to himself; it is given for the edification of others. If God gives me any little gift at all,

He gives it not that I may gather people about myself, but that it may be used for the blessing of others, for the salvation of sinners, and for the edification of saints.

In John the Baptist we have a lovely picture of what every gifted servant of Christ really ought to be. John declared, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord,” and, pointing to the Savior, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 1:23; 3:30). John found his delight in lifting up Christ, not in directing people’s attention to himself. All gifts are given that Christ may be exalted, and in that way others find blessing.

Paul went on to specify what some of the gifts are. We may not see them all in evidence today, and probably there are some that we will never see, but that does not mean that they are not in the church. There are commentators who insist that some of these gifts have absolutely disappeared, but I do not know of any Scripture portion that tells us that. I do not know of any passage that says that the age of miracles has passed and I would not dare to say that the sign gifts all ended with Paul’s imprisonment. I know from early church history that this is not true. As the early servants of God followed up the work of the apostles, gifts of healing and other signs were frequently demonstrated and marvelous help was given to the servants of God to preach in languages that they had never known before. Therefore I do not think it is correct to take the position that these sign gifts have necessarily disappeared from the church. I do, however, believe that many of the gifts are not often seen today, and I think there is good reason for that.

In 2 Corinthians 11:2 the apostle wrote, “I have espoused you… as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Paul was writing to a separated company, the affianced bride of the Lamb, and it was the delight of the blessed risen Lord to lavish upon her gift after gift. The Corinthians “[came] behind in no gift,” we are told in the first Epistle (1:7). However, it seems to me that we can see in the book of Acts that as time went on and the church began to drift a little, and as dissension and other things that grieved the Lord arose, there was more reserve on His part in bestowing gifts. That, I believe, explains the lack of many of these gifts today. The church has gotten so far away from what she should be and there is so much strife, division, worldliness, and carnality that the Lord no longer delights in lavishing His gifts as freely as He did in the beginning.

Let me give you an illustration. A young man is engaged to be married to a beautiful young woman and he seals that engagement by giving her an expensive diamond ring. Now suppose that he has to be away from her for some time before the marriage; we will say he is going abroad on business. When he has earned enough money to build a home for his bride, he will send for her. In the meantime, every once in a while it is a joy to him to pick out some lovely thing and send the gift back to her, and she in turn is proud and happy to know that she is constantly being remembered by him.

But then suppose that his absence, instead of making her heart grow fonder, makes her careless. She thinks, Well, he is going to be away from me for so long and he cannot expect me to forego the pleasures of the young folk, and so she allows other young men to take her out and to pay a great deal of attention to her. Eventually he

hears, perhaps from his mother or his sister, “Your fiancee is not as true to you as she promised to be; you had better come home if you want to win her heart again.” Perhaps he cannot get home right away and he writes her a letter that provokes a rather indignant answer. He no longer finds the same delight in sending gifts to her as before when he believed her to be true to him. He loved to lavish his gifts on her once, but now he becomes more reticent in his own expressions of love and is more careful in what he spends on her. Likewise our Lord does not now give to His church all the sign gifts that He did when she was walking with Him in holiness and separation from this godless world.

Another reason for fewer gifts is that since we have the whole Bible, the New Testament as well as the Old, the sign gifts are not needed as they were at the beginning.

Let us now look at the spiritual gifts that Paul listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. He began with “the word of wisdom” and “the word of knowledge.” Here are two gifts intimately linked together. What is the difference between them? Let me speak of knowledge first. The Lord gives to some the knowledge of His Word, a remarkable insight into the Holy Scriptures. I have known men who filled me with holy envy, for they seemed to know this Book from Genesis to Revelation; they could turn unerringly to almost any portion. I have prayed, “O Lord, make Thy Word to me what it is to them; give me the gift of knowledge.” I realize of course that one does not get this gift in a sudden miraculous way; if you and I want it, we must seek for it. Those who seek are in perfect accordance with the Word of God, for in Proverbs 2:1-5 we read:

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

The gift of knowledge is given to those who earnestly study the Word of God in dependence on the Holy Spirit. But one might have the gift of knowledge, yet lack the ability to use that knowledge correctly, and so there is the gift of wisdom. This gift enables one to use God's revelation in a way that helps and blesses others. Many a person knows a little of the Word of God, but uses it in such a way that he drives people from him. Everything he says may be Scriptural, but Scriptural things can be said in such an unwise way that they upset people instead of helping them.

Of course I know there are some people who are upset no matter what we do. A lady came up to a preacher and complained, "I don't like to hear you preach because you always rub the fur the wrong way." He answered, "Not at all, sister; just turn around." Very often no matter how carefully we use the Word of God, we seem to rub people the wrong way, but that is usually because they are going the wrong way. The gift of wisdom is the ability to use the Word of God wisely, so that people will be edified and built up instead of being driven away.

The next gift Paul mentioned is faith. This of course is not the faith by which we are saved; otherwise many might say, "I would like to believe in the Lord Jesus, but

I have not the gift of faith and so cannot believe." To such I would say, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). To anyone who opens his heart when the Word is preached, God will give saving faith; 2 Thessalonians 3:2 says "All men have not faith" only because some men turn from the Word of God. However, when God gives to His own people the spiritual gift of faith, it is a special faith for a special service.

George Muller, who carried on the work of the Bristol Orphan Houses, was, I believe, the outstanding man of faith in the nineteenth century. God called him to open an orphanage to care for homeless boys and girls, but he had no money and so he said to the Lord, "You will have to supply the means." In the name of the Lord he went forward and spent every cent he received in opening the first building. The Lord sent more money, the children came, and the work went on. In fifty years he received $6,500,000 for that work, yet he never asked people for a penny. He did not beg for money; the Lord sent it in.

I have met a number of people who have told me that they were going to do the same kind of work as George Muller. Each of these people who talked to me started a home and announced that it was a faith work but, with one exception, their ventures ended in failure. Why? Because they were trying to do George Muller's work without George Muller's gift of faith. When God calls a person to do a work of faith, He gives him the gift of faith.

The same thing is true in connection with missionary work. When God raised up Hudson Taylor to start the China Inland Mission, he knew that he was to trust the

Lord alone and not ask for money. Every once in a while someone else has declared, “I am going to start a mission and run it on faith like Hudson Taylor.” The mission has gone on for a time, but then there have been reports of starving missionaries and soon the whole work has gone to pieces. Such people have tried to do Hudson Taylor’s work without Hudson Taylor’s faith. This faith is a special gift for a special work.

Then we read of the gift of healing, which is the ability to lay one’s hands on the sick in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and call them back to life and health. I do not know whether any believers today actually have that gift. I have never seen it exercised. I have united with other Christians to pray for the sick and we have seen the Lord graciously raise them up, but it does not seem to me that anyone in those prayer meetings had the gift of healing. There have been reports of this gift being exercised today, but my investigations of some of those rumors have revealed that the people who were supposed to have been miraculously healed were either dead or worse than ever.

I thought at one time that a certain dear man of God had this gift—until one day I was with him when he was praying for a sick woman and she did not get healed. He turned on her, scolded her soundly because she did not have more faith, and told her that she must have some hidden sin in her life. If that brother had had the gift of healing, her faith would not have made any difference. If there are people with the gift of healing in the world today—and there may be—we can thank God for them. Personally I have never known such a person.

We read next that God gives to certain of His servants the ability to work miracles. A miracle is anything that cannot be accounted for by mere natural law. God has often wrought wonderful things not to be accounted for naturally. Here is an example: Once there was a terrible drought in Africa and the natives had cried and cried to their false gods, but no relief had come. A certain missionary felt called to bring them all together and say, “Now I am going to cry to the God of Heaven to give rain.” He stood before them and offered a prayer and as he began to pray the sky above him was cloudless, but he had not finished praying before there was a terrific clap of thunder. The thunder and lightning continued and in half an hour rain was pouring down. That was a miracle.

The gift of prophecy is bestowed on other servants of God. In its New Testament sense, “prophecy” does not refer to foretelling future events. Prophecy is preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit of God, preaching that meets actual needs.

Still another gift on the list we are considering is the “discerning of spirits,” the ability to see through people. That is a gift I fear I do not have. I am too apt to believe every story that anybody tells me, at least until I have proven it to be false.

Finally we read about “tongues.” The gift of “divers kinds of tongues” was the ability bestowed on some to preach the gospel in languages that they had never learned. Without having taken any course in school to learn the language, a person with this gift was able to stand up and preach in the power of the Spirit in a foreign tongue. Other people were given the ability to

interpret a language that they had never learned. God gave those gifts in the beginning, but I have not heard evidence of their being in the world today.

“All these [gifts],” Paul said, “worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” If it is His will for us to have any of these gifts, He will give them to us; otherwise, He will not. Therefore it is folly for anyone to insist on having one or more of these gifts as the definite evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit of God. In Ephesians we read of certain gifts that will remain in the church to the end: teaching and preaching for the edification of the saints.

The Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-26)

In this passage Paul first emphasized the unity of the body of Christ and compared that unity to the unity of the human body. The human body has many different “members,” each one having a special function, yet the body is one; it has one heart, one circulatory system, and one mind dominating and controlling everything.

“As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is the Christ.” The definite article is found in the original, although we do not see it in our King James version. When the apostle used the term “the Christ,” it was just the same as if he had said “the church,” for as the context shows, he was thinking of the entire church as linked with the Lord Jesus Christ, its Head in Heaven. As the human body is one, so also is the Christ.

“Christ” means “the anointed,” and our Lord Jesus is the anointed One. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Acts 10:38); that is why He

is called Christ. But 2 Corinthians 1:21 speaks of all believers as being anointed, so we have been "Christed" by the same Spirit with whom God anointed Jesus. Therefore our risen Head in Heaven and the members of the body everywhere on earth constitute the Christ, the anointed One.

We cannot break the link that joins the believer to his Head in Heaven, "for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." Notice, it is not by the possession of divine life that we become members of the body of Christ. All believers from Adam and Abel down to the end of time have life from Christ. (Adam believed God when the promise came that the seed of the woman would bruise the seed of Satan, and God declared His satisfaction in that faith by clothing Adam and his wife with coats of skin.) There is no other source of life, and no natural man (unbeliever) in any dispensation was ever a child of God. The only way a man can become a child of God is through a second birth, through the reception of divine life, and this is given when he believes the gospel.

I know that people sometimes say, "But we must have life first before we believe the gospel." We have life before we believe a great many particulars in the gospel, but 1 Peter 1:23-25 says that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever…And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Therefore men are born again by believing the gospel, whatever form it takes in the various dispensations; God's message to man has differed in the various ages, but it has always had to do with Christ.

However, being born again is not the same thing as being baptized into the body of Christ. No one is baptized into the body of Christ until the Spirit of God dwells in him, and the Spirit comes to dwell only in people who have been born again. There is as much difference between being born by the Spirit and being indwelt by the Spirit as there is between building a house and moving into it. New birth is by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. The Holy Ghost builds the house, and then He comes to indwell the believer; He comes to take possession. In our dispensation there is no appreciable difference in time between a man's being born again and his being baptized into the body of Christ, but there was a time when there were numbers of people who were born again by the Spirit, but were not indwelt by Him.

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to indwell believers and baptize them into one body. What took place then has been going on ever since. The Spirit of God now dwells within us and makes all believers one. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." I like the good old translation of the word rendered "baptized" here; some people object, but I take the Greek word to mean "immersed." With this rendering the sentence reads, "By one Spirit are we all immersed into one body." We who were so many individuals before have now been immersed into one, and in this body there is neither Jew nor Greek.

Some used to be Jews and some used to be Gentiles before they were born of God and indwelt by His Spirit. Now they have lost their old standing in the flesh. When I meet my Hebrew Christian brothers, I do not think of

them as Jews anymore; I think of them as fellow members of the body of Christ. And when they look at their Gentile brothers, they think of them not as unclean Gentiles, but as fellow members of Christ's body.

In this body there are neither bond nor free. There are neither masters nor servants. In the world outside we meet one another on that basis; if I am employed by another, I am to render proper service to my master. But when we come into the church of God, we come together as fellow members of Christ's body.

A Christian worker once told of her visit to the beautiful palace of an English duchess who was a very humble Christian. On the Lord's day morning the duchess took the visitor to a meeting of a little group of Christian people gathered together around the table of the Lord, and as they sat there, a man got up and expounded the Word to them. The duchess whispered to the lady, "That is my coachman." The Christian worker, being a little surprised that this lady would go and listen to her coachman expound the Word, said to her later, "Isn't it hard on your pride to have to listen to your coachman open the Scriptures to you?" The duchess replied, "In the church of God there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free; we are all one in Christ Jesus." All these earthly distinctions are wiped out in the presence of God.

"We…have been all made to drink into one Spirit," the apostle added. Just as by water baptism a line of demarcation is drawn between the Christian and the world, by drinking into one Spirit we are definitely linked with the one body and enjoy fellowship in Him. As you enjoy spiritual fellowship with your brothers in

Christ, you are enjoying fellowship with the Holy Spirit, who now indwells you.

We are all one in the Lord, but each of us has a position in the body of Christ. Verses 14-17 warn against being discontent with that position. As men and women not yet glorified, we still possess the old carnal nature, and even though we have the new nature and are set apart to God in Christ, we often find envy and jealousy working within us. There is still the tendency to say, “Well, since I cannot do what so-and-so does, I will not do anything.”

Whenever you are tempted to make such a statement, remember that every member of your physical body has its own special function. Just imagine your foot going on strike. Some morning when you are getting out of bed, you want to put your foot on the floor and it says, “I do not like being a foot. I do not like always being covered up with a stocking and a shoe. I have just as much right to be free and uncovered as your hand has. I do not like it that the hand does all the writing, the painting, and the playing of the piano, while I have to be hidden away all the time. I am not going to function unless you train me to write, paint, and play the piano. I refuse to work any longer as a foot.” I have seen folks just like that foot, folks who won’t participate in anything unless they can do things that other people do.

Now a man born without arms can be wonderfully trained to hold a pen between his toes and write and paint with his foot, but normally that is not the case. A foot cannot do the work of a hand. When a foot is content to do its own work, it is a splendid thing, but what a failure a foot would be if it tried to do the work of a hand!

When every member of the body does its own work and does it well, the whole body is benefited. The same is true in the church or assembly of God. God does not gift everyone in the same way. Some are given special public ministries, while others are enabled to do quiet, private service for the Lord, but all are important.

I think that until I get to Heaven and stand at the judgment seat of Christ, I will never have the least inkling of how much I owe to quiet saints shut away in hidden places who have bowed down on their knees before God and asked His blessing on my ministry during the forty-three years that I have been preaching the gospel. I have been in the public place, but I am sure that the greatest amount of the credit for what has been accomplished belongs to those who have thought enough about me to bear me up in prayer that God might keep me from sin and use my testimony for the glory of His name. So let us be content to labor on in the place God has given us.

Now imagine an ear going on strike and saying, “I refuse to hear; if I cannot be an eye, I am not going to do anything.” What a foolish thing! And yet there are people like that ear. The apostle said, and I suppose he smiled as he said it, “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing?” Just picture a body that looked like a great big walking eye! Paul continued, “If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” If the body were one immense ear, would it not be a peculiar thing? And so each member has his place, and each is to act for God in that place. Thus Paul warned against discontent.

There is no room for natural ambitions because “now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” When I think, “I should like to do so much that I cannot,” it is comforting to realize that it is He who has set me right here where I am, that I am in the place where He has put me, and that He will give me grace to live for Him here.

While some are discontent, others cherish a disdain for other members of the body of Christ. Rebuking that disdain, Paul wrote, “But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” Our Christian fellowship would be ten thousand times more precious if we all would settle it with God that by His grace we will never let an unkind criticism of any of His people escape our lips. I find that the people who are the most sensitive to criticism are the most ready to criticize. Those who get all broken up and upset if someone makes the least derogatory remark about them are those who will speak in the most cruel, unkind, and critical way of others.

Preachers, I fear, are more guilty of this than anyone else. We often think and speak of one another in a most unkind way. Is it not a shame that men who have been set apart by God for the proclamation of His truth, who ought to stand shoulder to shoulder and be very jealous of each others’ reputations, should try to climb up on the failures of others? We who try to minister the Word should set an example for our brothers in Christ by covenanting with God that we will always say good, kind, and helpful things about our fellow servants. If we see faults in them, we should go to them personally and seek to help them.

I once saw a sign in a restaurant that read, “If you like our food, tell others; if you don’t, tell us.” I think that would be a good sign in a church of God. If you do not like something, tell the person responsible about it, and together seek to put things right. We need each other and we ought to be helpers of one another. The tongues of some of us are so vitriolic; we can say such unkind things and forget that the people to whom and about whom we speak are souls for whom Jesus died—He loves them that much. They are so dear to God that He gave His Son for their redemption.

Oh, that when Christians meet and part,

These words were graved on every heart—

They’re dear to God!

However wilful and unwise,

We’ll look on them with loving eyes—

They’re dear to God!

Oh, wonder!—to the Eternal One,

Dear as His own beloved Son;

Dearer to Jesus than His blood,

Dear as the Spirit’s fixed abode—

They’re dear to God!

When tempted to give pain for pain,

How would this thought our words restrain,

They’re dear to God!

When truth compels us to contend,

What love with all our strife should blend!

They’re dear to God!

When they would shun the pilgrim’s lot

For this vain world, forget them not;

But win them back with love and prayer,

They never can be happy there,

If dear to God.

Shall we be there so near, so dear,

And be estranged and cold whilst here—

All dear to God?

By the same cares and toils opprest,

We lean upon one faithful Breast,

We hasten to the same repose;

How bear or do enough for those

So dear to God!

“Those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble,” Paul wrote, “are necessary.” Sometimes perhaps we discount someone’s gift because it does not appeal to us, and yet that person may be God’s messenger to others. Years ago when I was in The Salvation Army, I knew a girl who was certainly imbued by the Spirit of God, but she had worked in the open air so much that her throat was affected. I remember listening to her once as she tried to sing a song, but she could not sing. I felt so sorry for her, and somebody standing next to me said, “Why does she make such a fool of herself by trying to sing?” But on the other side someone said to me, “Oh, it does me so much good every time I hear that girl sing; it comes from her heart and she is doing it for

love for Christ.” Remember, the people whom you do not appreciate may be God’s instrument to reach other folk. Be careful that you do not do anything to spoil the effect of their testimonies.

I once visited in a home where the parents said to me, “We wish you would pray for our sons and daughter. We have tried to bring them to Christ. They do go to church with us, but they are becoming less and less interested.”

I said, “I am sorry; we must pray for them.” There had just been a change of pastors in their church, and I had come to help the new pastor in some meetings, so at the dinner table I said, “This new pastor of yours seems to be a fine godly man.”

The mother said, “I haven’t any use for him; he doesn’t know how to dress for one thing and he murders the king’s English.”

The father said, “Yes, we are most disappointed in him.”

Then the two boys and the girl, joining the discussion, commented to their parents, “We would like to know why you expect us to go to church.”

After the meal I said to the father, “How do you expect your boys and your girl to be interested in spiritual things when you tear the messenger of Christ to pieces at the dinner table?”

Let us be careful to value one another, even “those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable.” You may have visited a mission and heard a man testify whose grammar was so bad that you said, “Oh, I wish he would sit down.” But some poor wretch in that meeting listened and said, “What! Did God save a man like that? Maybe He can save me. I am about as

bad as he was when God saved him.” The man who testified was not a handsome or brilliant member of the body, but you never could have reached that down-and-outer as he did.

“And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable,” Paul said, “upon these we bestow more abundant honor.” A woman who had a deformed ear bestowed more honour on that ear by combing her beautiful hair over it. Thus that uncomely part became most attractive. We too try to cover up the things in ourselves that we do not think are pleasing, and I wish we would learn to cover up the uncomely things in our brothers in Christ.

I have never seen a perfectly beautiful woman cover her face with a dark, heavy veil—unless she was about some nefarious business. “Our comely parts have no need,” Paul wrote, “but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body.” God desires that there be no divisions or strife in the body, “but that the members should have the same care one for another.”

Honestly now, if you had loved that brother or that sister as much as you love yourself, would you have made such a disparaging comment the other day? On one occasion a man came to the late Leon Tucker and started talking to him about another preacher. Mr. Tucker asked, “Is it because you love this brother so much that you are telling me this?” The man turned red and did not know how to answer. We can test ourselves with Paul’s words: do we “have the same care one for another”?

When there is “no schism in the body,…whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.” This principle too can be illustrated with the human body. When you have an infected finger, do you say to yourself, “That affects only my finger, and I am not going to let the rest of the body bother about it”? Of course you don’t because you know that your whole body is affected. Let me say something serious and solemn: Your entire local assembly is affected if there is one member that is not living for God in it. Because we are so intimately linked together, the whole body of Christ is affected if there is even one member playing fast and loose with holiness and purity and righteousness.

We understand that we are to suffer with one another, but if one member is selected for some special recognition, how should we react? Should we be jealous of that one? No, for we also read that if “one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

The Best Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)

Someone writing on a political theme said, “It is important for us to remember, as Scripture says, we are all members of one body and therefore should work for the good of every nation.” But the Bible is not talking about nations when it speaks of members of the body of Christ; nor does it use the word “body” as we use that term to speak of a legislative body or a body of soldiers —that is, a collective company. The New Testament uses the term “body” in comparing the church of the living God, the body of Christ, to the human body. As the human body is one, but has many members, so also is the body of Christ; every member joined together and linked with the Head is to work for the good of the

whole. And so it is Christians that the apostle had in view when he said, “Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

In one sense we Christians have lost our former identities. We are not just so many units as once we were, having no special relationship to one another, for we are now united. We who are saved, who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are thus baptized into one body. On the other hand, we have our individual responsibilities as members of that one body. Just as each of the various members of my human body has its part in the building up of the whole, so every Christian has his special responsibility for the blessing of the entire body of Christ. Each of us has a place to fill, so let each of us seek to fill his place to the glory of God.

God has given to the church special gifts which are for the edification of the body, and in these gifts we see Christ’s gracious provision for His church. In Ephesians 4:8 we read, “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” In 4:11 we are told what some of those gifts were: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.”

Then in 4:12 we are told why He gave them. The King James version gives the impression that there were three purposes. Notice the punctuation as you read: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” From this translation you would gather that Christ had given these gifts (1) to perfect the saints, (2) to do the work of the ministry, and (3) to edify the body of Christ. But let

me point out that the punctuation marks were put in by English editors, and have no real place in the Greek text.

Now read the verse omitting the punctuation marks. “For the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.” God did not give these special gifts to certain ones so that they could do everything, and the rest could sit back and be perfected and helped and blessed through them. God gave these gifts so that the gifted ones might, through the ministry of the Word, perfect the saints, so that the saints might go out and do the work of the ministry and thus edify the body of Christ. It never was the intention of the Spirit of God to have any drones in the gospel hive.

In 1 Corinthians 12 the gifts some men most highly esteem are made to seem the least valuable. For instance we hear a great deal about the gift of tongues, and many people imagine that this is the most important gift of all. Often such individuals say to me, “Brother, do you have the Holy Spirit?”

I say, “Yes, I have. I believe the gospel, and that tells me that upon believing I was ‘sealed with that holy Spirit of promise’“ (Ephesians 1:13).

“Well then,” they say, “can you speak in tongues?”

“Well, I speak a little English, and a very, very little Chinese, but I had to study hard to learn those languages.”

“But that is not it,” they say. “Can you speak in tongues in the power of the Spirit?” They mean some strange language that I have never learned, and they tell me

that speaking it is the supreme evidence of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But notice the order in which the gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28: “God hath set some in the church, first apostles.” And where do we have their ministry today? In the blessed Word of God. Their voices have long since been silenced, but the witness still goes on and through their written ministry they will abide in the church until the end of time. Linked with the apostles are the prophets and they too have long since been silenced in the primary sense. Luke and Mark (who were not apostles as Matthew and John were) were prophets who gave us their written ministry and went home to Heaven. And so we are told that the church of the living God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Next observe that in the third place are teachers. The teacher is one of the special gifts that God has given to the church. If I could ask for only one gift, there are two that I would find very difficult to choose between. If the Lord were to say to me, as He did to Solomon, “Ask what I shall give thee”—if He were to say, “I am going to give you any gift that you want to use for the blessing of a needy world and the blessing of My people”—I would have difficulty in choosing between the gift of an evangelist and that of a teacher of the Word.

My heart yearns to be able to preach the gospel in a way that will grip dying men and women and bring them face to face with the realities of eternity. The gift of an evangelist is one of the greatest of all. On the other hand, when I see how the people of God are bewildered, misled, and “carried about with every wind of

doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14), I realize how much they need careful, thoughtful Biblical instruction. My heart cries out, "O God, help me to feed Thy people; give me the gift of teaching in order that I may open Thy Word to Thy people." After all, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). And so I crave the gift of the teacher.

The teacher is not someone who gives men his own thoughts; he is not someone who makes up beautiful essays, which he calls sermons. He is someone who expounds the Word of God. Our Lord Jesus described the teacher in a wonderful way when He said, "Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matthew 13:52). The treasure house is the Word of God.

The other day I heard a widely-advertised man telling ministers how to preach. He is thought of as an outstanding religious leader, but although I listened carefully for nearly an hour, I did not hear him quote one verse of Scripture. Instead he quoted from Shakespeare, from George Bernard Shaw, and from a number of trashy novels, and he drew his illustrations from ancient and modern literature. If preachers have to listen to that kind of teacher, it is no wonder they deliver sermons that never could convert one poor sinner.

Scripture says, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psalm 119:130). The apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, said, "Preach the word… For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts

shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:2-3). The teacher is the man who calls the people of God back to the Book and opens up the Word of God to them.

One of our well-known American pulpit orators stated that expository preaching is the poorest type of preaching in the world because it leaves so little scope for the imagination. Thank God for any kind of preaching that leaves little scope for man's imagination, because the Word of God says, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). It ought to be the earnest desire of the real minister of Christ to subject himself to the Word so that all unholy imagining might be cast down and only the solemn serious truth of God be brought to bear on the minds of people. God give us teachers of the Bible!

Any minister who is troubled by empty pews ought to begin to dig into the Book and teach the Word, and then he will soon draw the people—-just as a good cup of coffee will draw customers to a restaurant. I know two young ladies who, not knowing what to do to support themselves after they graduated from college, opened up a wee restaurant on a little side street in my old hometown of Oakland, California. The dining room was so small that only about seven people could sit down at one time. I went over to sample their cooking and found that their coffee was different from what most lunchrooms served, so I went back to my bookroom and said to the other workers, "If you want a good cup of coffee, go to such and such a place." The next day people were standing outside waiting for the seven

inside to finish their lunch. Soon the girls had to rent the place next to them. The last time I was in Oakland, they had a great big restaurant serving hundreds of people. The word had gone out: “You can always get a good cup of coffee and excellent things to eat there.” So if people can tell their friends, “You can always get the Word of God in that church, for that minister gives you the truth of God to refresh your soul,” there won’t be any problem with empty pews.

I heard a minister suggest to a group of pastors: “One thing that will help boost attendance is different colored lights; people will come from far and wide to see the special effects. Then you can do so much with rhythmic dancing. And movies will draw a crowd to your night service. Some of you may not approve of such modern ideas, but I say you have to take your choice between empty pews and up-to-date methods.” But he was wrong; we do not have to make any such choice. The church of God does not exist for the amusement of people. If the Book is presented in simplicity and in the power of the Holy Spirit, people will come, for they are ready to listen to the Word of God. Ministers should fill their own minds with the truth of God and then give it to others.

Having mentioned apostles, prophets, and teachers, Paul wrote, “After that miracles, then gifts of healings.” Some people may have expected the verse to read, “First of all, miracles,” but Paul said, “After that miracles.”

I am not a miracle worker and do not pretend to be. I have prayed with a great many sick people and some of them have been healed very quickly, but I do not possess the gift of healing. To pray for people is one thing; to

have the gift of healing is another. If a lame man were here and I turned to him and said, “In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk,” and in a moment he sprang to his feet and became whole, that would be evidence of the gift of healing. That would be working a miracle. I have seen some people throw away crutches, but I have heard that they came back for them a week or two later. And so I say of the gifts of miracles and healing: the Lord may give such gifts, and if He does I will thank Him for them, but I do not know of anyone with these gifts at the present time.

The next gift, “helps,” is something we can all understand, and here it is linked with “governments.” Accordingly, other passages of Scripture imply that both these gifts are characteristic of the officers of the church—that is, its deacons and elders. A true deacon is a help; he is one who can help in all the temporal and business affairs of the church. A true elder is one who has spiritual discernment and can govern in the church of God. What a wonderful thing it is when a church is really gifted of the Lord with “helps” and “governments”! What a pitiful thing it is when a church is bereft of these gifts! The word deacon means “servant,” but there are too many deacons who are deacons in name only; they are not the ministering servants that they should be. There are too many elders who are elders in name only; they are not real guides and helps to the church of God.

Finally Paul mentioned “diversities of tongues.” He placed it last of all in this list of gifts, as though it is to be accounted of as least of all. And why is that? Because anybody with a little intelligence can learn a new language, and in most instances it is better for him to do

that than to receive it miraculously. One may say the same about receiving the truth of God. God could give everyone a sudden illumination so that we might have amazing insight into His truth, but He does not choose to give it in that way. He says, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God” (2 Timothy 2:15). There are too many Christians today who would like to have everything predigested. They would like not to have to go to any trouble to get the truth into their inmost systems. But God does not want us to learn His truth in an easy way; He wants us to study His Word.

After listing the gifts, Paul asked a series of questions. “Are all apostles?” Admittedly, no. (I do not know of any apostles in the full sense today.) “Are all prophets?” Again the answer is no. (There may be prophets today, but they are very few, and as far as I know there are none in the full sense.) “Are all teachers?” Again the answer is no (but there are people whom God has thus gifted today). “Are all workers of miracles?” No. (I know of very few indeed, if any.) “Have all the gifts of healing?” No (and whether there are any who have the gift today, I cannot say). “Do all speak with tongues?” No (and none in the Biblical sense). “Do all interpret?” They do not.

We are not to be concerned if we do not have all these gifts, but we are to “covet earnestly the best gifts.” We are to seek those gifts that are for the edification of the church of God. But if it does not please God to give us any of these gifts, He will still show us the “more excellent way.” These final words of chapter 12 lead us right into the wonderful “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13. The greatest gift of all is to have the Spirit of God dwelling in us and shedding abroad the love of God in

our hearts so that we reveal the love of Christ. There is something more excellent than signs and wonders, for "though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." A poor little Irish boy started going to classes at a small mission near his neighborhood in the lower part of Manhattan in New York. He got a great deal out of the lessons and attended regularly. But by and by when his folks made more money, they moved from that section of the city. They said, "Now, Patrick, you must attend one of the more stylish churches," and they enrolled him in a new Sunday school. The little fellow attended two times, but the third week he was found way down near the Battery sitting in the mission Sunday school. When he got back home, his folks said, "O Pat, why didn't you go to the nice church?"

"I wanted to go back to the other Sunday school," he said. "But why did you want to go back there?" He hesitated and they said, "Come, tell us why." "Well," he said, "they love a fellow down there." Love is what brought him miles downtown to the simple little mission. It is a great testimony for any church, assembly, mission, or Sunday school when people can say not only that the Word of God is preached there, but also that "they love a fellow" there.

This divine love is not something that is pumped up out of the natural heart; it is divinely given. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). When we confess our sins and put our hearts' trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as our own Savior, we are born of God and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, and thus the love of Christ shines forth in our lives.

Chapter Thirteen The Love Chapter

In between chapter 12, which discusses the gifts that the risen Christ gave to His church, and chapter 14, which deals with the use of those gifts, chapter 13 reveals the spirit in which the gifts are to be exercised. Someone has said that 1 Corinthians 13 is “the divine smithy”; the phrase alludes to the furnace in the blacksmith’s shop where the tools of chapter 12 are heated red-hot to be properly used in chapter 14.

In chapter 13 the apostle emphasized the importance of love, not only in the life of the servant of God, but also in the lives of all Christians. A gift without love is a poor thing. One might preach with great clarity and even eloquence, but if there is no love behind his message, he would be almost wasting words. It is love that pleases God.

The word translated “charity” in the King James version refers not to the good works and kindness that we associate with charity today, but to the root and source of those good deeds: love. There are three well-known Greek words that we translate as “love”: eros, phileo„, and agape„. If you are familiar with Greek mythology, you will recognize Eros at once as the name of the god of love, the son of Aphrodite. Eros is the word ordinarily used in classical Greek for love between the sexes, the love of sweethearts, the love of husband for wife and wife for husband. Phileo„, a broader word speaking of a kindly, friendly affection, is generally employed in reference to the love of friends. It also refers to the love of parents for children and of children for parents and the love of citizens for the country to which they belong.

The third word, agape„, speaks of a higher type of love, a love that is all-absorbing, a love that completely dominates one's whole being. This is the word that Paul used in chapter 13.

It is significant that in the writing of the New Testament the Spirit of God seemed to forbid the use of the word eros. It is found frequently in the writings of the Greek poets and philosophers, but never in the New Testament. This word had been so abused and degraded by the Greeks that God, as it were, stood over His Book and said to those who were writing, "Do not put that word in here; it is too capable of being utterly misunderstood. I do not want that word in My Book, for so many vile things have been linked with it." Eros had been so misused that it was not even right to think of it as expressing the true love of a chaste wife and good husband. So God did not allow eros to have any place in the New Testament.

Phileo„ occurs in its verbal form in many places in the New Testament, but only in reference to human friendliness, kindly feelings, or brotherly love. In reference to that which is divine, the Holy Spirit chose most carefully and used agape„. "God is agape„"—"God is love"—in the highest, most utterly unselfish sense. This word is used in the New Testament for God's love to us, for our love to God, and for the love we have for anything we put in place of God. We are warned against the love (agape„) of the world, for some men devote themselves wholly and completely to obtaining money and to the things of the world and thus make gods of the world and money.

We can readily see how beautifully Paul's choice of words brings before us an absolutely holy love that ought to be supreme in our lives. This divine love is not that which is in the heart of the natural man; it is not a love that a person can pump up out of his own heart if he is not a child of God; agape„ is not there. He or she may have phileo„. A poor heathen mother loves her child and may even love her husband. Unsaved men and women love their country. They usually love those who love them in this lesser sense, but it is only when they have been born of God that they love in the higher sense represented in 1 Corinthians 13.

We read in 1 John 4:7, "Every one that loveth [agapao„] is born of God." If the word phileo„ had been used there, you might say that every mother who loves her children, every patriot who loves his country is born of God. But that is not true. Agape„, the completely unselfish divine love, is the portion of only those who are regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. "The love [agape„] of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5).

The Value of Love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Paul warned against substituting mere talent for love: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." A preacher might be so talented that he could stir his audience to deepest emotion, but not accomplish anything for God. Apart from divine love, the eloquence of an angel would not reach the needy hearts of men.

Paul continued, "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge…and have

not charity…" You may ask, "Is it possible to have the gift of prophecy and not have love?" Oh yes! They said of Saul, who was not a child of God, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Samuel 10:11-12) When associating with prophets, he talked like a prophet; when associating with the world, he talked like a worldling.

Then there is the tragic case of Balaam, to whom God actually gave the gift of foresight. Balaam was able to look down through the years and utter marvelous prophecies, yet his heart was motivated by covetousness. He wanted Balak's money and therefore desired to curse Israel—but the Lord forbade him. Balaam said, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?" and then made the predictions recorded in Numbers 23-24. Since his words have proven true, we know that he had the gift of prophecy, but he certainly did not have love. His mere intelligence was illuminated by the Spirit. Balaam prayed, "Let me die the death of the righteous," but he died under the judgment of God because he was never regenerated. What an empty thing the gift of prophecy is without love!

Paul went on, "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Of course here he was speaking not of saving faith, but of the gift of faith mentioned in chapter 12. He was saying, "Even if God gave me faith that could scatter the hills, without love I would be nothing." It is absolutely impossible for any man to produce such love (agape, not mere sentiment) in himself apart from divine grace. Thus how solemn are the words of our Lord Jesus: "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7)!

A minister was leaving his church for another pastorate. He was one of those modern, up-to-date preachers who say a lot of sweet nothings that can neither hurt a flea nor do anyone any good. On his last Sunday a young man came up to him and said, “Pastor, I am so sorry we are going to lose you. When you came to us three years ago, I did not care for God, man, or the devil, but since listening to your beautiful sermons, I have learned to love them all.” That is the kind of sentiment that passes for love these days, but it is not what Paul was speaking of. The apostle was referring to a love that is the result of divine life in the soul, a love that is absolutely unselfish.

He continued, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” You may say, “But I can’t give my goods to feed the poor if I don’t love them.” Oh yes, you can. You can do it because you want people to see you doing it. The Pharisees of old did their alms that way; they blew trumpets to attract attention to their giving and “verily… they have their reward” (Matthew 6:1-2). There was no love in their giving. It was merely hypocrisy. So we see the uniqueness of love; it is distinct from mere charity, as we use the word today.

Even if someone is a religious zealot so wedded to an idea that he is willing to die for it, he may not be motivated by real love. Of course it was the love of Christ that enabled the early Christian martyrs to go to the stake; it was the love of Christ that enabled those devoted believers to face the lions. Having a song of love in their hearts, they were ready to die for Jesus’ sake. But it is quite possible to die for an idea, to yield one’s

body to the stake because of some great principle, yet have no real love in the heart.

The Character of Love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

What is the character of this love of which Paul was speaking? How can we know it? How can we recognize it when we see it? To answer these questions, we will examine verses 4-7 phrase by phrase, and as we do, think of Paul's words as a pen portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ. In these verses we can see our blessed Savior moving about in this world as He fulfills His mission of love. In fact we can substitute the word "Christ" each time the word "charity" occurs:

Christ suffereth long, and is kind; Christ envieth not; Christ vaunteth not Himself, is not puffed up, doth not behave Himself unseemly, seeketh not His own, is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

This character sketch of the Lord Jesus Christ can be taken as a divine picture of what every man ought to be. It tells me that only as Christ dwells in me, can I display these characteristics and truly say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

If I dare to say that not until this character sketch is true of me am I really fit for a place with God in Heaven, I might sink into utter despair, for I never could measure up to this portrait. There is so much in my heart of self,

evil, and unholiness, but as I receive Christ as my personal Savior, as I put my trust in Him who died because of man's selfishness, sin, and unholiness, I am born again of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, and Christ comes to dwell in my heart by faith. Now to the degree that I yield myself to Him, He lives out His wonderful life through me, and thus I am able to demonstrate the love that is revealed in 1 Corinthians 13.

This love "suffereth long." It does not become impatient when tried, wronged, or misunderstood. When people disapprove, love moves on just as sweetly and graciously as when people do approve. Love "suffereth long, and is kind." How much we need to realize that! Ella Wheeler Wilcox expressed a pretty sentiment about kindness, but it is not altogether true:

So many gods, so many creeds,

So many ways that wind and wind,

While just the art of being kind

Is all this poor world needs.

The world needs a great deal more than that. It needs God; it needs Christ. But the world does need people who can be kind. The kindness of God is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ, but I am afraid many Christians are not always very kind.

An old Scottish preacher had in his congregation some folks who imagined that they had attained a spiritual experience far beyond that of the majority of the members; they imagined that all inbred sin had been removed from their very beings and that they had achieved a state of perfect holiness. Because they were

so holy, they were extremely critical of other people and harsh in their judgments. The minister was not much of a theologian and was not able to counter their doctrinal arguments, but when he heard them censoring others, he would lean over the pulpit and say, “Remember, if you are not very kind, you are not very holy, because holiness and kindness cannot be separated.”

Paul continued, “Charity envieth not.” He meant that love is never jealous. Did it ever occur to you that jealousy implies selfishness? Love delights to see another honored and esteemed. Of course there is a holy jealousy. The Lord is a jealous God; He would have us altogether for Himself. But a carnal jealousy makes us unhappy when others are preferred before us. Jesus always took the lowest place and was content to be despised and rejected.

Then too, love “vaunteth not itself.” In plain English, love never brags. Love never exalts itself or its ability; it never tries to draw attention to itself.

Love “is not puffed up.” Paul said in 8:1 that “knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth.” I may think I know a great deal more than other people and so become puffed up or conceited. But real love does not puff up; it builds up.

Love “doth not behave itself unseemly” or literally “is never boorish.” The finest gentleman in the world is the man who knows Christ best. I remember reading a history of the world written by an Englishman about the year 1600. The author, when dealing with the reign of Caesar Augustus, said, “In his days, there was born in Bethlehem of Judea that goodly gentleman, Jesus Christ.” Taken aback, I thought, I do not know whether I like that. But when I stopped to analyze it, I thought,

What words could have more truly described the life of my Lord here on earth?

What is a gentleman? Is he someone born heir to a vast estate? Is he someone who has the right to put a title before his name? Not necessarily. A man might be heir to millions but be a perfect boor. On the other hand, a man might be the poorest of the poor, yet be controlled by divine love and so be a perfect gentleman. Have you ever noticed the refining influence of the Lord Jesus Christ? Watch a man brought out of the gutter and saved by grace, and see how the Spirit of God quiets him and transforms him until his whole character becomes different. Love never behaves in an "unseemly" ill-mannered way.

Love "seeketh not her own." The apostle's word to the quarreling Christians in Philippi was, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4). When divine love controls the heart, the rule will be "others first" instead of "self first."

Love "is not easily provoked." Ephesians 4:26 says, "Be ye angry, and sin not." A Puritan once remarked, "I am determined so to be angry as not to sin; therefore to be angry with nothing but sin." Sin may well stir my indignation, but love "is not easily provoked." Was Christ ever provoked? Oh yes. About what? About the wickedness, the sin, the hypocrisy of men. When, because of their pretended regard for the sanctity of the sabbath, they would have hindered His healing the poor man with the withered hand, Jesus "looked round about on them with anger" (Mark 3:5). There is an anger that is divine, but Christ was not easily provoked.

Love “thinketh no evil.” How apt we are to make snap judgments of people. If you were to say, “I think everything she does is done ostentatiously,” I would reply, “What right do you have to be thinking those things? Love credits people with the best possible motives.”

Love “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things.” If something happens that could be construed to be very bad, Love says, “Could I put a better construction on that? I will not give what I saw a negative interpretation if I can possibly think of a positive one. I will hope for the best. I will never be guilty of marring a brother’s or a sister’s reputation because of something said or done that looks unwise to me, yet might be innocent.” That is love.

Finally, love “endureth all things.” It is willing to suffer, for that is the character of love.

The Permanence of Love (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

Everything else may disappear, but love will remain. Love “never faileth.” Prophecy will be fulfilled eventually and tongues will “cease,” but love will continue forever. We do not know exactly when tongues passed away from the church, but as already noted we have no evidence that there are men today who have the ability to preach in languages they have never learned. The word translated “cease” is a very strong term. Paul knew that the day would come when the gift of tongues would no longer be seen, but love would remain. Knowledge too “shall vanish away.” In the sense that we have it now, knowledge is only a partial thing at best and it will

vanish away in the light of the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto Him.

Paul explained, “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” Then he used a little illustration comparing the present with the days of our childhood, and our glorious future with the years of maturity: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

I wonder whether that is actually true of all of us. Are we all through with childish ways? I am afraid that some of us are quite childish still. I know fully grown men and women who profess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but who still have a great many characteristics of children. Let them have their own way and they are perfectly delightful to get along with, but cross them and they pout like little children.

May I make a plea for true Christian manhood and womanhood in the matter of praise? One thing that often grieves my own heart is mat mere are so few Christian people content to do their duty as God shows it to them without human praise. If we are men and women in Christ who have “put away childish things” and are doing what is right, what difference does it make whether men praise us or blame us?

If we have “put away childish things,” in one sense we have reached adulthood. But we must confess that we are still in our childhood if we compare our present state with the glorious maturity that will be ours when our Lord returns and we are fully conformed to His image. Some day we will be just like Him.

But now, Paul said, “we see though a glass, darkly.” There were no glass windows in his day. There was a crude kind of glass, but it could not be used for windows. Sometimes people used a very thin pressed-out horn or an almost transparent crystal, and that may be what Paul was referring to, but in all likelihood he had a brass mirror in mind. You can see enough in a brass mirror to know whether your hat is on straight, but you cannot see what your complexion is like. So the apostle was saying that we are just like folk looking at themselves in a brass mirror. We see nothing now as we will see it when we see “face to face.”

“Now I know in part.” I know some things through the revelation that God has given—and thank God for that. How little I would know without it! But there are still many things about which He has not yet given me information. How many questions there are that even the Bible does not answer! “But then shall I know even as also I am known.” If I were to use the exact tense of the original, I would say, “Even as also I have been known.” I will know others and I will know all mysteries in that coming day, even as God knows me now and has known me down through all the years.

“Now abideth faith” because “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). “Now abideth… hope” because I am living in hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto Him. “Now abideth… charity” because love is the result of divine life. “But the greatest of these”—even at the present moment here on earth, even before I enter eternity—is love.

God grant that we may demonstrate the love of Christ through yielding ourselves wholly to Him so that He may live out His life in us! Then when faith has changed to glad fruition, when our most wonderful hopes have all been accomplished, when we stand face to face with our blessed Lord, love will remain throughout all the ages to come. We will understand then what we cannot understand now: the love that moved the heart of God and led Him to send His only begotten Son into this dark world that we might live through Him. What a wonderful thing to know Christ! Let us go out and live Him before men.

Chapter Fourteen The Exercise Of Gifts

In chapter 12 we considered the diverse gifts of the Spirit, who gives them “to every man severally as he will.” In this matter the Holy Spirit is sovereign. No one has the right to demand that he be given any particular gift or gifts as an evidence of the Spirit’s baptism. What He gives will be for the edification of the church as a whole, not for the enjoyment or aggrandizement of some individual.

While we are not told of any specific time limit, we know both from Scripture and church history that most of the so-called miraculous gifts passed away shortly after the Bible was completed. They are not needed now as they were at the beginning. If the Spirit so wills, He might give them today under special circumstances, but we need not be surprised if we do not see them being exercised. These signs served their purpose, a very useful one: when they followed the initial proclamation of the truth, they authenticated the message as divine. Now with God’s complete revelation in our hands, we do not require signs to prove it is the Word of the Lord; when preached in power, the Word authenticates itself.

In chapter 13 we learned that apart from love, the gifts are useless. Love is the evidence of the indwelling of the divine nature. Romans 5:5 tells us that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

In chapter 14 we will read about the gifts being exercised in love for the edifying of the body of Christ.

A Gift to Covet (1 Corinthians 14:1-25)

“Follow after charity,” Paul wrote, “and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.” As a member of the body of Christ I should desire to be a means of blessing to my brothers and sisters in the Lord, and to be used of God in proclaiming the gospel to a lost world. I can only do this right as I am filled with the Spirit and gifted by Him in some special way.

It is therefore quite in keeping with my Christian profession to seek to be at my best for God. Worldly ambition is obnoxious and unholy, but there is a laudable ambition, and that is to desire spiritual gifts. But I must be sure that I exercise my gifts in love. Every gift is given for the blessing of the whole assembly, and not in any sense for the glory of the individual possessing that gift.

In the church of God as a whole and in the local assembly of believers gathered together as a worshiping company, there is no place for mere carnal display. If I am gifted of God in preaching the gospel, I am not to take advantage of that to exhibit my abilities ostentatiously or to gather people about myself. If I have been gifted of God to sing the fine old gospel songs that people enjoy hearing so much, I am not to use that talent to attract attention to myself or my voice; I am to use my gift to give out a message that, winged by melody, will move human hearts that the spoken word might not reach. If I am gifted of God to teach the Holy Scriptures, I am not to take advantage of that gift by exercising people’s minds about strange and perplexing problems in order to make them think that I am more educated than most men; I am to make things as plain

and simple as possible so that the saints may receive edification. This is the standard for using the gifts that God has given. All are to be exercised in love.

The apostle singled out prophecy as a gift that we should earnestly covet. If you read the seventeen prophetic books of the Old Testament, you will be surprised to find how small a portion of those writings is devoted to foretelling future events. There are indeed many most remarkable predictions that have been fulfilled to the utmost detail down through the centuries; and there are many more that are yet to be fulfilled. But a larger portion of the prophetic books is concerned with bringing home the truth of God to the hearts and consciences of His people.

There is a difference between the teacher and the prophet. The teacher expounds the Scriptures and illuminates the mind and understanding. The prophet brings the truth home to the heart and conscience in a way that causes people to examine themselves before God. As a teacher I might take this letter of Paul and through divine help be able to expound it so that my hearers would thoroughly understand just what it is that the Spirit of God is saying, yet their consciences might not be affected in the least degree. I might be able to edify my students intellectually, but their hearts might not really be lifted to God. However, if I had the gift of prophecy, I could take exactly the same passage of Scripture and, as the Spirit of God enabled me, so impress the hearts and consciences of my hearers that they would go away to a secret place, kneel down, search themselves, and ask God to help them live the truth that they have been learning. That is the highest form of ministry.

Paul went on to contrast the gift of prophecy with one of the "show gifts," the gift of tongues. Suppose that I as a native of an English-speaking land had the ability to learn and speak one of the many dialects of the Chinese language; and suppose that, endeavoring to exercise the wonderful gift the Spirit of God had given me, I poured out my heart in public in Chinese. At once my English-speaking congregation would say, "We cannot understand a word that he is saying." I might be quite happy and perfectly self-satisfied to think that I was able to use such a remarkable gift, but others would not understand me unless they were Chinese. So you see the gift of speaking in tongues is not for one's home assembly of Christians; it is for the missionfield. Let the gift of speaking Chinese, for example, be exercised where that tongue is spoken. Do not get up in a church service and take the time of God's people by speaking in a language that they cannot understand.

"He that speaketh in an unknown tongue…speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." Notice the three aspects of the spiritual ministry of the prophet:

First, the man who is divinely gifted to give a message from God speaks to men for their edification. They get something from the message for their spiritual good. If I am able to open up the Word of God to you in a way that instructs and feeds your soul, then you are edified. It is a great thing to build up God's people.

The second aspect of the prophet's ministry is exhortation. How you and I need the message of exhortation! We are so apt to slumber in our spiritual lives. An exhortation is something to awaken, something

to arouse the one who has gone to sleep or become apathetic. How the Word of God arouses the conscience! I know some folks do not like that kind of Bible teaching, but the faithful servant of God will cause men to seek after God and will show them their true state as God Himself sees it.

The third aspect of prophetic ministry is comfort and encouragement, and how much you and I need comfort! When addressing a group of theology students, the great London preacher Dr. Joseph Parker said, “Young gentlemen, always preach to broken hearts, and you will never lack for an audience.” How many broken and bereaved hearts there are! So many things come home cruelly to the heart—distressing financial circumstances, ill health, trouble in one’s own family. God’s people need the word of encouragement.

The apostle did not want to slight the gift of tongues, but he told the Corinthians that he wished “rather that [they] prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.” If anyone had the gift of tongues, Paul wanted him to use it to the glory of God.

The person who speaks in an unknown tongue enjoys it, but no one else does. The same would be true if I were to try to sing a solo. I love to sing. Out in the woods or on the mountainside I just let myself go and delight myself in singing. However, if I were to do that in a choir, I might put someone else out of tune. And if I were to sing a solo, I might enjoy it thoroughly, but you would not, and there would be good reason. Likewise if one speaks in tongues he edifies himself, but others are not

edified. Do not covet a gift that makes you as selfish as that.

Let me point out that the word “unknown,” which occurs before “tongues” many times in this chapter, is in italics because it does not represent anything in the original text. Strictly speaking, the apostle was not thinking of unknown tongues, but of definite languages. The miracle of Pentecost was that the eleven apostles were empowered to preach the gospel in languages they had never learned, so that all who listened heard the message “in [their] own tongue, wherein [they] were born” (Acts 2:8). I know of nothing like this happening today.

The Corinthians were anxious to have the showy gifts of the Spirit, the gifts that would attract widespread attention. They were particularly interested in speaking in tongues. Through this remarkable gift the gospel was spread in a wonderful way in the earliest period of the church of God. Speaking in tongues was nothing like the rhapsody that people give way to when they utter weird sounds; those strange sounds may in truth be called “unknown” tongues, for they are unknown to Heaven or earth. The tongues Paul referred to were definite languages. Thus we can see at once why the apostle rebuked the display of such a gift when there were no people present who could understand the language. The gifted man would get a great thrill from speaking in a language that was incomprehensible to others, but there would be no blessing to the church.

We have no record that Paul ever had to learn the languages in which he spoke to the people. He spoke to the Greeks in their own language, to the Romans in

theirs, to the Hebrews in theirs, and to the various barbarians in the tongues to which they were accustomed. If he spoke to the Corinthians in the language of another land, he would not be edifying them unless he gave them an interpretation or the Spirit of God enabled someone else to interpret. Similarly no one can understand what song is being played if a piano does not give “a distinction in the sounds.” If a trumpeter goes ahead of the army, but plays notes that nobody can understand, the soldiers are unable to respond.

Paul said, “So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.” I think the apostle was not only referring to the misuse of the gift of tongues; he was also rebuking the vanity of ministers who delight to use the pulpit as a place to display their education and culture, and the tendency of preachers to use language that is far above the heads of the people to whom they are ministering. Charles Spurgeon said, “I am afraid that many of my ministerial brethren must imagine that when Scripture tells them to ‘Feed My sheep,’ it means ‘Feed My giraffes,’ for they put the food so high that people would have to be giraffes to reach it.” Shepherds should always put the food down where the sheep can get it. It should be the ambition of the preacher of the Word to use language so simple and so plain that everyone can understand.

In one of the churches where I preached, a lady accompanied by a boy about ten years of age came up to me and said, “I want my little grandson to meet you. I hope you won’t be offended if I tell you what he said. I had been talking about you and he wanted to hear you

speak, so I brought him tonight. After the service he said to me, 'Why, Grandma, he is not a great preacher; I could understand every word he said.'"

I replied, "Well, my dear madam, I consider that a great compliment. I hope you will always pray that when I stand up to minister the Word, I will speak in such a way that the youngest child as well as the oldest saint may understand every word. If they do not understand, I am just speaking 'into the air.'"

The apostle noted that there are many different voices in the world and all of them have some significance, but if the person listening does not understand the significance, the voices accomplish nothing. If Paul spoke in a tongue that others did not understand, he would be like a barbarian to them and they would seem like barbarians to him. He said to the Corinthians, "Forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church." In other words, "Try to get from God that which will be the greatest blessing to the people to whom you minister."

Even when we pray, we are to speak with our understanding as well as our spirits. I may have within me a great urge and a great sense of need, and I might express it in foreign sounds, but I would not be praying with my understanding; the apostle repudiated anything like that. People recited long prayers in Latin in the early days, but they did not understand Latin. Their spirits may have been prayerful, but their understanding was unfruitful. The Reformation brought back the use of people's native tongues in addressing God and in the worship of God so that their understanding might keep up with their spirits. Certainly I should pray with the

spirit; my inmost being must be aroused. But “I will pray with the understanding also.”

We should understand what we sing as well and therefore it is important to sing hymns that express Scriptural truth. Some people think that a song is suitable because they like the tune, but they forget that the words may not be in agreement with Scripture at all. On the other hand, some people think that any song is suitable if the words are from the Bible, but they forget that the Psalms for example were written before redemption was accomplished. There are many lovely things in the Psalms that can be used to express the worship and praise of our hearts, but we are to sing from the standpoint of people who have already been redeemed. I won’t sing, “Turn away Thy wrath,” because divine wrath has been turned from me. It fell on my Substitute and therefore I am saved from judgment. There should not be any question about our relationship with God. If we do not understand this, we will always be confused.

We are also to give thanks in an understandable way. In the early church when a man gave thanks, the rest were to say, “Amen,” but how could they do that if they did not understand what he was saying? He might give thanks well with his spirit, but the others would not be edified.

Paul said to the Corinthians, “I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all.” He was not boasting, just stating a fact. Then the apostle qualified his statement by saying in effect, “I would rather speak five words in a language you can understand, than ten thousand words in a foreign language.” When he went out to the barbarians, he was glad to talk to them in

their native tongue, but when he came into the assembly in Corinth, he would not speak to them in the language of the barbarians.

I know some dear people who, I am sorry to say, would rather speak five words in an absolutely unknown tongue than ten thousand words in good, plain English. They wish they could feel the thrill of some power taking hold of them so that they could speak in some weird language that no one could understand! Their wish is really a selfish desire to have something that other people do not have. The folk that are running after these things are like children. Paul wanted the Corinthians to have the understanding of men, yet the sweet, kindly spirit of children. “Be not children in understanding,” he said. “In understanding be men.”

Going back to the book of Isaiah, the apostle showed how the prophet had to reprove Israel. Referring to 28:11 Paul said, “It is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.” God was saying through Isaiah, “I will send Gentiles to speak to Israel,” and for more than nineteen hundred years, He has proclaimed the gospel to the Jews through converted Gentiles. Thus tongues became a sign to those unbelievers that it was the Spirit of God that was working in power in His messengers.

Then Paul stressed again the value of prophecy. He said in effect, “Suppose the whole congregation comes together in one place and everybody is able to speak with tongues; one after another, they stand up and speak in strange languages. Suppose also that unsaved people come in. They would go away saying, ‘What a lot of

lunatics they are! I could not understand a word.' But if, exercising the gift of prophecy, the servants of God clearly proclaim His truth in the power of the Spirit, the unsaved would be convicted, the careless would be awakened, and the anxious—realizing that God is speaking through human lips to their souls—would be led into assurance."

Order in the Assembly (1 Corinthians 14:26-40)

We will now consider the practical aspects of the exercise of gifts in the public assemblies of the people of God. As you read these verses, which speak of order in the early churches, I think you will instinctively feel that we know very little today of their way of worship. This surely ought to lead us to examine our own ways, to see how far we have departed from the simplicity of primitive Christianity.

I do not mean to imply that there is not a certain amount of liberty given in Scripture to adapt ourselves and the order of our meetings to the times in which we live and to the recognized customs prevailing among different races and nations. It is clear that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of liberty, and He does not seek to press everyone into one mold. He is the Spirit of a sound mind and He expects us to use God-given common sense in carrying out the work of the Lord and in ordering our assemblies.

But Paul laid down certain principles that should govern us when we are gathered together for worship and the ministry of the Word. It is God who gathers His people around His blessed Son, our risen Lord, who said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). While

these words had reference originally, as the context shows, to a prayer meeting, they really apply to all assemblies of the saints of God, whether they come together for worship, for ministry, or for intercession. On such occasions all should be subject to the Holy Spirit's direction.

With the practical application of his principles in mind, Paul asked the Corinthians: "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." Because of the liberty they had in Christ, those early Christians were in the habit of participating in the meetings as their own feelings prompted them and the result was confusion. The apostle showed that all things should be done in an orderly and godly manner and with the edification of the whole company in view, not the personal enjoyment of some gifted individuals.

Several people must not speak in tongues at the same time and if there is no interpreter, they should not speak at all. Someone might say, "It is the Lord who has given me the gift of tongues, so I must speak out in meeting." But this does not necessarily follow, for "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Paul made it plain that even if one has such a gift, if he cannot interpret, he must remain silent in the church. The fact that a tongue might be interpreted shows that a tongue is a definite language.

People may prophesy, but not more than three in one service. "Ye may all prophesy one by one," Paul said. If one person is speaking and another has something to

say, the first should wait until the other is through, “for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.”

“Let the prophets speak,” the apostle said, “and let the other judge.” Paul was speaking here of judging in the sense of discerning. Those who listen to the prophesying are to weigh all that they hear carefully before God. None of us has a right to say, “This is the truth of God and I demand a hearing.” Our Lord Himself urged the people to search the Scriptures. The preacher is to speak; the people are to listen and then compare what they hear with the Word.

So there are several situations in which a person should keep silent. If someone wants to speak in tongues, but there is no interpreter, he is to “keep silence [sigao„].” If a prophet is speaking and another has something to share, Paul said, “Let the first hold his peace [sigao„].” And then the apostle said something over which there has been a great deal of controversy in the church of God, though there should not be: “Let your women keep silence [sigao„] in the churches.” Surely Paul meant exactly the same thing here as in the other two instances.

By “churches” Paul did not mean buildings. He was not telling us that no woman could give a testimony or offer prayer in a religious building. The word translated “churches” means “assemblies.” He was saying, “When you are gathered together in your regular church service, let the women keep silent in the assembly.” Some have objected that Paul was an old bachelor and did not like women, but we need to remember that he was the inspired servant of God and wrote as directed by the Holy Spirit.

In 11:5 Paul referred to women praying in some other sphere, but in 14:34-35 Paul was referring to the official meeting of the church when all are gathered together as a worshiping company. The women are not to seek to teach at such a time, or if the women hear something they do not understand, they are not to interrupt the meeting by inquiring aloud. Paul said, “Let them ask their husbands at home.” One lady said to me, “Well, that is not meant for me; I have no husband.” But the word translated “husbands” here is elsewhere rendered “men.”

Neither men nor women were to interrupt in a public assembly. Instead they should discuss things at home if there is something they do not understand. In these days it is often the men who do not understand and they ask the women at home! It should be noted that in those early days only a comparatively few women could read or write. We have to take into consideration the time when the Epistle was written; slavery and debasement of women were common. But I think the principle is clear enough.

The Word of God has come to us, and we are not to decide what we are going to accept or reject. God Himself speaks with authority and we are to do as He commands. Paul’s instructions that we have just been reading in this passage are the commandments of the Lord. Lest there be any misunderstanding, the apostle wrote, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” Anyone who objected, Paul put down among those who are ill-taught. Such an ignorant man should confess that

he does not understand rather than pretend to be wiser than those who obey the injunction of the Lord.

I realize that there has been a great deal of controversy over this passage, but it is one that the Spirit of God has given for the edification of the whole church, and we always find our greatest blessing when we are subject to His direction. Sometimes we think that we can improve on what God has commanded, but we may be sure that His ways are always best. This is not only true in the assembly of God, but in all details of every individual life.

Women have a wide sphere for service and testimony outside of the worship meeting of the assembly. The home is pre-eminently the woman's sphere, but in social gatherings too she has abundant opportunity to witness for Christ. And no one is better equipped to work among children and to help her own sex than a godly well-instructed woman. In visitation work, in the sickroom, and elsewhere, her services are invaluable. If God has restricted her by forbidding her to usurp the place of pastor or teacher in the public assembly, He is not slighting her gifts or ignoring the value of her service. He knows best what each one of us should do in order to glorify Him.

A Priscilla may teach an Apollos, a Mary Magdalene may be the risen Lord's messenger to His fainthearted disciples, a regenerated woman of Samaria may evangelize the men of her city, a Dorcas may serve by ministering to the comfort of the poor, and a Phoebe may be a deaconess of the assembly. But no matter how gifted and godly a woman is, she is not to take the place of the man in the assembly of God. She is to set an

example of lowly subjection to the revealed will of God, for she has the assurance that He values devoted obedience above any possible form of activity, however much it may be approved by those who have never learned to let God's Word be the supreme authority.

The true test of love for Christ is obedience to His Word. Our happiness should be found in acting in accordance with His revealed Word. This honors God and glorifies the Head of the Church, our blessed Lord.

After giving us the divine order for the assembly of God (chapters 10-14), the Spirit concluded, "Covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently [respectably] and in order [by arrangement]." In other words, things should be done in the way the Word of God authorizes; we are not to substitute an order which Scripture condemns.

Chapter Fifteen Victory Over Death

There was a small party in the Corinthian assembly who had imbibed Sadducean notions and were seeking to foist them on believers as the truth of God. This faction denied the reality of a physical resurrection. We need not suppose that they went so far as to deny spiritual survival after death, but they were like many today who refuse to accept the teaching of Scripture that the physical body of Christ came forth from the tomb and that therefore the bodies of all men will eventually be raised.

Paul addressed that serious error in this great chapter on the resurrection. We can almost be thankful that the error was permitted to arise so early so that it might be countered by the pen of inspiration. How much we would have lost had there been no occasion for this magnificent treatise to be written!

In preparing to combat—yes, to annihilate—the false teaching, the apostle first gave a restatement of the gospel. He showed that there is no gospel to preach to dying men if the resurrection is denied. The whole proclamation of Paul and the other apostles can be summarized in the phrase from Acts 17:18: “Jesus, and the resurrection.” Even Festus recognized their theme, for we read that he wondered at the strange “superstition” about “one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive” (Acts 25:19).

Yes, Jesus died and lives again! He lives in a material body and, though glorified and marvelously changed, it still bears the print of the nails.

The Resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-11)

In this passage Paul restated the gospel and referred to the witnesses of the resurrection, which alone gives validity to that message of redeeming grace.

Paul had preached the good news for lost sinners, and the Corinthians had received it. It was the gospel of grace, and in this they stood. We need to remember that our standing is in grace as truly as our salvation is by grace.

Through this gospel the Corinthians had been saved—if their faith was genuine. If their faith was not real, Paul said, they had "believed in vain." He was not intimating that some who had believed the gospel might be lost at last; rather he was saying that continuance in the faith was the evidence of the genuineness of their faith. This is important. Christ said, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

It is quite possible to give mere mental assent to the truth of the gospel and by baptism and lip profession take the place of a Christian when there has been no actual work of grace in the soul. To have such an empty faith is indeed to believe "in vain," for it accomplishes nothing as far as the salvation of the individual is concerned. Real faith will be emphasized by godly living, and "he which hath begun a good work" in the believer "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Paul reviewed the basic truths of the gospel, as he had preached it in Corinth and elsewhere. First, "Christ died for our sins." When the apostle wrote, "Christ died," he was stating a historical fact, which in itself might not

mean anything more than the death of a martyr. But when he added “for our sins,” he completed a definite doctrinal statement that explains the reason for that death. It was an expiatory sacrifice. Christ “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6). He took the sinner’s place and bore the sinner’s judgment. He died that we might never die.

This, Paul told the Corinthians, was “according to the scriptures.” Throughout the Old Testament, in type and actual prophetic declaration, we find the sacrificial, atoning death of Christ. Psalms 22 and 69, Isaiah 53, and Zechariah 12-13 are examples. All the sacrifices of former dispensations pictured His one offering of Himself on the cross. The prophets looked forward to that great event as the supreme fact of revelation. God declared in Leviticus 17:11, “The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls.” Yet we know that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Only through the propitiatory death of Christ could this be accomplished and, thank God, it did indeed take place—and all “according to the scriptures.”

The second basic truth Paul reviewed was, “He was buried.” This suggests the reality of His death. It was not, as Mrs. Eddy has intimated in her blasphemous chapter on the atonement, His “seeming” death. He actually died and because He was dead, they buried His precious body in Joseph’s new tomb.

But as Robert Lowry’s hymn reminds us, “Death cannot keep its prey…He tore the bars away,” and so we come to the third basic truth in Paul’s declaration of the

gospel: “He rose again the third day.” The resurrection of Christ was the Father’s expression of satisfaction in the work His Son accomplished on the cross when He “gave himself a ransom” for our sins. The sin question having been settled, God raised Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the highest glory, exalted to be “a Prince and a Saviour” (Acts 5:31).

We need to remember that apart from His physical resurrection there was no proof that God had accepted Christ’s work as an atonement for our sins. But having been delivered up to death “for our offences,” Christ was raised again “for our justification,” or as some render it, “because of our justification” (Romans 4:25). His death so fully met all the righteous claims of God’s throne against our sins that God declared, by bringing Him back from the dead, that there is no longer a barrier to our complete justification.

The physical resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is fundamental. There is no room for human theories here. It will not do to say, as one individual has said, that “the body of Jesus sleeps in a Syrian tomb, but His soul goes marching on.” This is to deny His resurrection altogether. His soul was never dead, but His body died, and it was His body that was raised again.

Note that the resurrection of Christ is ascribed to each person of the trinity; all three had part in that glorious work. Romans 6:4 says, “Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father” (also see Hebrews 13:20). In John 2:19-21 we read that the Lord Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up… He spake of the temple of his body.” And in Romans 8:11 His resurrection is attributed to the Holy Spirit.

There is no contradiction in these verses; they are all in harmony because the entire godhead was involved in the resurrection.

Paul reminded us that Christ's resurrection, as His death, was "according to the scriptures." For example in Leviticus 23 the resurrection is pictured in the feast of the firstfruits on the day after the Passover sabbath. Psalm 16:10 and Isaiah 53:10 reveal that for Christ the path of life lay through death; after death He would "see his seed" and "prolong his days." Psalm 110 portrays Him as the risen One taking His seat at God's right hand in Heaven.

Having thus restated the gospel, Paul went on to mention witnesses to the resurrection. God had provided positive testimony regarding this great fact to those who were appointed to go out and proclaim the message of salvation throughout the world. The risen Christ's many visible appearances to so large a number of reputable witnesses, the fact that His dead body could never be located anywhere, the demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's power, the confident assurance and new bravery of Christ's apostles, and the way God set His seal on their ministry with miracles of healing and the salvation of thousands—all alike proved that Jesus had indeed vanquished death and come forth alive from Joseph's new rock-hewn tomb. That crypt is still empty and always will be. The body that once lay wrapped in linen cloths came out of its shroud like a butterfly leaving its cocoon when God's appointed hour struck (see John 20:4-8).

Survival of the spirit after the death of the body might be considered immortality, but it is not resurrection.

What Scripture plainly declares is that the body that hung on the cross is the same body that was raised from the grave. Christ's resurrected body still bore the print of the nails in His hands and the wound in His side (see John 20:27). Long years afterward, John the beloved saw "in the midst of the throne… a Lamb as it had been slain" (Revelation 5:6). The marks of His passion will be visible on His body forever.

Thy wounds, Thy wounds, Lord Jesus,

Those deep, dark wounds, they tell

The sacrifice that frees us

From sin and death and hell.

They bound Thee once forever

To all who own Thy grace;

No power those bonds shall sever,

No time those scars efface.

Christ's literal bodily resurrection is the pledge that eventually "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth" (John 5:28-29). The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). Paul declared that He is "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

It is true that a great change came over Christ's body in resurrection. After He rose from the dead He could enter a room when all the doors were locked; He could appear and disappear at will. And so we are told in regard to ourselves that what is sown in burial is "not that body that shall be" (15:37). Nevertheless there is positive identity: "It is sown;…it is raised" (15:42-44).

The body that died will live again, but under altogether new and wonderful conditions.

Adding himself to the list of witnesses to the resurrection, Paul said he saw as one “born out of due time.” We are apt to think he meant that he was born much later than the other witnesses, but the Greek word he used precludes any such thought. The original word means “born before the time.” The apostle was thinking of that glorious day when the risen, glorified Christ is to appear on earth once more and His people Israel will “look upon [Him] whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10). As they recognize Him as their Lord and Savior, the nation will be born in a day. Paul had known that experience already: he first saw Christ in resurrection and, receiving Him as Savior, became part of the new creation.

The apostle could never forget that he had once been an opponent of Christ and a persecutor of His church. Paul felt that he was not fit to be called an apostle because of this, yet he could rejoice in the infinite grace that had made him what he was: the messenger of the Christ he had once hated. Taking the glorious gospel message to the Gentile world, he went from country to country and from people to people. God worked through him in such a mighty way that he could say in all humility, “I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” Paul wanted to emphasize not the work of the servant, but the message that the servant carried. Regardless of who the preacher was, when people believed the message, they were saved.

Let me remind you again that Christ's bodily resurrection is proof that God accepted His propitiatory work. The way into the holiest is now opened up for all who would draw nigh, trusting Christ's precious blood as the only basis of redemption. In this great resurrection chapter the inspired writer insisted on the absolute necessity of Christ's rising again to validate His death as an atonement for sin. "If Christ be not raised," he said in 15:17, "your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

It is useless to laud Jesus as a teacher while denying His bodily resurrection. He Himself predicted it. He declared that He must be rejected and be put to death and rise from the dead the third day. His disciples could not understand what He was saying at the time, but the empty tomb and the subsequent appearance of their Lord in His resurrection body made everything clear. Then they remembered His words, and after His ascension to Heaven in that same body and the descent of the Holy Spirit, they went everywhere declaring Christ's resurrection from the dead. Apart from this they would have had no gospel to preach.

Without His resurrection there would be no message for sin-laden, condemned humanity today. The proclamation that has brought life and blessing to untold millions through all the Christian centuries is that embodied in Romans 10:9-10: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." We rest on His Word and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

The Basis of Our Hope (1 Corinthians 15:12-20)

In this passage the Holy Spirit developed and vigorously defended the fundamental truth of the bodily resurrection of the saints. There were some in the Corinthian assembly who, because of the influence of the pagan philosophies with which they were familiar before their conversion, were questioning this teaching. I do not suppose that they thought for one moment that people cease to exist when they die. One can hardly think of any real Christian believing that, but some doubtless thought that while the spirit lives on in another world, the body ceases to exist; death is the end of it. They never expected either to meet their deceased loved ones again in physical form or to inhabit a material body again after their own deaths. The apostle identified their belief as a definite error and showed how serious the consequences of such a view would be.

Paul asked the Corinthians, “If Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” The apostle was referring to the very foundation of Christianity. Everywhere the apostles went they preached “Jesus, and the resurrection.” Our faith rests on that. The two great truths that Scripture teaches are that He was put to death because of our sins and that He was raised again as the token of God the Father’s satisfaction in the work that His Son’s death accomplished. Thus as the risen One He ever lives “to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Hebrews 7:25).

Though changed in a most wonderful way, our Savior’s resurrection body was a real human body. The print of a

nail was in the palm of each hand, and the mark of the Roman spear was still on one side; and the Bible indicates that the raised body of the Lord Jesus will bear those marks for all eternity. In this it will differ from the bodies of all the saints.

I do not think there is any reason to suppose that even those who have been martyred for Christ's sake will bear in their resurrection bodies any evidence of suffering; there will be no scar, spot, blemish, or any such thing (see Ephesians 5:27). Our bodies will be absolutely perfect when raised and glorified. Why then should the body of our Lord Jesus bear scars that speak of His sufferings and of His passion? Because those marks will be the visible evidence throughout the ages to come that the same Jesus who died for our sins on the cross has been raised in the power of an endless life.

Yes, He lives in Heaven in the same body in which He once walked on this earth, but that body is now changed and glorified. Christian testimony begins with this fact. If one who is seeking the way of life inquires, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer comes in unmistakable clearness: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:30; Romans 10:9). Therefore we have no right to think of any man as a Christian if he denies the physical resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul said, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23), but that was not all that the apostles proclaimed. They also preached Christ raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand. "We have testified of God," Paul wrote in 15:15, "that he raised up Christ."

Some wonder, “If He is living in Heaven, is that not sufficient?” No, for Paul continued, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” If our Lord Jesus Christ did not come forth triumphant from that tomb, we have no gospel to preach to lost men. If the body of Jesus still sleeps in the grave, then you and I are absolutely hopeless; there is no salvation for us. The fact that He rose from the dead is the proof that His sacrifice on the cross satisfied the claims of divine righteousness and met every requirement of infinite holiness.

You may ask, “Why do you say that if Christ did not rise there is no way of knowing that redemption is an accomplished fact?” You see, when our Lord was here on earth, He told His disciples that He was going to die: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). He also told them, “The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Luke 24:7). If that latter statement was never fulfilled, He stands convicted of false testimony. Either He was deluded in thinking that He was the Savior, the Redeemer who was to die for sinners and rise again; or He was a deliberate deceiver. It was His resurrection, the fulfillment of His own prediction, that proved Him to be the sacrifice for sin that He had proclaimed Himself to be.

Thank God, that testimony is true. More than five hundred witnesses saw Christ after He rose from the dead. As Horace Bushnell said, “The resurrection of Jesus Christ is absolutely the best attested fact in ancient history.”

My sins nailed Him to the cross; He, the sinless One, took my place and died under the judgment of God. After settling the sin question by pouring out His life and dying for us, Christ lay in the tomb. Three days were permitted to elapse to prove the reality of His death and then God brought Him back from the dead to declare His acceptance of the sacrifice of His Son. The resurrection is the testimony that God is satisfied and now can open His arms of love to every poor sinner in the world and proclaim a full, free, and eternal salvation for all who believe. I know that my sins are gone because He who made Himself responsible for them, who died for them, now sits enthroned at God's right hand and there are no sins on Him there.

As a sinful man, I could not cleanse my own heart. "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean," said Job, "yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me" (Job 9:30-31). But when the absolutely holy One went in grace to Calvary's hill and hung on that cross of shame, Jehovah "laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Darkness enwrapped His soul and in anguish He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

The Holy One who knew no sin,

God made Him sin for us;

The Saviour died our souls to win,

Upon the shameful cross.

Having borne sin's judgment, Christ descended to the grave and lay there for three days and three nights. During that interval no one in all the world knew

whether His work was satisfactory. No one knew whether He had really settled the sin question until, when the first day of the week came, He rose in triumph from the grave and broke the bands of death asunder. No sins remain on the risen Christ, for He has left them all behind in His open grave and has ascended to God's right hand without them. The Irishman was right when he said, "What a wonderful salvation! If anybody will have to be kept out of Heaven because of my sins, it will have to be Jesus; but, blessed be God, they cannot keep Him out, for He is there already."

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we are in a hopeless state. Those who have trusted in Him are trusting in a bruised reed; we who are counting solely on the work He did, have believed in vain. As Paul wrote, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable [or to be pitied]." I suppose there are miserable men living for the devil, but if Jesus did not rise, Christians would be the most to be pitied, for we stake everything on the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of our faith in Him we have given up the world and its pleasures and follies; we have become strangers and pilgrims on this planet. If our faith is all a mistake, we are going to lose both worlds. We gladly gave up this world because we thought we saw another above our heads, but it was only an illusion, a fantasy, if Christ did not rise.

The unconverted man can at least enjoy this present world, but the converted man says, "There is nothing here for my heart. It has been won by that One who has gone over yonder, and for His name's sake I have surrendered the things that other men live for down here." If Christ did not rise, he is simply following a will-

o'-the-wisp that will land him at the end in darkness and despair.

However, the apostle did not close this passage with any such dreary suggestion. He immediately added, "But now is Christ risen from the dead." There is no question about it. We know that He who died has been raised again. He Himself said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:17). He who was put to death was quickened by the Spirit. "The God of peace… brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20).

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the basis of our hope for eternity. His resurrection is not debatable; it is not something about which those professing the name of Christ may have different opinions. He came out of the grave as a sample of the great harvest that is yet to come forth from the tomb at His return.

Christ is risen, and His resurrection is the assurance of ours. He has become "the firstfruits of them that slept." Every Israelite understood that figure of speech. When the days of planting and cultivation had gone by, when the summer was ending and the time of harvest was just beginning, the Israelite went out in his field and plucked a fast-ripening sheaf. He presented it to the Lord in the temple or at the tabernacle gate as "the firstfruits," the pledge of the coming harvest. A few days or weeks later he went back to his field and found ripened grain everywhere—all like the firstfruits. Likewise our Lord Jesus is the firstfruits of resurrection. The day will come when all His own will be called forth from the tombs; that will be the glorious harvest and we will be like the firstfruits—that is, we will be like Him, our glorious

Lord. We too will have resurrection bodies; we too will be forever triumphant over death and throughout an eternity of bliss we will glorify the One who has redeemed us.

The Last Enemy (1 Corinthians 15:21-28)

It was Adam who as federal head of the race plunged humanity into death and judgment by his sin. But the Second Man, the Lord from Heaven, went down into death and triumphed over it. Coming forth a victor, He robbed death of all its terror. “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.”

Now through Him will come the resurrection of the dead, “for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” All—the righteous dead and the wicked dead—will come forth from the tomb through Him. The emphasis here is on the fact that it is the man Christ Jesus who will call the dead to life, for God is contrasting the first man, who plunged the race into ruin, with the Second Man, who brought redemption.

As we stress the importance of the deity of the Lord Jesus, we must never belittle or in any way lose sight of the perfection of His humanity. He is as truly man as if He had never been God, and He is as truly God as if He had never become man.

“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). And it is the Son of man whose voice will eventually be heard by all the dead: first by the righteous dead, the saved dead, when He comes again to call His own to be with Himself; and then at last

by the unsaved dead when they are summoned from the tomb to judgment.

Scripture distinctly teaches two resurrections, not one general resurrection. Our Lord spoke of those who will be rewarded “at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14) and Paul told Felix, “There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust” (Acts 24:15). Christ said of Himself, “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life [that is the first resurrection]; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [that is the second resurrection]” (John 5:28-29). In Revelation 20:6 John wrote, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” But in reference to the resurrection of the unjust, he wrote, “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished” (20:5).

It seems that when writing 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul had especially in mind the resurrection of the righteous, for he began the chapter by saying, “I declare unto you the gospel which…ye have received, and wherein ye stand.” However, the phrase “in Adam” in 15:22 includes all who received their natural life from Adam. We are all his children by natural birth. He was the head of a race and over that race hangs the death sentence. So the phrase “in Adam” takes in an entire race. Similarly the phrase “in Christ” takes in a race, but naturally a narrower, smaller group, for while everyone born into the world is in Adam, only a limited number are in Christ by grace. When we receive divine life from

the risen, glorified Christ, we are then said to be in Christ. We are in Christ only through that second birth, only through becoming members of a new creation.

In Romans 16:7 Paul referred to some of his relatives as "my kinsmen…who also were in Christ before me." I do not know whether they were older than Paul—they may or may not have been in Adam before him—but they were in Christ before Paul was. I often wonder if that might be one reason the apostle had his remarkable experience on the Damascus turnpike. His relatives had probably been praying for him and partly in answer to their prayers God broke him down and saved him.

"In Christ shall all be made alive," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "but every man in his own order...at his coming." The word translated "order" was a military term used to describe the various companies or cohorts of soldiers. So the dead in Christ for example form one "cohort." First Thessalonians 4:16-17 tells us that the Lord "shall descend from heaven with a shout...and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

"Then cometh the end," Paul told the Corinthians. I do not know that we need that italicized word "cometh," for it does not represent anything in the original text. Another translation reads, "Then the end." The apostle was referring to the time when the glorious kingdom reign of our Lord Jesus will have come to an end, "when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."

Now our Lord Jesus Christ is sitting at the Father's right hand until the time comes for Him to return to this planet. Then He will take the kingdom and reign for a thousand wonderful years. He will bring in that age when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). During those thousand years the Lord will exercise righteous government and righteous judgment in this world. Then will come the day of judgment when the wicked, raised from their graves, will appear at the great white throne, where they will be sentenced according to their works.

When the mediatorial kingdom is ended, all will be handed back to the Father, "that God may be all in all." Christ may be likened to a receiver—that is, a person appointed by a court to administer the property of a bankrupt company. Suppose a business in San Francisco is owned by a firm of three persons in New York City. They send a manager out to take charge of the business, but the manager proves to be dishonest and incompetent, and the business gets into inextricable difficulties. One of the owners says to the other two, "You allow me to go out there and act as receiver and I will try to straighten everything up and put the business on its feet." He goes out there, takes charge of everything, goes over all the books, and uncovers the crookedness. It may take him months, or perhaps years, to straighten things out, but he stays there until everything is cleared up. After every bill is paid and all debts are settled, he goes back to New York, accounts for what he has done, and hands the business back to the firm. Does he cease to have an interest in it? No, for he is a member of the firm. But the firm takes complete

charge and he no longer administers the business as a receiver.

Similarly when this world was put under the dominion of Adam, Satan interfered and the whole earth was thrown into turmoil. And so our Lord Jesus, one of the eternal trinity, is going to come back to this world and take charge of it. When everything has been subjected to God, and all the wicked and utterly impenitent have been dealt with, Christ will hand the earth back to the Father "that God may be all in all." Will we lose our Savior then? No, He will remain the same loving Jesus that He has always been since His incarnation, but the kingdom will be delivered up to the Father, and God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) will maintain it in righteousness for all eternity.

When Christ takes charge of the earth, "he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" and "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Death will hold within its grasp all the wicked dead up to the end of the millennium, but God will not permit that condition to last forever. Death will be destroyed. Satan himself will be banished to the lake of fire and the wicked will share his doom because they refused God's grace.

When the Lord Jesus puts all things under the feet of God the Father, Jesus Himself will voluntarily occupy the place of the Father's beloved Son and the Servant of the redeemed. He will serve us through all the ages to come, for love delights to wait on the objects of its affection.

There is a beautiful picture in the Old Testament of Christ as a Servant. We read in Exodus 21 that when a Hebrew who had been sold into slavery completed six

years of service, he could “go out free.” If his master had given him a wife, the wife and children would remain in bondage. But if that servant said, “I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,” he was put through a peculiar ceremony. The master placed his slave’s ear against the door and pierced it through with an awl, and he would then serve his master forever.

What a striking picture that is of the place our Lord Jesus voluntarily took in order to be identified with us for eternity! When He came into this world, He took a servant’s place, and having completed His service, He could have gone back free at any time to the Father’s house. But He chose not to do so, for there were those down here on whom His love was set: “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). We can think of Him saying to the Father, “I love My Master, My bride, and My children; I will not go out free.” He bears the marks of eternal subjection because of His love for us.

When meditating on Exodus 21,1 have often pictured that Hebrew servant sitting in his little cabin on his master’s plantation. His wife is preparing a meal and his children are playing about. One little tot climbs up on his knee and says, “Father, what is that ugly hole in your ear? I do not like that.” The child’s mother hears the question and says, “Oh, my darling, don’t speak that way; to me that hole is the most beautiful thing about your father. He could have gone out free and left us behind in bondage, but he wouldn’t do it. He loved me and gave himself for me; he loved you and the other children and because of his love for us he chose to

remain a perpetual servant. That mark tells of his undying love."

Our reaction will be similar to that wife's when we see our Lord Jesus, the One who has subjected Himself for all eternity. As we look on His wounds, which will never be effaced, we will say, "There we have the evidence of His unchanging love." What a Savior!

"Man of sorrows!" what a name

For the Son of God, who came

Ruined sinners to reclaim!

Hallelujah, what a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,

All His ransomed home to bring,

Then anew this song we'll sing:

Hallelujah, what a Savior!

(Philip P. Bliss)

We will be the joy of His heart and He the joy of ours for an eternity of bliss. We will delight in looking back and remembering His suffering on the cross for us. Others may think of His beauty as a lowly Nazarene, or of His glorious transfiguration on the mount, but to us who are redeemed He seems most beautiful when we think of Him wearing His crown of thorns, bleeding, suffering, and dying for us.

Filling Up the Ranks (1 Corinthians 15:29-34)

Verses 20-28 formed a parenthesis, as it were, in which the apostle turned aside from his reasoning regarding the resurrection, but in verse 29 he picked up the thread

of the argument from verse 19: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable… Else what shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?”

The expression “baptized for the dead” is found nowhere else in Scripture. Exactly what does it mean?

Down through the centuries a number of different interpretations have been suggested. One of the most common among orthodox believers is that we as Christians are baptized for or in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ who died. He went down into death and we have been identified with Him, and in our baptism we confess our death with Him. Therefore it could be said that “baptized for the dead” really means “baptized for Christ who died.” Certainly that interpretation is not repugnant to Christian consciences. It is absolutely true that believers are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ, for that in fact is the exact meaning of the ordinance of baptism. But is that what Paul meant here?

In baptism we confess that we were sinners, that we deserved to die, but that our Lord Jesus Christ died in our place. We say before the world, as it were, “I take my place with the Christ who died; I desire henceforth to be recognized as one identified with Him in His death, in His burial, and in His resurrection.” Looked at in this way the ordinance is wonderfully precious. I never can understand the state of soul of Christians who would try in any way to belittle or set aside Christian baptism. Many people have been brought to Christ simply by witnessing the carrying out of this ordinance. There is something so solemn about it as it definitely reminds us

of Christ's death on our behalf and demonstrates our identification with Him, that it cannot but speak to everyone who has ears to hear. So I fully understand the view that "baptized for the dead" could mean "baptized for Christ who died," but I do not believe that interpretation explains the context: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all?"

A second suggested interpretation, which has found favor with many, is that "baptized for the dead" refers to the fact that we who are baptized confess that we ourselves are dead, that we have died with Christ; in baptism we take the place of the dead. We bury the dead and since we have died to the old life, we are buried. Although we are in this world, we no longer belong to this world. We who were once living for this world, we who were once living to gratify the flesh, have now in the cross of Christ died to all that. Undoubtedly baptism teaches this; the ordinance speaks of a burial, but I do not think this interpretation explains the expression in the text either.

From the earliest days a third explanation has been suggested, but it is rather grotesque. In recent times the Mormons have spread it abroad as though it were the very gospel of God. Mormons are known as Latter Day Saints, but I am more interested in "former day saints"; it is my joy to be linked with the saints of all ages unto whom Christ Jesus has been made "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1:30).

The view held by these Mormons and a few others is based on the belief that baptism in itself is a saving

ordinance, that apart from it none will ever be saved. It would follow that since a great many people have died without having had the opportunity of being baptized, someone else must be baptized for them if they are going to be saved. Therefore the Mormons say that the apostle was referring to—and approving of—living Christians being baptized vicariously on behalf of people who have died unbaptized. This is a common practice among the Latter Day Saints. In fact they have temples in which they carry out the ceremony of baptism for the dead, and people are urged to be baptized, some over and over and over again, for the dead who were never baptized in this life.

When I was in Salt Lake City some years ago, a young Mormon elder told me about a wealthy lady who had been baptized over thirty thousand times. Every time she was baptized she paid a sum of money to the Mormon church, so you can see that baptism for the dead is a rather good thing from the financial standpoint! She had spent her entire fortune redeeming people, so she thought, from death and destruction. She had been baptized for all her deceased friends and relatives; then she had taken thousands of names from history and literature and had been baptized for every one of them. Alexander the Great, Nebuchadnezzar, Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Cleopatra were among those for whom she wanted to be the means of salvation. The youthful elder said to me with a very solemn face, “I believe that in the day of judgment it will be proven that this lady, through being baptized for the dead, has saved more souls than Jesus Christ ever saved through dying on Calvary’s cross.” That ridiculous and

blasphemous theory of course finds no support whatever in the Word of God.

In the first place the Word of God never teaches that baptism is essential to salvation. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that if people die unbaptized, they are lost. It is quite true that it is perfectly right and proper for people who are saved to be baptized. We find this ordinance linked with faith because it is the confession of the faith that we have. But when Scripture says, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” it never adds, “He that is not baptized shall be damned.” It says, “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16, italics added).

We have the remarkable example of the first soul ever saved after Christ was nailed to the cross: the penitent thief who hung beside Him was saved that day without any possibility of being baptized. With hands and feet nailed to the tree he could do nothing; he could not carry out any ordinance or do anything to earn salvation. He was saved only by the finished work of the One who hung on the central cross. And every man who is ever saved will be saved only through what Jesus did when He died on that tree. So we can put away the Mormon concept.

There is a fourth view, which certain Christians have held throughout the centuries. According to their interpretation, the apostle was referring to that practice of vicarious baptism without saying whether it was good or bad. (The Mormons say he approved of vicarious baptism.) But we can be sure that Paul would not refer

to it in the way he did without telling his readers that it was contrary to the mind of God.

I have spoken of four suggested interpretations and now I will tell you what I believe to be the exact meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29. First let me say that the expression translated “baptized for the dead” literally means “baptized in place of, or over, the dead ones, or those who have died.” The word translated “dead” is plural; since it is not a singular noun, it cannot refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither can the preposition be translated “because of or “on behalf of or “for the benefit of.” Thus “baptized because of Christ” and “baptized on behalf of the dead” and “baptized for the benefit of the dead” are not permissible interpretations. The actual rendering would have to be “baptized in place of dead ones.” So Paul was thinking of the fact that when people professed faith in Christ and availed themselves of the ordinance of baptism, they were filling up the places made vacant on earth by Christians who had died.

Verse 29 may be translated, “What shall they do who are baptized in the place of the dead ones if no dead ever rise? Why are they then baptized in the place of dead ones?” Paul was saying, “If those who have died are lost, they have gained nothing by their profession. Why then should people fill up the ranks if there is nothing to be gained by it? They might as well go on enjoying this world, for death ends all if Christ did not rise.”

Perhaps the apostle was making a comparison to a regiment of soldiers going into battle. After the battle is over, they count the men and find, let us say, that seventy-five have been slain. Immediately they begin to recruit others to take the place of the dead—not to do

the dead any good, but to take their places—and seventy-five replacements are drawn into that regiment. They don the uniform and take part in the next conflict. But if they are fighting a losing battle, if there is no possibility of ever winning, if they are just wasting their lives, why were they recruited to take the place of the dead? It is the height of folly if they know there is nothing but certain defeat and destruction awaiting them.

Think of Christian people as a mighty army. Down through the centuries the church has been in conflict with the powers of sin and death and Hell; over and over again one generation of Christians has fallen and another has taken its place. By being baptized the new converts in each generation have publicly demonstrated the fact that they have thus enlisted in the army of the Lord. But what a pointless thing it would have been to enlist if Christ had not risen and "if the dead rise not"! What would the reinforcements have gained by being baptized in place of the dead? Would it not have been better to have wound up the history of Christianity in the first century and to have declared: "The whole movement is a failure; there is no risen Christ; there is no possibility for salvation"?

A man may accept the philosophy of Christianity and keep it to himself. Possibly his neighbors will never suspect his belief and he will not be subject to ridicule—or persecution or perhaps even martyrdom in some countries. But if he really believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he will say, "I must make it known." So he is baptized, and in that way openly confesses Christ as the One who died and rose again. Afterward one neighbor may say, "That man is a Christian," and another may

ask, “How do you know?” The first will reply, “He has been baptized, confessing the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In Paul’s day and for many centuries afterward, the moment a man was baptized he put himself, as the apostle wrote, “in jeopardy.” Paul was risking his own life “every hour,” for there were enemies of Christianity on every hand. He declared, “I die daily.” In other words, “I am exposing myself to death every day, and I am ready to die for Jesus Christ.” Why should Paul and his fellow laborers have taken those risks? Because they knew that Christ had risen; in fact the apostle had seen Him in the glory as He appeared to him that day when he fell stricken on the Damascus road. For the name of Christ, Paul took his life in his hands daily and became the outstanding defender of Christianity. He said in Philippians 1:17, “I am set for the defence of the gospel.”

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I have fought with beasts at Ephesus,” he was referring to the beast-like men who were ready to tear him apart in the riot at Ephesus. He was prevented from going into their midst, but the angry mob, shouting “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” thronged his companions and would have destroyed them if the townclerk had not intervened (Acts 19). But the apostle assured his friends in Corinth, in effect, “It is all right no matter what people do to me. Christ is real, for He rose again. I know Him as the risen One and am ready to die for His name’s sake.” If Christ had not risen, there would have been no advantage to living in such jeopardy.

Why should any Christian give up the world and live a life of self-denial and devotion to the One whom this world has rejected “if the dead rise not?” If there is no reality in Christianity, why shouldn’t we get all the enjoyment out of the world that we can? Why not accept its philosophy? “Let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die” (the apostle was quoting from Isaiah 22:13). Let’s have a good time while we live. If death ends everything, why shouldn’t we get what we can out of this life?

But there is a better world beyond the grave. There is a Savior who died to put away our sins and who lives triumphant in glory waiting to receive those who trust Him. So we say to the world, “You can have your feasts, your fame, your frivolity, and your wealth. Christ is more to me than all of these.” The Christian, you see, is a man who has heard the drumbeat of another country and no longer keeps step with the drumbeat of this world.

Some people say, “It does not make any difference whether or not Jesus died and rose; we can be just as good without this assurance.” But when they deny the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, they inevitably will give free rein to their lusts, live for the world, and please themselves. So to us the challenge comes: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not.” If you are a Christian, you are joined to a risen Christ and you are in this world to glorify Him. Let that risen One control your heart and life, and yours will be a holy life devoted to the glory of God.

A number of years ago I was leading the funeral service of an aged saint who had devoted his life to God’s glory. For a great many years he had been a bright witness for

Christ in the part of the city where he lived and had brought up his family in the fear of God. In fact one of his children was a missionary in the Philippines. But the deceased man had grandchildren who, though they attended church, had not yet confessed faith in the Lord.

As I closed the funeral service and we were about to take our last look at his face until the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering unto Him, I felt led to step up to the casket and say, “Just wait a minute before we take our farewell look at the face of our beloved brother. He has been a witness for Christ in this city for many years and his place will not easily be filled. He will be greatly missed by Christians. I wonder whether anyone at this funeral service would like, by the grace of God, to take his place. Is there anybody here who has heard the voice of God speaking to you? Perhaps you have never yet come to Christ, but right here you will take Him as your Savior and be ready to be baptized for the dead? Since this brother has gone, there is a vacant place in the ranks. Will you take his place?”

I waited a moment and then his grandson, a fine young man, rose from his seat and came forward. He faced the audience and said, “Today I accept my grandfather’s Savior and I want you to pray that I may be able in some measure to take his place.” Then he knelt at that casket and gave himself to the Lord; the next Sunday night I baptized him for the dead. Thus he gave public testimony that he had turned from the world, trusted Christ, and would now seek to live for His glory.

Lessons from Nature (1 Corinthians 15:35-49)

Having settled the question of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the apostle took up another problem

that has perplexed and exercised the minds of many: If there is to be a resurrection of the dead, in what kind of bodies will they arise? In answering this Paul gave us a special divine revelation, and we should remember that apart from revelation, we can know nothing of this matter. We are just as ignorant today of what comes after death as philosophers like Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle were five hundred years before Christ. If God had not spoken, all our discussions on life, death, and immortality would be mere speculation at best. But He has spoken. He has given us His sure Word, and we may be certain that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Let us read then in this letter to Corinth what God Himself, the Creator of all, the God of the resurrection, had to say on the subject.

Our salvation is threefold: salvation from the guilt of sin, salvation from the power of sin, and salvation from the presence of sin. We who believe have already received the redemption of our souls; we are already saved from the guilt of sin and the judgment due to sin. But we are still looking forward to "the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23); we still inhabit poor, failing human bodies. Christians get sick just as other people do, and Christians die just as other folks die.

Every once in a while somebody rises up to tell us that we may have redemption of the body in this life and that no Christian need ever be sick if he will just claim the Lord as his healer. But no matter how fervently people believe such a new gospel, no matter how faithfully they teach it, they all catch cold if they sit in a draft, they all get indigestion when they eat things that do not agree

with them, and they all get sick and die eventually—unless they die by accident. Christians are just as truly subject to sickness and death as other people are. Even the faith healers of the past have died, and the faith healers of the present will die soon—unless the Lord Jesus should come in our lifetime and we should all be changed and caught up to meet Him without passing through death.

All under the Adamic sentence die; but, thank God, there is a provision for the redemption of the body. The hour is coming when our Lord Jesus Christ will return from Heaven and transform these bodies of our humiliation to make them like the body of His glory. This is just as true for those who have died and whose bodies have decayed as it is for those who are still living when our Savior returns.

The natural mind says, “I can understand how He could touch this mortal body of mine and make it immortal if I am living when He returns. But if I die before He comes, my body will go back to the dust from which it came, and that dust will be scattered to the four winds; I cannot understand how it could possibly be raised again. I may have a body in resurrection, but it will surely be another body; I cannot actually be raised from the dead.” Scripture answers that objection in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.

Paul began, “Some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?” In other words, “In what way are they brought from the tomb, and what kind of body will they have in the resurrection?” The apostle answered in effect, “Take a lesson from nature, thou simple one.” The word

translated “fool” in 15:36 is rather strong, but Paul was not insulting the inquirer the way we would be if we called a person a fool. The Greek word simply means “unthinking one,” so Paul was just saying, “If you would only stop to think, you would realize that there are many analogies in nature to the resurrection.”

We can think of some analogies in addition to those given in Scripture. Consider the caterpillar crawling along the leaves. Suddenly a strange alteration comes over it, and it spins a cocoon around itself. The whole appearance of the caterpillar is changed and it dies to its old life altogether. It stays in that cocoon awhile and eventually emerges as a beautiful butterfly, a lovely creature that is able to soar above the ground. That transformation is a wonderful picture of what the resurrection will be.

The apostle used the illustration of a farmer sowing seed. He sows it, to use the words that are so often recited in funeral services, “in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection.” The farmer sows the “bare grain” because he believes that when it falls in the ground and seems to rot away, that will not be the end of it; it will soon have a fuller life than it has known before. When the resurrection of that grain takes place, the farmer does not see the seeds he has sown coming up from the ground; he sees first a blade of green, then a stalk, and then a head of wheat, oats or barley.

“God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.” There is no mistake made. If wheat is sown, wheat rises from that grain; if oats are sown, oats rise from the ground; if barley is sown, barley rises from that grave. The same will be true of our

resurrection bodies; in some way there will be absolute identification with the body that died. There is absolute identity and yet a wonderful change. The beautiful head of grain is much more lovely to look on than the simple little seed that went into the ground.

How much of the seed of wheat is in the new stalk? If you look at the root of that stalk, you will still find the little shell out of which this stalk came. Just so will it be in the resurrection. God will not have to use every part of this body. As a matter of fact, I do not possess today a particle of the body that I had a few years ago. When I was a boy in school, my teachers told me that the body changes every seven years. Now they say it changes every three years. I am not conscious of that change except of course that I know my nails and hair grow and have to be cut. Like my nails and hair, my entire body is changing continuously. I do not have a bit of the body that I had three and a half years ago, yet I know that I am I. If I say to you, “You are looking so much better than you did the last time I saw you,” you do not answer, “Well, that is because you never saw me before if you haven’t seen me for three and a half years.” No, you are the same person, and the body is your body, and you know it is; yet there is not a cell in it that was there three and a half years ago. And so we say that in resurrection there is identity, though the entire body that is put into the grave is not necessarily used in the resurrection body.

After giving the illustration of the grain, the apostle stressed the fact that there are different kinds of flesh: “All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.” We do not understand the

differences, yet we know that they exist and that one kind never changes to another. Men are made to live on the earth, and that is the only environment in which they are comfortable. Beasts are also made to live on the earth, but in a different way. For instance the bear and the raccoon hibernate; as winter approaches, they go into a burrow or a hollow tree and become dormant until spring comes again and then they emerge. That would be impossible for a man.

Fish, another kind of flesh, are adapted to a different environment. Beasts and men can survive in water for limited periods, but they would drown if they stayed under water indefinitely. Fish are at home there, but they are so constituted by God that when they are taken out of the water, they die. One writer has well said, “If fish are philosophers, if they are capable of thinking, I am absolutely certain that every philosophical fish is quite sure that it is impossible for any creature to live out of water.” Birds, differing altogether from mankind and beasts and fish, are suited to fly in the air. And so if there are such differences in kinds of “flesh,” why should we wonder about the differences between bodies suited to Heaven and bodies suited to this planet?

Paul told the Corinthians there are “celestial [heavenly] bodies” and “bodies terrestrial [earthly].” Our Lord Jesus came into this world and took on a terrestrial body, but after having made satisfaction for our sins on the cross, He came forth at the resurrection in a celestial body. In that body He ascended through the heavens into the very presence of God where “he ever liveth to make intercession” for us (Hebrews 7:25). His celestial body is the pattern for ours. Our resurrection bodies will not be subject to the laws that control us now.

When we read in Scripture of our Lord talking with the Sadducees, who denied that there is any resurrection, we get a little better understanding of celestial bodies. They said, “There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she?” (Luke 20:29-33) They thought they had asked a puzzling question.

But the Lord Jesus simply answered, “You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God…They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world [attain to the coming glorious age of the kingdom], and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage...for they are equal unto the angels, being the children of the resurrection” (Matthew 22:29; Luke 20:35-36).

The angels are sexless; they do not propagate their kind. Each is an individual creation, and believers, in resurrection, will be like the angels. That means we are not going to be men and women as we are now. We will simply be redeemed people with no sex distinctions whatsoever because the day will have gone by when the human race is to be propagated.

As long as we are in this world our bodies have to be nourished by food, so we have digestive tracts by means of which we are able to take from our food those elements that repair and build up our physical constitutions. But in the resurrection our digestive tracts are to be destroyed. You will remember that when

the apostle was reproving the Corinthian believers for making a fuss over questions of clean and unclean foods, he said, “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them” (6:13). It is not that we will not be able to eat, for Jesus ate a piece of broiled fish and a piece of honeycomb after His resurrection, but he no longer needed a digestive tract to process the food. In the resurrection we too will have bodies that need no nourishment or repairs. All the changes of time will have come to an end and our bodies will be like the glorified body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Turning his attention to the sun, moon, and stars, Paul thought about the light shining from those celestial bodies and related it to the resurrection. When we get our resurrection bodies, they will be bodies of light like the body in which our blessed Lord was seen on the mount of transfiguration and on the Damascus road. Saul of Tarsus said, “I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun” (Acts 26:13).

Daniel 12:3 says, “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” This suggests that when we have our celestial bodies, there will be differences in the glories that we will enjoy. Contemplating this fact, the apostle noticed how even the material celestial orbs—the sun, the moon, and the stars—differ in glory: “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.” In that day there will be differences in glory according to the measure of our devotedness to Christ down here, for Paul added, “So also is the resurrection of the dead.”

We are all saved by the same grace, and through the same grace we will all be raised and changed at the coming of the Lord. But we will not all be rewarded in the same way, for reward is for faithful service. I am afraid that many of us are going to lose a great deal at the judgment seat of Christ because we have not been as true and earnest as we should have been. The day is soon coming when you and I would give worlds, if we possessed them, for another chance to let God have His way absolutely in our lives. The greatest joy that can come into any life results from wholehearted surrender to the will of God, no matter how difficult it may seem at the time. Often the things we most dread are the things that bring us the greatest blessing as we seek to walk with our gracious God and Father.

When the Lord reviews our lives, when He goes over everything with us, when He says, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant… Enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21), how we will rejoice in His approbation! And how we will wish that we had been more devoted! There is not one soul with Christ today who, looking back on his earthly life, says, “I wish I had not been quite so out-and-out for God; I wish I had been less self-denying; I wish I had been more concerned about my own comforts.” But I imagine there are many who say, “If I had my life to live over again, no matter what suffering it might mean, no matter what heartbreak it might entail, I would never hesitate a moment to let God have His will in everything in my life.” It is not a question of whether or not we get to Heaven. All who are saved by grace will be there, but there will be a difference in our rewards.

As you read on in 1 Corinthians 15, observe the repetition of the impersonal pronoun in verses 42-44: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” These verses tell us again that there will be differences in appearance; but the sameness of the pronouns indicates that there will be identification of the body that dies with the body that rises. The body that is sown is the one that is raised, yet it is changed.

Corruption of the natural body begins only a few hours after death occurs, but the new body will be incorruptible; it will be a glorified body. Just what that means may be seen in what the disciples beheld on the mount of transfiguration. They saw Moses and Elijah shining in the same glory with the Lord Jesus. Moses had died, yet he was there in a glorified body. Elijah had been caught up to Heaven without dying and he also was in a glorified body.

The dead will be “raised in power.” How weak our poor bodies are! “The spirit [often] is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). We find ourselves hindered by the body, but the day is coming when instead of being a hindrance to the spirit, the body will be like wings to the spirit; we will be able to go to the uttermost parts of the universe on the Lord’s business more easily than we can cross the street today.

The natural body “is raised a spiritual body.” Do not misunderstand that. A spiritual body is not a body formed of spirit. God is a Spirit and is not said to have a

body. He took a body when the Lord Jesus Christ became incarnate. “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily [in a body]” (Colossians 2:9). Likewise you and I are spirits dwelling in bodies.

But I am not all spirit; I am also soul. Paul acknowledged that when he wrote, “I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The soul is the seat of my emotional nature, the seat of all my natural instincts; the soul is my human self. The spirit is the highest part of my nature, the part to which God can make Himself known. Romans 8:16 says, ‘The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” As a Christian I ought to be constantly under the control of the spirit; I ought to live according to the highest part of my nature. But once in a while I find that instead of being controlled by the spirit part of me, I am controlled by my soul and I am more or less a creature of emotions. I am easily influenced this way or that by my emotions, and often to my detriment and that of others.

The word translated “natural” in 1 Corinthians 15:44 is simply the adjective form of the Greek word meaning “soul,” so the “natural body” is a soulish body. This body is the suited vehicle for the expression of the emotions of my soul, but in resurrection I will have a body that is suited to and dominated by the spirit. There will be nothing then to hinder the full expression of the spirit and I will be absolutely subject to God who is a Spirit.

Paul continued, “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.” The first Adam was the head of the

old creation, and God formed him out of the dust of the ground. If you do not believe that, wait awhile and your body will go back to the dust and prove that Scripture is right. God breathed into the first Adam, and he became a living soul, the progenitor of the human race. The last Adam is our Lord Jesus. He is the risen One and so has become the quickening Spirit who breathed on His disciples and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (John 20:22). As descendants of Adam we have bodies like his, but since we are now linked with “the Lord from Heaven,” we will in resurrection have bodies like the one He has now.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that the first man, Adam, was of the dust, dusty—or of the dirt, dirty. That is what man is by his relationship with Adam. The very word “Adam” means “red clay.” But just as we have looked like our first father and have had the appearance of the natural man in this world, we will one day “bear the image of the heavenly,” the image of the Second Man, our glorified Savior.

I think this helps explain another passage (1 John 3:2) that has bewildered many people: “When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” A lady expressed the confusion of many when she said to me one day, “If we are all going to be like Him, we will all look alike. How are we ever going to know each other?” She had misunderstood what Scripture says.

It is true, as Paul said, that “we have borne the image of the earthy” and we are like Adam, but we certainly do not all look the same. If all the people in the world were to pass before you, you would never find two exactly

alike. There are cases where two people are so nearly alike that we can hardly tell them apart, but there is always some little difference. The infinite variety in creation is amazing when you think that there is so little to work with: only one nose, one mouth, two ears, two eyes, one chin, two cheeks, and one forehead!

I do not know much about music, but I am always dumbfounded when I think how much can be made from seven tones. One would think that all the music that could have been written would have been written years ago, that no one could possibly make up another melody; but there are symphonies to be written that men have never dreamed of yet. Likewise in resurrection there will be infinite variety. Although we will all be like Christ in that we will have incorruptible bodies, we will know each other in Heaven as we have never known each other down here. What a wonderful hope this resurrection chapter holds out for believers!

The Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

In the concluding verses of this chapter Paul revealed that while all believers will have part in the glorious event at the resurrection of the saints, some will not have passed through death; these will not need to be raised from the grave, but they will need to be changed.

“Flesh and blood,” the apostle said, “cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Paul was referring to that future reign when the authority of God will be exercised in Heaven and earth. The kingdom of God will consist of two spheres. We read of one sphere in Matthew 13:43, where our Lord Jesus said, “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Those are the heavenly saints in the kingdom day. In the

other sphere are the people who are brought into blessing here on earth during the period of the kingdom; they of course will be in bodies of flesh and blood. The apostle was considering the heavenly side of the kingdom when he said, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” As we have noted before, the heavenly saints “neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:30).

Observe that the apostle did not say, “Neither flesh nor blood.” He said, “Flesh and blood.” In other words, our bodies in their present condition, sustained by blood, are not suited for the coming glorious heavenly kingdom and therefore we must be changed.

Introducing an explanation of how this change will take place, Paul declared, “Behold, I shew you a mystery.” A mystery in the New Testament is not something mysterious, strange, or difficult to understand; it is something revealed only to the initiated. Some of you have been initiated into secret societies and although you have not discovered anything very mysterious in them, you have found that there are certain things that folks like me on the outside do not know anything about. Paul was revealing something to the initiated, and all God’s beloved people are looked on by Him as His initiated ones. The only lodge I have ever joined is the grand army of the redeemed. I was initiated into that by being born again, and then the Holy Spirit revealed to me the mysteries that are found in the Word of God.

A number of sacred secrets were kept hidden from the people of God in past dispensations, but have been made known now in the glorious dispensation of the Holy

Spirit. One of these secrets is this “mystery” of the first resurrection and the rapture of the living saints: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” This is a remarkable statement.

We often hear it said that there is nothing more certain than death and taxes. Taxes seem to be quite certain, but I am glad to say that death is not absolutely certain for the Christian. Someone may say, “Doesn’t the Word say, ‘It is appointed unto men once to die’?” (Hebrews 9:27) That is the divine appointment for man as such, but there will be a generation of God’s redeemed people who will be exempt.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We shall not all sleep,” he used the word “sleep” in place of “die” because death to the believer is the putting of the tired, weary, worn body to sleep until the Lord Jesus comes to waken it again. It is only the body that sleeps. The real man, his spirit and soul, is “absent from the body, and…present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8); he is taken home “to be with Christ; which is far better” (Philippians 1:23). So the bodies of our friends in Christ who have died are sleeping, but they themselves are with Christ and wonderfully happy in His presence.

The apostle Paul gave us an idea of their state and condition when he spoke of being “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2). The first heaven is the atmospheric heaven, the second is the starry heaven, and the third is God’s dwelling place. When the apostle had his experience in “the third heaven,” he was so enraptured that he could not tell whether he was “in the body” or “out of the body.” That teaches us that if Paul was in the body, his body did not impede him, and

thus when we are in the presence of the Lord in the body, our bodies will be no hindrance to us as they often are now.

On the other hand, if Paul was taken out of the body, he did not miss his body; he was just as conscious when he was out of it as when he was in it. Some say that it is impossible to live outside of the body, but it is not. Just as the works of a watch go on running without the case, the body dies but the spirit of the believer lives on. Then in the first resurrection the body is raised in glory, and the spirit comes to dwell in the body again. That is the state of the believer when Christ calls him forth from the tomb.

There may be some of us in this generation who will be living when our Lord Jesus Christ returns, but whether living or dead we will all be changed. Every one of us must undergo the glorious transformation in order to have part in the heavenly side of the kingdom. This change will take place instantly, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” Paul did not say “in the winking of an eye,” but “in the twinkling of an eye,” which is much faster. At the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be changed as quickly as a gleam of light shines in the eye.

I have often tried to think of what the swiftness of the change will mean to dear children of God who are lying on hospital beds—weak and suffering, enduring days of pain and nights of anguish, they cry out in the distress of their souls, “O Lord, how long?” One moment they will be in excruciating pain, and the next they will be rising to meet the Lord in the air in bodies that can never suffer again. I have also thought of God’s people whose minds have failed because of stress; some are

shut away in sanitariums and, in their melancholy, are imagining that God has forsaken them and there is no hope for the future. Their poor brains, which have given way completely, will in a moment be filled with the intelligence of angels, as they find themselves in their glorified bodies looking into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a marvelous hope that is! No wonder the apostle spoke of it as “that blessed hope” in Titus 2:13.

When will we be changed? “At the last trump,” Paul told the Corinthians. Many have attempted to link this trump with the trumpet of the seventh angel in Revelation. In that book we read of a series of seven trumpets; when they are blown, various judgments are poured out on the earth, and when the seventh is blown, the kingdom of God is ushered in. If Paul had been referring to that seventh trumpet, he would have been indicating that the church of God is to go through the tribulation until that trumpet is blown. But the book of Revelation was not written until approximately thirty years after 1 Corinthians was written, so there can be no connection between these trumpets. And when we turn to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we find that “the last trump” is called “the trump of God”; it is not the trumpet of an angel.

Why did Paul use the phrase “the last trump” when writing to the Corinthians? The reason is that the expression, being in common use in connection with the Roman army, was familiar to the people who lived in Paul’s day. When a Roman camp was about to be broken up, whether in the day or in the middle of the night, a trumpet was sounded. The first blast meant, “Strike tents and prepare to depart.” The second meant, “Fall into line.” And when what was called “the last trump”

sounded, it meant, “March away.” Likewise when the last trump of this age of grace sounds, we will be called away to be forever with the Lord.

Most of you readers have heard the first blast. At the time you were part and parcel of the world; you were living with the world and like the world and you were settling down here, but you heard the gospel trumpet awaking you out of your sleep. And then I trust you have heard the second trumpet calling you to take your places in fellowship with God’s beloved people as soldiers in this world. And now what do you and I wait for? We are waiting for the last trump, when we will be summoned; we will not be called to march away or fly away, but we “shall be caught up together…to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

When will we be caught up? We do not know the date. It may be today; it may be tonight. Whether the trumpet sounds at midnight or in the morning or in the daytime will make no difference to us, for we have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ.

Paul told the Corinthians, “The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we [who are living] shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” Notice the two groups: the “corruptible” and the “mortal.” The “corruptible” are the dead; their bodies, which have decayed, will be “raised incorruptible.” The “mortal” are those who are alive but subject to death if time goes on; they must “put on immortality.” The terms “mortal” and “immortal” refer to the body, never to the spirit or soul. The everlasting existence of man is taught in Scripture, but immortality

is a blessing that will be experienced when our Lord comes.

In Romans 8:10 we read, “If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin.” A little word is omitted there, which may be added to make the meaning more clear: “The body is still dead because of sin.” In other words, you may be a believer, but your body is still under the Adamic sentence: “Dying thou shalt die” (Genesis 2:17, Hebrew). But the spirit is alive and is the pledge of the new life yet to be: “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:11). I know that some have taught that the indwelling Spirit gives new life to the mortal body right here and now, but the apostle denied that when he said, “If Christ be in you, the body is [still] dead because of sin.” At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of life will raise our mortal bodies into newness of life.

“Then,” Paul told the Corinthians, “shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (also see Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14). Now death comes in and takes from us our nearest and dearest, and our hearts are pained because of the separation. But if we know Christ, and if our loved ones were in Christ, the sting of death is gone and we can look forward to a glorious reunion when Jesus comes again. What a wonderful event it will be when saints who have been separated here on earth recognize one another as they are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will sing, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” What makes death terrible to the unsaved is sin: “The sting of death is sin.” But if

we know that sin has been put away, that sin has been purged by the precious atoning blood of Christ, the sting is gone.

Paul continued, “The strength of sin is the law.” Some people think that the law is the strength of holiness. They imagine that the way to be holy is to be under the law, and they try to obtain sanctification by keeping the law. But the law simply stirs up everything in the human heart that is opposed to God, and instead of producing holiness, it produces greater transgression. The law never produces holiness; it is the heart’s being occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ that produces holiness. When you have seen that the law condemns, but that Christ has borne the condemnation for you, you can look away to Him; and as you are occupied with Him, you will be a holy man or woman. You cannot make yourself holy by obeying rules and regulations. Not even God’s law given at Sinai has the ability to make men holy; but the living glorified Christ can change people into His image as their minds dwell on Him, and in that way they become holy.

Absorbed with Christ and confident of the final victory, Paul offered heartfelt thanks. Death may seem for the moment to triumph. Years ago it seemed like death was triumphing when it came into our home and took one after another of those whom I loved most tenderly; but as I look on to the glorious future and realize that death is to be conquered at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, by faith I claim the conquest and cry, “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The verse with which Paul closed the resurrection chapter comes home to every one of us: “Therefore [because these things are true], my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Some people say that occupation with the precious truths that have to do with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ may have a tendency to make people theoretical, impractical, and no longer useful in the church of God here on earth; but I do not know anything that should so grip the soul and motivate one to work for God as the knowledge of the truths we have just been considering.

Chapter Sixteen Maranatha

This concluding chapter of 1 Corinthians seems to be some what prosaic and we may wonder why it has been preserved for us down through the centuries as part of Holy Scripture. We can easily understand that certain personal things would be of interest to the Corinthians, but would it make any difference to us if this chapter had been lost? Yes, it would, for these personal touches in the letters of Paul and other apostolic writers are what prove that the Epistles are not forgeries. Anyone trying to forge a letter to pass off on people as the Word of God would certainly leave out details such as we read here. The personal comments came bubbling up from the warm heart of the actual writer, who was in touch with all the people to whom and of whom he wrote.

The First Day of the Week (1 Corinthians 16:1-12)

The Christianity of Paul was very practical and so he wanted to help the many Jewish believers who were suffering greatly as a result of the prolonged famine in the land of Palestine and other parts of Syria. The apostle, moving around among the Gentile Christians in Europe where conditions were very different, convinced those converts that they should minister to the needs of their Hebrew brothers in Christ. The Gentile believers shared liberally and Christians have sought to imitate them ever since, thus demonstrating the unity of the church of Christ and the compassion of our Lord toward those in need.

In this passage Paul showed that he expected the Corinthian church to accept their responsibility to help their Jewish brothers. The Corinthians could not say, "Oh well, those folks in another land are not intimately related to us. If they have not been provident enough to lay their surplus aside during the years of plenty, why should we share our possessions with them?" Christianity demands that we recognize that "we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25) and if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

In fact Christianity demands that we show deep interest even in men and women of the world who are not with us in Christ, for we are told, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Obedience to this teaching has characterized the true church of God wherever there has been a cry of need. When nations, peoples, or cities are in distress, Christian people are the first to put their hands into their pockets and share with those who are in need. I wish that those who spurn the church, those who ridicule the message of the gospel, would bear this in mind. For example the Red Cross is a product of Christianity; its logo is the blood-stained cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such practical ministries show that believers have the same love that animated our Savior when He came from Heaven to give Himself for a lost world. So Christians are to look out for those in need and seek to make things easier for them.

The apostle was careful to insist that collections be taken in a manner that was beyond reproach. He never set out to accumulate large sums of money for the poor

without making himself accountable to someone. Otherwise he would have opened himself up to suspicion, and people might have said, “He used our money to feather his own nest.” So he said to the Corinthians in effect, “I do not want to be responsible for your money: I want you to gather your offerings in my absence.” He wished to have nothing to do with their “gatherings.” Instead he allowed the Corinthians to appoint men whom they trusted to take charge of the fund and to carry it later on to Jerusalem. He told them that if they wished, he would go with them, but he would not take the responsibility of handling the funds. That is a good principle, for many a professed servant of Christ has gotten into difficulty through soliciting and obtaining money for which he gave no proper accounting. We can all take a leaf out of Paul’s book when it comes to handling funds.

Paul was planning his work for the coming season, for he was not one to allow his schedule to be determined by haphazard opportunities. He planned to visit the Corinthians when he passed through Macedonia and possibly spend the winter with them. First, however, he intended to visit Ephesus and minister there until he moved on to Jerusalem. He was anxious to get to Jerusalem by the feast of Pentecost, the time when, years before, the Holy Spirit had descended and the church had been formed. Paul wanted to be there on that specific occasion, for it would give him a remarkable opportunity to present the gospel to the thousands of Jews who would come from all over the world to keep the feast. Many Christians would be there too so he also looked forward to having happy fellowship with them.

“For a great door and effectual is opened unto me,” Paul wrote, “and there are many adversaries.” God had opened a door for his testimony, but of course there were those who opposed him. No servant of God who is in the current of the divine will, ever has to hunt for open doors for witnessing; he simply needs to be obedient to the Lord. The trouble is that we are not all willing to let the Lord guide us. He has told us that it is He who “openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Revelation 3:7). The business of the servant of Christ is to be in His will and say, “Here, Lord, I am at Your bidding. Open doors or close them as You will. If You want me to go, I will go; if You want me to refrain from going, I am under Your command and Your control.”

If the Lord opens the door, never mind the adversaries. They did not frighten Paul. He went forward, “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Ephesians 6:10), knowing that “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Notice Paul’s kindly interest in his younger fellow servant. “Now if Timotheus come,” Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do.” I take it that our friend Timothy was a bit troubled with what psychologists call an inferiority complex. He was not constantly shoving himself forward; he underrated rather than overrated his own ability and Paul realized that because Timothy was so humble and lowly, there were some who might belittle him and set him to one side. Paul was saying, “He is my companion in ministry; he does the same kind of work that I am doing, so help him succeed.”

I think we can also learn something from the way Paul spoke of Apollos. Some folk have an idea that the apostles were the first bishops of the church, that they had all authority in their jurisdictions, and that the apostle Paul was an archbishop of western Asia and eastern Europe. If that were the case, he would have commanded the other Christian workers associated with him to go where he directed. He would have said to Timothy, “You go here,” and to Apollos, “You go there,” and they would have gone. But there is no hint of that in 1 Corinthians 16.

Paul did not occupy any such place of power; he did not lord it over other servants of Christ. Paul was a servant himself, subject to the Lord Jesus, and he recognized that the others were in exactly the same position. He would say a good word for Timothy, but he would not command him. Paul suggested to Apollos that he go to Corinth and minister to the believers there; he had been there before and they had been greatly benefited by his ministry. But Apollos said in effect, “I do not have any leading of the Lord to go there; at some later day I may.” And we can infer that the apostle replied, “Very well, it is not for me to tell you where to go; you are the Lord’s servant.”

Paul’s comments reveal the conditions that prevailed in the early church. There was no hierarchy dictating to the rest—just the various local assemblies of believers and the servants of Christ, gifted by the Lord and acting as subject to Him. I would not like to tear this chapter out of my Bible. It helps me understand God’s way of guiding His servants in their ministry for Him.

However, what Paul especially wanted to stress in this passage was “the first day of the week.” I would like to trace with you the place that the first day of the week had in the early Christian church and the place that it should have in the church of God today. Let us turn first to Leviticus 23, where we read about the seven outstanding Hebrew festivals, the feasts of the Lord. These were occasions on which the people of Israel came together in a special way, beginning with Passover and finishing with the feast of tabernacles.

In 23:10-11 we read: “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.” When was the sabbath? Verse 3 says, “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.” The sabbath then was the seventh day. The feast of the firstfruits took place on “the morrow after the sabbath,” which was the first day of the week. And what was this feast of firstfruits? It was the feast that immediately followed the Passover.

What was the Passover? Its typical significance is explained in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8: There the apostle said, “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” The Passover was the recurring memorial feast of the death of the

lamb. By the shedding of the blood and the sprinkling of the blood on the door posts and lintels in Egypt, the people were delivered from judgment, for God had said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). The Passover speaks of the death of Christ.

Following the Passover, the sheaf of the firstfruits was presented before the Lord. It spoke of grain that had fallen into the ground in death, but had come forth in new life. Jesus said, “Except a com of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). He was the com of wheat who fell into the ground in death; He has come up in resurrection. The apostle explained in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23: “In Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.” On the first day of the week the sheaf of the firstfruits was presented before the Lord, and this is a type of the resurrection of Christ.

In Matthew 28:1 we read, “In the end of the sabbath [the Greek word is plural and should be translated ‘sabbaths’] as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.” But they found that the Lord had risen in power on that first day of the week, that morning after the sabbath, and from that time on the first day of the week has had a very special place in the thoughts, hearts, and minds of followers of our Lord Jesus.

Psalm 118:22-23 prophetically sets forth the rejection of Christ and then His resurrection: “The stone which the builders refused [Christ’s rejection and crucifixion] is

become the head stone of the corner [Christ's resurrection]. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." Men crucified Him; God raised Him from the dead, and thus made Him the Head of the corner. The Psalm continues, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (118:24). What day? The day when Christ was made the Head of the corner. It was the day of His glorious resurrection, the day of the presentation of the firstfruits, the first day of the week. Do you see what an honored place the first day of the week has in God's Word?

Going back once more to Leviticus 23, we read: "Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat [meal] offering unto the Lord" (23:15-16). This would be another first day of the week, and the feast would be Pentecost. And one year, on the day after the seventh sabbath following the Passover, which typified the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, while the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:2-4).

The day of Pentecost had "fully come," and the Lord received to Himself a new meal offering in those that had been redeemed by His precious blood. It was on the first day of the week that the Holy Ghost came from

Heaven to baptize believers into one body and so from that time on, the first day of the week has always had its special place in the church of God.

In Acts 20 we read of Paul coming to Troas and remaining there a week. Luke wrote, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (20:7). Scripture does not say that on the first day of the week the disciples came together to hear Paul preach; it says they came together to “break bread.” That is what they were accustomed to doing on that day; they came together to participate in what we call the communion service. On the first day of the week they took part in the breaking of bread and the drinking of the cup, which speak of the precious body of our Lord Jesus given up to death and of His blood poured out for our redemption. And when the disciples in Troas came together that night, they found they had a wonderful visitor ready to minister the Word to them. Many of them were slaves and had to work during the day, and so they came together at night. Paul participated with them in the meeting and preached the Word to them, and the service went on until midnight.

If you go back to the earliest records of those whom we call the apostolic fathers, those who wrote shortly after the New Testament was completed, you will find that it was still the custom of believers to gather together on the first day of the week for worship, for ministry of the Word, and above all for participation in what they called the Eucharist. They thought of the Lord’s supper as a feast of thanksgiving when Christians came together to

give thanks to the Lord Jesus for the suffering and sorrow that He went through for their redemption.

Some people tell us that we are all wrong in recognizing the first day of the week as a special day for worship and praise, that we should Judaize Christianity and go back to the law of Moses, which made the seventh day holy. But the sabbath has been set aside with the old dispensation, for in the new dispensation God gives special honor to a new day, the first of the week. On this day the disciples came together to break bread. On this day the Holy Ghost descended. On this day Christ arose from the dead. And on this day the early Christians gave their offerings for the work of the Lord.

The apostle told the Corinthians to put aside their offerings at home, as God had prospered them, so that when they came together, they could give something to the Lord. They were to go over what they had received during the week to see how God had blessed them, and then give the Lord a part. Of course I take it that no Christian would give less than a Jew did, and he gave a tenth to God. Thus God would be given a tenth at least, and more if the Christians could afford it. So when they came together to break bread, they gave their offering to meet the needs of the Lord's work and to care for the poor.

Yes, we can thank God for preserving for us the privilege of gathering together on the first day of the week. How we ought to praise Him that we live in a land that, in some sense at least, recognizes the sanctity of the day so that we are free to come together to worship and praise Him. How much we would lose were we to be denied this privilege!

Closing Messages (1 Corinthians 16:13-24)

There is something delightfully personal in most of the closing messages of the apostle Paul to the various churches. He was a very human man as well as a very spiritual one. Dr. C. I. Scofield used to say that when we are first converted we have to be changed from natural to spiritual, but after being saved awhile we need another conversion to become natural again—in a different sense of course. So many of us allow ourselves to become rather stilted and unnatural in our desire to be spiritual and we lose much of that sweet, gracious warmth that should characterize us as Christian men and women.

Paul was a man with a tender heart. He made deep friendships and never turned his back on a friend. He may have grieved over some of them who forsook him, but he continued to pray for them even when they turned away from him. Those with whom he could continue to have happy fellowship were a real joy to him.

In chapter 1 Paul mentioned that he had baptized the household of Stephanas and then in chapter 16 he told us something about that household. The household must have consisted of adults, for the apostle said that they were “the firstfruits of Achaia” and had “addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.” The very first home to be opened up to the gospel when Paul went to Corinth was that of Stephanas. He and his family were brought to Christ and from that time on they ministered. Evidently they were in a position to help others. The word translated “addicted” in 16:15 is exactly the same word that is elsewhere translated “ordained.” So one

could say that the household of Stephanas had "ordained themselves to the ministry of the saints."

What a blessed ordination! Instead of constantly looking for other people to do things for them, it seems that they said, "We are going to do things for others; we will try to be a blessing to them; we will set ourselves apart to help God's beloved people." The apostle said to the Corinthians, "Submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth." Like Epaphroditus, the household of Stephanas made themselves servants so that they might bless other people.

Stephanas himself had evidently launched out into evangelistic work, and he with others had come to meet Paul. Writing to Corinth fromPhilippi, Paul said, "I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied." I take it that he meant, "I knew you wanted to send me something to help with my expenses but have not had opportunity to do so, but now these brothers have brought an offering and I appreciate it very much."

When Paul was in Corinth, he would not take anything from them because they had just come out of heathenism and he did not want anyone to say, "Paul is just here for what he can make out of us." Later the apostle even said, "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service" (2 Corinthians 11:8). Others gave the money that enabled him to meet part of his expenses, and whatever he lacked he earned by tentmaking. But now that he had left Corinth, he was willing to receive from the Corinthian church a

missionary offering to help him in his work. Like the Corinthians, we at home are glad to send our money to those laboring in heathen lands to help make the gospel known.

Paul did not have such great regard for “the cloth” that he would not soil his hands with manual labor. He went into business with Priscilla and Aquila when they lived in Corinth, and Paul stayed with them when he was there. Now they too were away and naturally sent their greetings back to the home church. Paul wrote, “Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”

Then the apostle instructed the Corinthians, “Greet ye one another with an holy kiss,” for there is such a thing as a Judas kiss. In those early times women kissed women, and men kissed men, but whatever the prevailing custom is, the principle is the same. Do not profess to love someone when deep in your heart there is resentment and unkindness toward him or her. Greet each other with sincerity, for an insincere handshake is an unholy greeting. Let the heart behind the greeting be right. Said Jehu, “Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?” And when Jehonadab said, “It is,” we read that Jehu “took him up to him into the chariot” (2 Kings 10:15). We need to get rid of hypocrisy in our fellowship. Paul wanted the Corinthians to be genuine in all things.

For the moment let us turn back to 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, where we will find Paul’s closing exhortation: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity [love].” How we need to heed this.

“Watch ye.” As long as we are in this world, we are in the place of danger; we are surrounded by pitfalls and snares. “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation,” said our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 14:38). We dare not trust ourselves and we certainly cannot trust the world through which we journey.

Are there no foes for me to face?

Must I not stem the flood?

Is this vile world a friend to grace,

To help me on to God?

Since I must fight if I would reign,

Increase my courage, Lord!

I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain,

Supported by Thy word.

(Isaac Watts)

One of the first principles of soldiery is to keep a sharp lookout for the enemy, and so we must be constantly on the watch for the enemy of our souls.

“Stand fast in the faith.” There are too many people who blow hot and cold; they act one way in one group and quite a different way in other company. But the servant of Christ, the child of God, should be one who realizes that there has been committed to him the greatest of all possible responsibilities and therefore he is to “stand fast in the faith.” The apostle wrote in 2 Timothy 1:14: “That good thing [deposit] which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.” It is only in the power of the Holy Spirit that we can keep the faith.

“Quit you like men.” Some of the Corinthians were acting like babies, dividing themselves into little sectarian groups, and Paul told them they were childish. “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it,” he wrote in 3:2.

Whenever Christians fuss and quarrel about their rights, whenever they complain because they are not properly recognized or because people do not greet them as they think they should or because they do not get enough applause for what they do, their “baby” spirit is revealing itself. They have not yet reached spiritual maturity. May God deliver His children from their babyishness! In some churches half the time of the minister is spent trying to keep weak Christians from causing trouble over little slights.

The man who is “in Christ” is indifferent to praise or blame. If I belong to Christ, I am here to serve Him and if I have His approbation, that is what counts. And if you are living for God, people cannot slight you, because you will not let them; it will not make any difference to you if they try.

“Be strong.” You may confess, “I know I ought to be strong, but I am so weak.” Of course you cannot be strong in your own strength. Ephesians 6:10 says, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” The more you realize your own weakness and the more you throw yourself upon Him, the more you will be able to “withstand in the evil day” (6:13), for His strength is made perfect in our weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:9).

You are not to be strong in your own human spirit, but you are to be made strong by the Spirit of the Lord. Note that the apostle said to the Ephesians, “I bow my

knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ…that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:14-17). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and He has come to dwell in you if you are a believer. If He is controlling your life and dominating your will, you do not need to depend on your own ability to stand; you can depend on His ability. As you are yielded to Him, you are enabled to be strong and stand for His glory.

However, you do need spiritual nourishment; you become strong through the Word. The apostle John said, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you" (1 John 2:14). How did those young men get their strength? By meditating on Scripture. If you show me a weak, wobbling believer, I will tell you that he is not giving much time to the Word of God. If you show me a strong, devoted, earnest Christian, seeking only the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, I will tell you that he is living on the Book. As you eat the Word, as you feed on the truth, you acquire strength that you cannot obtain in any other way. I get so tired of people lamenting their weakness and their leanness. They say, "Do pray for me that I may be a stronger Christian," but what is the use of praying for them if they do not read their Bibles?

Suppose you said, "Do pray that I may get stronger physically," and suppose that I replied, "What kind of food do you eat?" If you answered, "Not any," I would say, "Then there is no use praying for you."

What you need as a Christian is a good meal of spiritual nourishment and you can only get it in the Book. You may do all the praying you like to be a strong Christian, but your prayers will never be answered until you begin to answer them yourself by feeding on the Word of God.

But do not stop there, for you also become strong through obedience. The Lord told Joshua: “Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:7). Notice the words “to do.” We are lacking in obedience when we know but do not “do.” Joshua 1:8 continues, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (italics added). Scripture consisted of only the five books of Moses when God gave that command, but today we should apply the directive to the whole Bible with its sixty-six books.

If you want to make a success of your life, that is the divinely-appointed way to do it. If you want strength, live in fellowship with Christ, walk in the Spirit, feed on His Word, and obey His Word. Then when the hour of trial comes, you will not be weak-kneed; you will not be vacillating; you will not be carried about like a leaf before the wind. You will have strength to stand, and you will be able to glorify God even in the fire of testing. In the testing is the proof.

It is easy enough to be pleasant,

When life flows on like a song,

But the man worthwhile is the man with a smile

When everything goes dead wrong.

The Christian who is really worthwhile is the man who can be bereft of everything—he can lose his money, his home, his health— and still say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). That is the kind of Christian God wants you to be—strong in the hour of trial, and strong in the hour of temptation.

I am afraid that many of us keep from falling into various sins because they never come very close to us, and then we look with contempt on the person who does fall when stress comes. If we had been exposed to the same temptation that that poor failing brother or sister was exposed to, we might have succumbed just as he or she did. We too would have fallen if we had not been kept by the mighty power of God. It is only by living in fellowship with God that we will be kept from yielding.

Someone has said, “I can resist everything but temptation.” A good many of us are like that. If you go through the Book of God, you will find that the men who could resist in the hour of temptation were the men who knew God before the test came. If David had been in fellowship with God when his awful temptation came, he never would have gone down. Joseph was tempted under far more adverse circumstances and he stood fast, exclaiming, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9) Our Lord could say, “I have set [Jehovah] always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8). The

man who resists temptation is the man who is strong in the Lord before temptation comes.

Paul finished his closing exhortation to the Corinthians by adding, “Let all your things be done with charity.” There is always the danger that the strong will be contemptuous of the weak. Be exacting with yourself, but generous in your judgment of other people; be very, very strict with yourself, but gracious in dealing with those who are weak. Consider what they have to contend with. Perhaps they do not know the Lord as well as you do, so seek by grace to show the love of Christ to them.

Moving now to the end of the chapter, we find a solemn statement in verse 22: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.” What strange expressions, “Anathema” and “Maranatha”! I think the Holy Spirit of God providentially allowed our translators to leave those two peculiar words untranslated. “Anathema,” a Greek word, means “accursed, devoted to judgment.” “Maranatha,” a Syriac word, means “the Lord comes.” If you translated the entire verse, it would read like this: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be devoted to judgment at the coming of the Lord.” I wonder whether any of my readers do not love the Lord Jesus Christ. If not, may the Spirit of God help you realize your danger.

The Lord has not yet returned, so if you do not love Him now, there is still time to turn to Him. You cannot stir up any love in your own heart, but you can trust Him—the One who loves you, the One who gave Himself for you, the One who died on the cross for your sins. You can open your heart to Him, receive Him, and bow at His

feet in repentance. Hide nothing; confess your sins of hypocrisy, or dishonesty, or immorality, or selfishness, or covetousness—whatever wickedness there may be in your heart. Tell Him all about it.

Do not say, “O Lord, I am not much of a sinner; I never did many things that are wrong, but please forgive me.” Get into the company of David who, when his conscience was awakened, said, “O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (Psalm 25:11). We might have expected him to say, “It isn’t very great, so pardon it,” but he said, “It is great.” Sin is such great iniquity that only a great God can pardon it and only a great Savior can deliver you from it.

As 1 Chronicles 28:9 says,” If thou seek him, he will be found of thee.” In Jeremiah 29:13 God said, “Ye shall… find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” If you turn to the Lord, honestly face your sin, acknowledge your guilt, trust Him as your Savior, and confess Him before men, He will put love in your heart. Then you will be able to say, “I love Him, my Savior, my Redeemer,” and you will be saved from judgment. You will be able also to enjoy all the benefits of Paul’s closing benediction: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

After his benediction the apostle added so humanly, “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.” We could well respond, “Thank you, Paul. We are glad to get this message from you and when we get home to Heaven, we will look you up and talk it over together. Until then we will seek to live in the light of the truth we have found in this Epistle.”

Author Biography

Henry Allan Ironside, one of the twentieth century's greatest preachers, was born in Toronto, Canada, on October 14,1876. He lived his life by faith; his needs at crucial moments were met in the most remarkable ways.

Though his classes stopped with grammar school, his fondness for reading and an incredibly retentive memory put learning to use. His scholarship was well recognized in academic circles with Wheaton College awarding an honorary Litt.D. in 1930 and Bob Jones University an honorary D.D. in 1942. Dr. Ironside was also appointed to the boards of numerous Bible institutes, seminaries, and Christian organizations.

"HAI" lived to preach and he did so widely throughout the United States and abroad. E. Schuyler English, in his biography of Ironside, revealed that during 1948, the year HAI was 72, and in spite of failing eyesight, he "gave 569 addresses, besides participating in many other ways." In his eighteen years at Chicago's Moody Memorial Church, his only pastorate, every Sunday but two had at least one profession of faith in Christ.

H. A. Ironside went to be with the Lord on January 15, 1951. Throughout his ministry, he authored expositions on 51 books of the Bible and through the great clarity of his messages led hundreds of thousands, worldwide, to aknowledge of God's Word. His words are as fresh and meaningful today as when first preached.

The official biography of Dr. Ironside, H. A. Ironside: Ordained of the Lord, is available from the publisher.